

Mental Health Help-Seeking Intentions Among International and African American College Students: An Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between social-cognitive factors (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control), psychological distress, and help-seeking intentions for a sample of 111 international and African American college students. The results of this study showed that the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) variables (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) accounted for 17.7 % of the variance in help-seeking intentions. The first hypothesis, which predicted that positive attitudes toward mental health services and perceived behavioral control would be significant predictors of the students' intentions to seek mental health services, was partially supported. Perceived behavioral control was the strongest predictor of help-seeking intentions. Contrary to our expectations, attitudes toward mental health services were not a significant predictor of mental health seeking intentions. The second hypothesis was not supported. There was no significant difference in mean intention scores for African American college students compared to international college students. These findings have implications for mental health service providers in terms of designing outreach mental health programs that would motivate these students to translate their help-seeking intentions into behaviors (e.g., seeking mental health services when they experience psychological distress).

Keywords: Mental health, help-seeking intention, international students, African American college students

There has been a significant increase in the number of international and African-American college students attending U.S. colleges and universities. Approximately 690,923 international college students were enrolled in colleges and universities in the 2009-2010 academic year, which constituted an increase of 3% for the academic year 2009-2010 (Institute of International Education, 2010). However, it should be noted that there was a decrease of 4.7% of international students enrolled in colleges and universities in Mississippi (the site of the current study) during the academic year of 2009-2010. The number of African-American students attending higher education in the U.S increased from 9% to 14% from 1978 to 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Few researchers have investigated mental health seeking intentions among international and African-American college students. The literature suggests that international and African American college students underutilize mental health services (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008; Yargason, Linville,

& Zitzman, 2008; Mori, 2000; Davidson, Yakushka Sanford-Martens, 2004; Soet & Sevig, 2006). Underutilization refers to “an evaluative term applied to situations in which individuals who might benefit from services do not use them” (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008, p. 61). The reasons many international and African-American college students are reluctant to seek help from mental health professionals remains unknown. However, the most frequent issues for the low mental health utilization and negative attitudes toward mental health services include cultural mistrust (Duncan & Johnson, 2007; So, Gilbert, & Romero, 2005), attitudes toward mental health problems, African American spirituality (So, Gilbert, & Romero, 2005) and socioeconomic status (Duncan & Johnson, 2007). So et al. (2005) found that the more students are aware of their need for psychotherapeutic help, the greater their stigma tolerance, interpersonal openness, and confidence in mental health practitioners.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Despite substantial support for the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a way of predicting health behavior, there have been few studies that have investigated the role of psychosocial factors (intentions, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and psychological distress) in mental health seeking intentions among international and African-American college students. Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior is a model that may help to explain the different psychosocial factors that contribute to the students’ intentions to utilize mental health services. Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), suggests that a person’s attitudes toward a given behavior, subjective norms in relation to the behavior and perceived control over the behavior are typically good predictors of intentions to perform the behavior. Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior has been used in a wide variety of research to predict and understand a range of behaviors, and help-seeking intentions (Skogstad, Deane, & Spicer, 2006; Mo & Mak, 2010; Westerhof, Maessen, de Bruijin, & Smets, 2008). To better understand this theory’s utility for predicting mental health help-seeking intentions among international and African-American college students, it is critical to explore the influence of the components of this model on mental health utilization among these students.

Attitudes on Intentions to Seek Mental Health Help

Most studies that have examined the nature of attitudes towards help-seeking behaviors have not focused on the relationship between attitudes, intentions and help-seeking behavior, and even fewer have examined help seeking-behavior among diverse groups. Attitude describes the extent to which an individual has a positive or negative appraisal toward a specific behavior. Mitchell, Cort, Young, and Robert (2007) studied the attitudes and beliefs of African-American college students toward mental health treatment. Less than 5% of their sample reported that they would choose to talk to either a member of the clergy or a health professional. In addition, most of those students reported that they were more likely to rely on religion to deal with mental health issues because of perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment and negative attitudes towards seeking mental health services. Other studies have found that African-American male college students reported having negative attitudes toward counseling and were significantly less likely to utilize these services (Henderson, Geyen, Rouse, Griffith, & Kritsonis, 2007; Williams & Justice, 2010).

