

BEYOND TRADITIONAL COUNSELING: STUDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND DIGITAL CBT SUPPORT

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Abstract:

This study examined students' awareness of psychological services, help-seeking attitudes, and preferences for psychological support among 235 students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. An anonymous online survey was used. Although 73.2% of students were aware of university psychological services, only 6.8% would seek help from a psychologist, while 70.6% preferred anonymous online support. The findings suggest a need for accessible, confidential, and student-centered psychological services, including digital CBT-based support.

Keywords:

university students; help-seeking; psychological support; digital CBT

INTRODUCTION

Mental health among university students has become an important concern in higher education. The transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood involves significant academic, social, and personal changes that may increase vulnerability to stress and emotional difficulties (Arnett, 2000; Sussman & Arnett, 2014). Research also indicates that the university years coincide with the period when many mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression, commonly emerge (Auerbach et al., 2018; Kessler et al., 2007).

Academic demands may further affect students' psychological well-being. Heavy workloads, examinations, academic competition, financial concerns, family expectations, and adaptation to new educational environments are frequently reported sources of academic stress (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Reddy et al., 2018). Such stress can contribute to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and difficulties in academic functioning. Despite these challenges, many students do not seek professional psychological assistance. Previous research has identified self-reliance, stigma, concerns about privacy, lack of time, and doubts about the necessity or usefulness of professional support as important barriers to help-seeking (Gulliver et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2025).

The availability of university psychological services therefore does not necessarily ensure their use. Students may be aware of available services while still preferring to manage difficulties independently or seek support from informal sources such as family and friends. This gap between awareness, intention, and actual professional help-seeking highlights the importance of understanding students' preferences and perceived barriers (Zhao et al., 2025).

Digital psychological interventions may provide an additional and potentially more accessible form of support. In particular, internet-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT) allows psychological techniques to be provided through structured online programmes and may be attractive to students who value privacy, flexibility, and greater autonomy. Previous research has demonstrated the potential benefits of digital mental health interventions and iCBT for university students (Harrer et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2023).

Although international research on student mental health and help-seeking is extensive, evidence from Uzbekistan remains comparatively limited. Therefore, the present study examines students' psychological experiences, awareness of university psychological services, barriers to professional help-seeking, and preferences for different forms of psychological support. The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how accessible, confidential, and student-centered psychological services, including appropriate digital and CBT-informed options, may be developed within higher education.

METHOD

The study involved 235 students from Uzbekistan State World Languages University who voluntarily completed an anonymous online questionnaire. A cross-sectional quantitative design was used to examine students' psychological experiences, awareness of university psychological services, help-seeking attitudes, and preferences for psychological support. Participants reported their experiences during the preceding two weeks, with most items measured on a five-point Likert scale from 0 (Never) to 4 (Almost every day). The questionnaire covered academic stress, emotional well-being, existential and social experiences, awareness and preferred sources of support, and barriers to professional help-seeking. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

Students reported various psychological difficulties, particularly academic pressure, exhaustion, negative emotional states, and anxiety about the future. A clear gap emerged between awareness of psychological services and willingness to use them: although 73.2% were aware of university psychological services, only 6.8% would approach a psychologist. Instead, students more often preferred family members (45.5%) or friends (41.3%), while 38.7% would not seek help from anyone.

A strong preference for alternative forms of support was also observed. 70.6% of participants indicated that they would use anonymous online psychological support. The main barriers to professional help-seeking were the belief that psychological assistance was unnecessary, embarrassment or shame, fear of negative judgment, and discomfort discussing personal problems with a professional. Overall, the findings indicate that students tend to prefer informal, private, flexible, and less stigmatizing forms of psychological support.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study indicate that students experience a range of psychological difficulties, while their willingness to seek professional psychological assistance remains relatively low. Academic pressure, exhaustion, sadness, and concerns about the future were among the difficulties reported by participants. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that the transition to emerging adulthood and the demands of university life may increase vulnerability to psychological distress (Arnett, 2000; Auerbach et al., 2018). Academic stress has also been associated with emotional exhaustion and reduced psychological well-being (Pascoe et al., 2020).

