

## **Student Population Awareness and Utilization of University Provided Mental Health Resources**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** A study done at a mid-sized American University assessed the student population's awareness and utilization of university provided mental health resources.

**Methods:** The study was completed using a survey of students with multiple choice, true/false and free response questions. Data were analyzed for any significant correlations.

**Results:** The results of the study provide a groundwork for future research despite limitations. The research showed that most of the students, including seniors, did not know many of the mental health resources offered on campus and had important misconceptions, such as thinking the counseling office was part of the student conduct office.

**Conclusion:** Efforts are needed to increase student awareness of mental health resources on campus and further study should be done to investigate the determinants of misconceptions.

### **Introduction**

Most mental health issues first onset before the age 24 making it important for college students and non-college attending peers to be aware of mental health resources (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2009 and Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer, & Zivin, 2011). It is reported that 41% of 18-24 year olds in the United States currently attend a college or university, with serious psychological issues affecting over 17% of those students (Sontag-Padilla et al., 2016). Many college campuses throughout the United States provide some level of mental health resources to their students, be it in the form of face-to-face counseling or through the campus clinic. Despite this ease of access, over one third of college students with mental health issues do not seek treatment (Sontag-Padilla et al., 2016), limiting their ability to succeed during

their time of higher education. There are many barriers that prevent students from seeking treatment including self-perceived stigma (Watson, Corrigan, Larson, & Sells, 2007) and public stigma (Wang, Peng, Li, & Peng, 2015; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2009). Public stigma is typically defined as “the negative stereotypes and prejudices surrounding mental illness held collectively by people in a society or community” (Wang et al., 2015) and is typically one of the biggest barriers a student must overcome to seek treatment (Sontag-Padilla, 2016). Self-perceived stigma is then defined as the internalization of public stigma, whether present or not, which can lead to a breakdown of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Awareness of resources within a university setting is also a huge barrier to help-seeking for mental health issues. The main research objectives of this project include investigating awareness the university students have of provided mental health resources within their campus community and evaluating any significant correlation between demographics, awareness and utilization of those resources.

## Methodology

Prior to starting the study, approval was obtained from the local institutional review board. Students from a mid-sized American university were randomly recruited throughout the university campus during normal academic hours. The recruiting locations were on the university campus in the student center, the main classroom building, the science building, the library and outside of the convocation center. These are areas of high student traffic, selected to obtain the desired number of responses in the necessary time. An effort was made to recruit students throughout all academic classes and disciplines. Students were approached by student researchers and asked if they would like to be involved in the study. After recruitment, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to completing the questionnaire. All participants then completed the questionnaire through an online Google form-based survey on one of two Microsoft Surface tablets provided through the supporting academic department.

Participants were included in the study if they were over the age of 18 and a current residential undergraduate student at the university. Participants who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Data were collected in November through December 2017, with 101 surveys being completed in that time frame. Of those, 99 surveys met inclusion criteria and were included in the study. All participants completed a demographic questionnaire asking residential student status, gender, year of study, marital status, and race. All participants then filled out a true/false table with six statements regarding mental health services on campus. Based on their pre-existing knowledge of these services they were expected to mark the statements true or false to the best of their ability. All participants were asked if they had utilized campus mental health services. The options for this question are as follows: Yes, I currently use them; Yes, I have in the past; No, but I have considered it; No, I would not utilize them.

## Results

All (100%) of respondents were over the age of 18 and all (100%) of respondents were single (unmarried). 41 respondents were male and 58 were female (Table 2). Furthermore, 17 freshmen, 11 sophomores, 20 juniors, and 51 seniors responded (Table 3). Regarding race, 78 respondents were Caucasian, 10 were Hispanic or Latino, 2 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 6 were African American, 1 was African (not African American), and 2 chose not to specify their race (Table 4).