Yakunina and Weigold (2011) studied Asian international students' intentions to seek counseling. They explored the relationship between cognitive variables (i.e., counseling attitudes and stigma concerns) and cultural factors (i.e., acculturation, Asian values, and loss-of-face concerns). They found that students who endorsed more traditional Asian values had less positive attitudes toward counseling and also reported lower help-seeking intentions. Conversely, loss-of-

face and stigma concerns were correlated with stronger intentions to seek counseling. Chang and Chang (2004) examined the relationship between Asian American and Asian international college students' attitudes toward seeking online professional psychological help and traditional face-to-face professional psychological help. They found that students were receptive to seeking help by traditional face-to-face that online counseling services.

Ramos-Sánchez and Atkinson (2009) examined the relationships between Mexican American acculturation, cultural values, gender, and help-seeking intentions among Mexican American community college students. The results of this study suggested as Mexican American students became more acculturated their attitudes toward help seeking become less favorable. Vogel, Michaels, and Gruss (2009) investigated parental attitudes and college students' intentions to seek therapy. They found that parents' attitudes were correlated with students' attitudes towards seeking therapy, which played an important role in influencing students' intentions to seek therapy for psychological and interpersonal issues. All of these studies suggest that attitudes about mental health services can influence intentions to seek mental health treatment. Masuda, Suzumura, Beauchamp, Howells, and Clay (2005) found that a person's attitude toward mental health services was one of the most important factors in determining help-seeking behavior.

Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control

Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure of whether to perform or not to perform a behavior. While perceived behavioral control is the extent to which a person perceives the behavior to be performed as easy or difficult. Barksdale and Molock (2009) investigated the influence of perceived norms on mental health help seeking among African-American college students. They found that peer norms were more influential for males while family norms significantly influenced intentions to seek mental health services for females. Overall, peer norms and family norms were correlated with help-seeking intentions. Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson, and Hackler (2007) examined how ones' social network influenced help seeking from mental health professionals. They found that being prompted to seek help and knowing someone who had sought help were related to positive expectations and positive attitudes towards mental health help-seeking.

Stigma is another type of subjective norm that can influence mental health seeking behavior. Bathje and Pryor (2011) examined public and self-stigma in relation to mental health seeking services. They found that participants' endorsement of public stigma and self-stigma were independently related to attitudes towards seeking counseling. Self-stigma was found to be negatively associated with intention to seek help among college students (Wade et al., 2011). Masuda et al. (2009) found that Japanese international students, compared with US college students, reported having greater stigma toward individuals with psychological disorders. Miville and Constantine (2007) studied cultural values, counseling stigma, and intentions to seek counseling among Asian American college women. They found that there was a positive correlation between Asian cultural values and perceived counseling stigma. Importantly, they found that both Asian values and social stigma inversely correlated with intentions to seek counseling.

Psychological Distress and Mental Health Services

The amount of psychological distress experienced by an individual has been found to influence utilization of mental health services. In 2006, Soet and Sevig found that the types of psychiatric diagnosis most commonly reported by students were depression, eating disorder, anxiety, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In a recent survey, 91% of counseling center directors reported a significant increase in the number of students with severe psychological problems on their campuses (Gallagher, 2010). According to the directors, 44% of

their clients experience severe psychological problems. The National Leadership Council on African American Behavioral Health (NLC, 2009) reported that students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are experiencing a wide variety of mental health issues including acute stress and generalized anxiety. Similarly, international students experience psychological issues including depression, anxiety, academic difficulty, relationship issues (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas 2004; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003; Yokushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008), loneliness, and cultural adjustment (Yokushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008).

However, research on the role of psychological distress and utilization of mental health services has been inconclusive. One study found a positive relationship between use of counseling services and level of psychological distress among college students. Students who reported having experienced higher levels of psychological distress were more likely to utilize mental health services (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008; Yorgason et al., 2008). However, another study investigated general psychological distress symptoms and help-avoidance in young Australians (Wilson, 2010). This study found that higher levels of general psychological distress symptoms were significantly related to stronger intentions not to seek help from mental health professionals or from friends and family.