A central finding was the substantial gap between awareness of psychological services and willingness to use them. Although 73.2% of students knew about the university psychological service, only 6.8% indicated that they would seek help from a psychologist. Family members and friends were preferred sources of support, while 38.7% reported that they would not seek help from anyone. This pattern is consistent with previous research showing that awareness of available services does not necessarily translate into professional help-seeking (Gulliver et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2025). Self-reliance, embarrassment, fear of negative judgment, and the belief

that professional assistance is unnecessary may contribute to students' reluctance to seek psychological support.

The findings also highlight the importance of the format and accessibility of psychological assistance. While only a small proportion of students preferred direct professional help, 70.6% expressed willingness to use anonymous online psychological support. This considerable difference suggests that privacy, flexibility, and reduced social stigma may make digital forms of assistance more acceptable to students. In this context, internet-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT) and other CBT-informed digital resources may serve as useful complementary options, particularly for students who hesitate to approach a psychologist directly (Harrer et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2023).

These findings suggest that universities may benefit from combining traditional psychological services with psychoeducation, stigma-reduction initiatives, peer support, and confidential online resources. Digital and CBT-based interventions should be viewed as complementary forms of support rather than replacements for professional psychological services.

The study has several limitations. It was conducted at a single university and relied on self-reported data, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could involve students from multiple higher education institutions and combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine help-seeking attitudes in greater depth.

Overall, the study demonstrates that students' awareness of psychological services does not necessarily result in professional help-seeking. Providing accessible, confidential, flexible, and student-centered forms of psychological support, including appropriate digital and CBT-informed options, may help reduce this gap and improve access to psychological assistance in higher education.

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AN'ANAVIY PSIXOLOGIK MASLAHATDAN TASHQARI: TALABALARNING PSIXOLOGIK VA RAQAMLI KXT YORDAMIGA BO'LGAN AFZALLIKLARI

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Annotatsiya:

Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universitetining 235 nafar talabasi orasida psixologik xizmatlardan xabardorlik, yordam so'rashga munosabat va psixologik yordam shakllariga bo'lgan afzalliklarni o'rgandi. Anonim onlayn so'rovnoma o'tkazildi. Talabalarning 73,2 foizi universitetdagi psixologik xizmatlardan xabardor bo'lgan bo'lsa-da, faqat 6,8 foizi psixologga murojaat qilishini bildirgan, 70,6 foizi esa anonim onlayn yordamni afzal ko'rgan. Natijalar qulay, maxfiy va talabalarga yo'naltirilgan psixologik xizmatlarni, jumladan, raqamli KXTga asoslangan yordamni rivojlantirish zarurligini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar:

universitet talabalari; yordam so'rash; psixologik yordam; raqamli KXT

ЗА ПРЕДЕЛАМИ ТРАДИЦИОННОГО ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО КОНСУЛЬТИРОВАНИЯ: ПРЕДПОЧТЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ В ОТНОШЕНИИ ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ И ЦИФРОВОЙ ПОМОЩИ НА ОСНОВЕ ККТ

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Аннотация:

В исследовании изучались осведомлённость студентов о психологических услугах, отношение к обращению за помощью и предпочтения в отношении психологической поддержки среди 235 студентов Узбекского государственного университета мировых языков. Был проведён анонимный онлайн-опрос. Несмотря на то, что 73,2% студентов

были осведомлены о наличии психологических услуг в университете, только 6,8% указали, что обратились бы к психологу, тогда как 70,6% предпочли бы анонимную онлайн-поддержку. Полученные результаты указывают на необходимость развития доступных, конфиденциальных и ориентированных на студентов психологических услуг, включая цифровую поддержку на основе КПТ.

Ключевые слова:

студенты; обращение за помощью; психологическая поддержка; цифровая КПТ