Table 1: Demographic Data

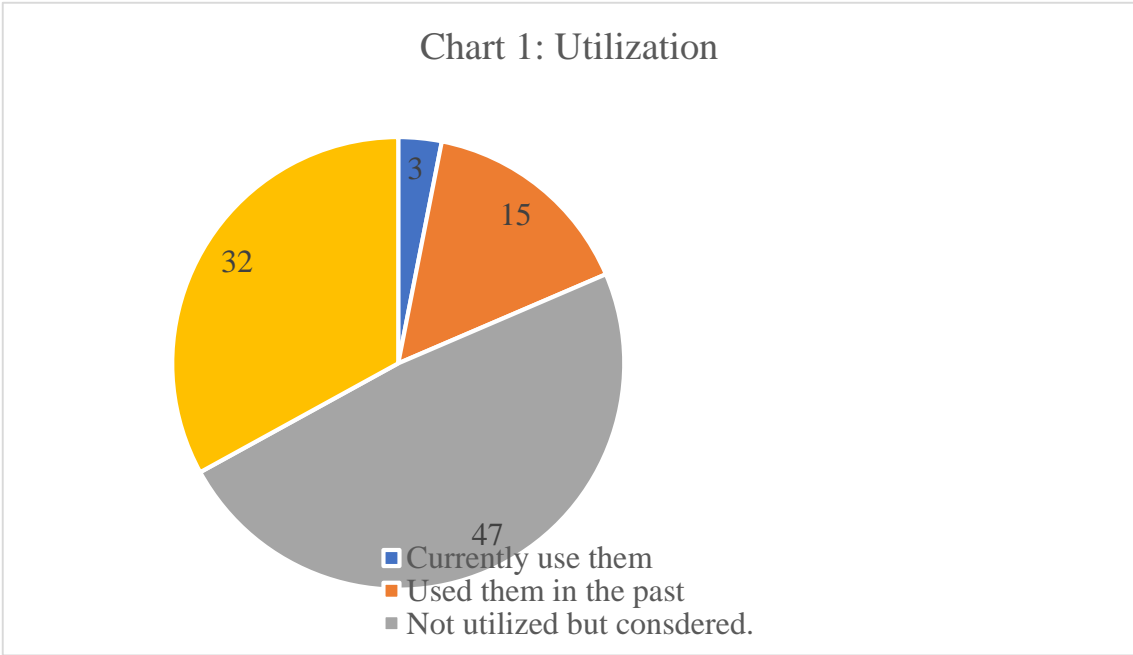
Demographic	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
-Male	41	41.4
-Female	58	58.6
<b>Year of Study</b>		
-Freshman	17	17.2
-Sophomore	11	11.1
-Junior	20	20.2
-Senior	51	51.5
<b>Race</b>		
-Caucasian	78	78.8
-Hispanic/Latino	10	10.1
-Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2.0
-African American	6	6.1
-African (not African American)	1	1.0
-Other (not specified)	2	2.0

The next question analyzed the respondents' awareness of what mental health services the university provided using a true/false response table with six statements. This table only had one false statement, "Counseling office is part of student conduct office" and 69 respondents considered this true with only 29 aware the offices are separate.

Table 2: True/False Data Responses

Counseling Service Provided	True	False	Statement True	% Correct
Online mental health screenings	73	25	Yes	74%
Face to face counseling	98	1	Yes	98%
Counseling free of charge to university students	95	3	Yes	95%
24/7 mental health crisis services	79	20	Yes	80%
Counseling office is part of student conduct office	69	29	No	30%
Counseling is confidential from the rest of campus operations	91	8	Yes	92%

The next question, asking about the respondents' utilization of mental health services, showed that 3 currently used the services, 15 had used them in the past, 47 had not utilized them but had considered it and 32 respondents would not utilize them.



The final question was a free response asking respondents if they were aware of any mental health services not previously mentioned in the study. Out of the survey respondents, only 11 answered correctly.

Gender, year of study, and race were not found to have any statistically significant correlation to the utilization of services.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to investigate the awareness students have of mental health resources provided by their university. Furthermore, through this survey there was a desire to understand and evaluate any correlations between race, gender, year of study, awareness and service utilization. In the end, this project successfully investigated the awareness of mental health services on campus 65% of respondents being aware of the services provided in some capacity. Almost 50% of respondents, however, had considered using but had not yet utilized the services. There are a multitude of possible reasons for this and further investigation is needed. However, based on prior research of college

student's attitudes towards mental health services this high percentage of students considering help could be due to public or self-perceived stigma surrounding the use of the resources. Through the course of the survey, there were a few respondents who verbalized concern that the necessary anonymity did not exist between the counseling office and the rest of campus operations as it should. This however needs to be verified with further research.

### Limitations

This study had significant limitations. The population size was smaller than the initial study design intended. Due to time constraints and limited resources the population was reduced to 100 respondents out of a population of approximately 15,000. More significant conclusions could have perhaps been drawn with a larger population. Furthermore, the geographical parameters of the study excluded a large part of the campus population. Despite the study being designed for undergraduate residential students on the campus, only students from the academic section of campus were included in the study. Locations not utilized included recreational areas, athlete facilities, and campuses away from the main campus.

### Recommendations

As noted above, there are numerous indications for further research. A study on the internalized attitudes toward mental health services would help better understand the reason for the non-utilization by the campus population. Also, a study looking at perceptions towards mental health and how religious students seek help would provide an even better understanding of public or self-internalized stigma.

## References

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