Purpose of the Study

The underutilization of mental health services by African American and international college students has been well-documented. Most of the studies mentioned above have been mainly focused either on attitudes toward mental health and/or underutilization of mental health services among international and African American students. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the extent to which social-cognitive factors (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control), and psychological distress predicted help-seeking intentions for a sample of international and African American college students age 18 and above. It was hypothesized that positive attitudes toward mental health services and perceived behavioral control would be significant predictors of the students' intentions to seek mental health services. Additionally, African American college students would have higher mean total scores on the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI) than the international college students. Higher scores on the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory reflect more positive attitudes toward mental health help-seeking intentions or a greater likelihood of seeking mental health services.

Research Method

Participants

Participants were students attending Jackson State University (JSU), a historically black university with an enrollment of over 9,000 students and English as second language students (ESL) at Belhaven University, a Christian liberal arts university with an enrollment of over 2,900 students. A total of 111 students of which 51 (45.9%) were males and 60 (54.1%) were females participated in this study. Approximately 74.8 % of the participants were under the age of 25, 18.9 % were between 25-26 years old, and 6.3 % were above 36 years old. In regard to citizenship status, 69.4% of participants indicated that they were U.S citizens, and 30.6% were international students, 25.5% of which have F-1 visas. Over 15% of participants were married, 83.8% were single, and .9% was divorced. Most of the participants were full-time (94.4%) undergraduate students. Approximately 15.1 of participants were freshmen, 14.2% were sophomores, 28.3% were juniors, 31.1% were seniors, and 11.3% were graduate students. The majority (71.2%) of the students self-identified as African Americans, 2.7 were Hispanics/Latinos, 9.9% were Asians, 5.4% were Europeans, and

10.8% indicated Other. Over 82% of participants were Christians, 7.6% were Muslims, .9 was Jews, and 2.8 were Hindu, .9% was Buddhists, .9% was Scientologists, .9% was Atheist, and 3.7% selected other.

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Student Demographic Characteristics

	Number (n)	Percentage	cum %
Ethnicity			
Africans/ African Americans	79	71.2	71.2
Asian	11	9.9	73.9
Hispanics/Latinos	3	2.7	83.8
European	6	5.4	89.2
Other	12	10.8	100
Gender			
Female	60	54.1	45.9
Male	51	45.9	100
Marital Status			
Married	17	15.3	15.3
Single	93	83.8	99.1
Divorced	1	.9	100
Age			
Under 25	83	74.8	74.8
26-35	21	18.9	93.7
Above 36	7	6.3	100
Nationality			
U.S. Citizens	77	69.4	69.4
Non-U.S. Citizens	34	30.6	100.0
F1-Visa	28	25.2	25.5
Religious Affiliations			
Christianity	90	81.1	82.6
Islam	8	7.2	7.3
Judaism	1	.9	.9
Hinduism	3	2.7	2.8
Buddhism	1	.9	.9
Scientology	1	.9	.9
Atheist Agnostic	1	.9	.9
Other	4	3.6	3.7
Student Classification			
Freshman	16	14.4	15.1
Sophomore	15	13.5	14.2
Junior	30	27.0	28.3
Senior	33	29.7	31.1
Graduate	12	10.8	11.3
Full time	104	93.7	95.4
Part-time	5	4.5	4.6

Measures

In addition to demographic items, participants completed three instruments: the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI; Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975), Inventory of Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS; Mackenzie, Knox, Geroski & Macaulay, 2004), and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale- 21 (DASS 21; Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995).

Demographic Questionnaire. The demographic measure assessed the essential demographic information for the participants. Participants were asked to indicate their sex, citizenship, country of origin, marital status, college classification, racial/ethnic background, religion affiliation, and their history of mental health services.

Intentions to Seeking Counseling. The participants' intention to seek counseling services was measured with the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI; Cash et al. 1975). The ISCI is a 17-item likert scale designed to assess the participants' intentions or willingness to seek counseling if they were to experience the following problems, such as relationship difficulties, depression, personal concerns, and drug-related problems. Items are rated from 1 (very unlikely) to 4 (very likely). The ISCI has adequate internal consistency estimates for its three subscales measuring .90 for Interpersonal Problems, .86 for Drug/ Alcohol Problems, and .71 for Academic Problems (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998). In this study only 15 items were administered to the participants. For the current sample, the internal consistency was .86 for the total score.

Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) variables (i.e attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) were measured with the Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS; Mackenzie et al. 2004). The IASMHS is a 24-items likert scale ranging from 0 to 4 (0, disagree, 4, agree) designed to assess individual's attitudes towards seeking professional psychological services. The IASMHS consists of three factor subscales, Psychological Openness, Help-seeking Propensity, and Indifference to Stigma, which contain items measuring the three components (e.g., attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control) of Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior. Ajzen's three components, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control correspond respectively to Mackenzie, Knox, Gekoski, and Macaulay (2004) subscales, psychological openness, indifference to stigma, and help-seeking propensity. The IASMHS has internal consistency for the subscales ranging from 0.76 to 0.82 and the alpha coefficient for the full scale inventory is 0.87. The IASMHS has high test-retest reliability for Psychological Openness ($r = 0.86$) and Indifference to Stigma ($r = 0.91$), and moderate for Help-seeking Propensity ($r = 0.64$). For the current sample, the internal consistency was .72 for the total score, .60 for Psychological Openness subscale, .51 for Indifference to Stigma, and .73 for Help-seeking Propensity.

Psychological Distress. The participants' psychological distress was assessed with the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The DASS-21 is a set of three self-report scale consisting of 21 items originated from the full version of the DASS, which assesses depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms over the past week. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced depression, anxiety, and stress *over the past week* using a 4-point severity/frequency scale. Henry and Crawford (2005) indicated that the DASS-21 has a reliability of .88 for the Depression scale, .82 for the Anxiety scale, .90 for the Stress scale, and .93 for the Total scale. The internal consistency was .94 for the total score, .86 for Depression scale, .85 for the Anxiety scale, and .87 for the Stress scale. Furthermore, the DASS-21 has adequate construct validity and can be used to assess the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from different departments at Jackson State University, including the Jackson State University Department of International Studies and from Belhaven University's English as Second language (ESL) Program. Student participation was solicited for this research project. Interested participants received a consent form with information explaining the purpose of the study. After the signed consent forms were collected, an assessment package containing demographic, intentions to seek mental health, assessment of theory of planned behavior, and psychological distress questionnaires was given out to the participants. The assessment package took participants 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

Analyses

A power analysis was conducted to determine the sample size needed. The results of the statistical power analysis suggested that for the multiple regression analysis (with 4 predictors, alpha level .05, anticipated effect size .15, and a desired power level of .90); the minimum required sample size was 108 participants. For the T-test directional hypothesis, a minimum of required sample size of 102 participants (51 participants per group) was needed (alpha level .05, Cohen's $d = .5$, desired power .80). Statistical analyses were carried out using PASW Statistic version 19.

Correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between the variables (e.g., attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, intentions, and psychological distress). In addition, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine each variable's (e.g., attitudes, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and psychological distress) contribution to intentions to seek mental health services. A T-test was performed to compare help-seeking intentions among international and African American college students.

Results

Approximately 61% of the sample indicated that it is important to integrate or to incorporate religious values into therapy treatment. With respect to issues experienced in the past 12 months, the most common problems were relationship issues (37.8%), academic difficulty (24.3%), death of someone close (19.8%), serious illness (8.1%), being arrested (4.5%), and alcohol and drug (2.7%). Approximately 17.1% of the sample reported that they have seen a mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, psychiatrist, school or university counselor, clinical social worker) for help with emotional and/or mental problems. Approximately 5.4% indicated that they were currently seeing a mental health professional for emotional and/or mental problems.

Overall, participants scored 33.84 ($SD = 10.56$) on the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI), indicating that they were less likely to seek mental health services when they experienced problems. The participants had overall average scores of 57.92 ($SD = 11.54$) out of 96 on the full scale Attitudes towards Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS), which suggests positive general attitudes toward seeking mental health services. Participants had the following mean scores on the IASMHS subscale: Help-seeking Propensity ($M = 21.52$; $SD = 5.88$), Indifference to Stigma ($M = 20.22$; $SD = 5.00$), and Psychological Openness ($M = 17.01$; $SD = 5.60$). The participants' overall scores on the DASS21 were 24.59. On the Stress subscale, they had a mean score of 10.26 ($SD = 10.26$). Subscale score were similar for Anxiety ($M = 7.68$; $SD = 9.14$) and Depression ($M = 7.28$; $SD = 8.63$). These scores suggested no significant problems with anxiety, depression, or stress.

Table 2

Mean intentions, Attitudes, and Depression, Anxiety and Stress ratings

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Intentions	33.84	10.58
Total IASMHS	57.92	11.54
Attitudes	16.68	5.57
Subjective Norms	19.75	4.97
Perceived Behavioral Control	21.30	5.92
Total DASS21	24.59	26.15
Depression	7.28	8.63
Anxiety	7.68	9.14
Stress	10.41	10.26

Pearson product moment correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between the variables (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, intentions, and psychological distress). The results of the correlational analyses suggested that psychological distress and intentions ($r = .21, p < .05$) were positively correlated. Psychological distress and attitudes and were inversely related ($r = -.27, p < .001$). Additionally, psychological distress and subjective norms were also inversely related ($r = -.29, p < .001$). There was a significant moderate positive relationship between attitudes and subjective norms ($r = .59, p < .001$).

Table 3

Students Intercorrelation between Intentions, Psychological Distress, Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intentions	–	.21**	-.08	-.00	.39 ***
2. Psychological Distress		–	-.27***	-.29***	.15
3. Attitudes			–	.59***	.02
4. Subjective Norms				–	.10
5. Perceived Beh. Control					–

Note. ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

The first hypothesis stated that positive attitudes toward mental health services and perceived behavioral control would be significant predictors of the students' intentions to seek mental health services. A standard multiple regression analysis was performed to test this hypothesis. Intention to seek mental health services was the dependent variable and the Theory of Planned Behaviors variables (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) and psychological distress were the independent variables. The model (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and psychological distress) accounted for 17.7 % of the variance in intentions to seek mental health services, $F(4, 91) = 4.88, p < .001$. The strongest predictor, perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .36$), made a statistically significant contribution in the prediction of intentions to seek mental health services, followed by psychological distress ($\beta = .14$), attitudes ($\beta = -.09$), and subjective norms ($\beta = .05$).

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analysis for Students' Psychological Distress, Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavior Control

Variable	B	SE	β
Psychological Distress	.05	.04	-.14
Attitudes	-.16	.23	-.09
Subjective Norms	.11	.26	.05
Perceived Beh. Control	.64	.17	.36*

Note. $R^2 = .17$. * $p < .001$

The second hypothesis stated that African American college students will have higher mean total scores on the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI) than the international college students. To test this hypothesis an independent sample t-test was performed to compare the intentions scores for African Americans ($n = 72$) and international ($n = 31$) college students. There was no significant difference in mean intentions scores for African American college students ($M = 33.89$; $SD = 10.08$) compared to international college students ($M = 33.74$; $SD = 11.85$) $t(101) = .064$, $p = .95$).

Discussion

The present study examined the extent to which social-cognitive factors (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control), and psychological distress predicted help seeking intentions for a sample of international and African American college students age 18 and above. The first hypothesis, which predicted that positive attitudes toward mental health services and perceived behavioral control would be significant predictors of the students' intentions to seek mental health services, was partially supported. This hypothesis was based on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior that proposes that attitudes about a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are predictors of intentions. As hypothesized, perceived behavioral control was found to be a significant predictor of the students' intentions to seek mental health services; however, contrary to the hypothesis, attitudes did not predict intentions to seek mental health services by African American and international students.

Perceived behavioral control, which measures the perceived capacity to perform the behavior (seeking mental health services), was the only social cognitive variable that was a significant predictor of intentions to seek mental health services. The construct of perceived behavioral control is used interchangeably with Bandura's self-efficacy construct. Perceived behavioral control is conceived of as an individual's perceptions of their ability to perform a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The present findings suggest that students who believed they had the necessary resources or abilities were more likely to seek mental health services. Based on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, perceived behavioral control predicted not only intentions, but also the actual behaviors. Perceived behavioral control and psychological distress were positively correlated with help-seeking intentions, suggesting that the students who reported high psychological distress and perceived that they had some control over the situation (in the form of access and available resources) were more likely to seek mental health services.

Psychological distress was the second predictor of intentions to seek mental health services. Students who experienced psychological distress were more likely to seek out mental health services. This is consistent with Rosenthal and Wilson (2008) who also found that students who were psychologically distressed were more likely to have sought mental health services. However,

this finding is inconsistent with Mo and Mak's (2010) study in which they found that mental health had no significant effect on their participants' help-seeking intentions.

It should be noted that over 17 percent of the sample in this study reported that they had sought mental health services in the past and over 5 % were receiving services at the time of this study. Thus, many of the participants were already familiar with psychological services and those who were suffering from significant psychological distress were more likely to seek mental health services to help alleviate their distress. Thus, familiarity with mental health services likely influenced their intentions to seek mental health services in the future.

Contrary to our expectations, attitudes toward help-seeking was not a strong predictor of the students' help-seeking intentions, suggesting that the students' attitudes toward mental health may not influence their help-seeking intentions. This finding is inconsistent with other studies on help-seeking attitudes with different populations. Skogstad et al. (2006) found that attitude was the strongest predictor of the prisoners' help-seeking intentions. The participants' overall average scores on the Attitudes towards Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS) suggested positive general attitudes toward seeking mental health services; however, attitude was a weak predictor of the students' intentions to seek mental health services. One possible explanation for this finding is that most of the students in this study had positive attitudes toward mental health services so they did not regard attitudes as an important factor for determining help seeking intentions. Having access to mental health services during times of psychological distress was viewed as more important.

The second hypothesis, which predicted that African American college students would have higher mean total scores on the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI) than the international college students did not receive support in the current study. The students' overall mean scores in the ISCI suggested low help-seeking intentions. Low intentions to seek help may reflect alternative coping strategies and/or that many of the students did not report serious life problems (e.g., the main problem reported was relationship issues). It is also possible that no significant difference was found between the African American and international students' mean scores on the Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI) because the international college students who participated in this study may have become more acculturated to American culture, which influenced their help-seeking intention. Additionally, since at least one-fifth of the sample reported past use of mental health services, it stands to reason that some of the international student may have had previous mental health experience.

Several limitations to this study need be acknowledged. First, a larger sample of international college students was desirable for this study. Second, most of the international students were English as Second Language (ESL) students. Thus, it was difficult to assess errors associated with misunderstanding the questions in the surveys, which may have influenced our findings. Third, the study did not incorporate a measure of cultural factors, such as acculturation, or cultural mistrust. Future studies may investigate the influence of cultural factors, such as acculturation on racial and ethnic minority students' help-seeking intentions and actual help-seeking behaviors.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between social-cognitive factors (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control), psychological distress, and help-seeking intentions for a sample of international and African American college students. We found that the Theory of Planned Behavior variables (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control)

accounted for a substantial amount of the variance in help-seeking intentions. Perceived behavioral control was the strongest predictor of help-seeking intentions. Contrary to our expectations, attitudes toward mental health services were not a significant predictor of mental health seeking intentions. There was no significant difference in the mean intention scores for African American college students compared to international college students. Despite the limitations, this study's main contribution to the literature is the finding that the students' perceived behavioral control was a significant predictor of help-seeking intentions. In other words, when the students perceived that they had access to the necessary resources, they were more likely to report intentions to seek mental health services if they experienced psychological distress. In addition, this study demonstrated that the theory of planned behavior can be used to understand help-seeking intentions among African Americans and international college students. These findings also have important implications for mental health service providers who design outreach mental health programs that motivate or encourage African American and international students to translate their help-seeking intentions into behaviors (e.g., seeking mental health services when they experience psychological distress).

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