

Social Status and Views as Factors of Applying for Psychological Assistance

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Abstract

Purpose:

The article examines the extent to which people are willing to accept psychological help based on their attitudes and social status. The study's primary purpose is to determine the role of social status and ideas about psychological help in a person's readiness to receive it.

Methodology:

The empirical basis of the study was a telephone survey. The sample population (547 people) was representative by gender and age for St. Petersburg. The methodological model of the study is based on the theory of M. Kovalevsky about the pluralistic nature of social experience and motivation. The obtained empirical data were analyzed using a weighted least squares regression model. The dependent variable is whether residents have experience in receiving psychological help.

Findings:

At the same time, no significant connection was found between the experience of seeking psychological help and the level of income, as well as the age of the respondents, which requires further research on the given topic. The findings demonstrate that being unemployed has a more pronounced positive role in the decision to seek help, despite earlier studies showing the opposite.

Implication:

The results of the work also contribute to the academic debate about the nature of the emergence of communication groups.

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INTRODUCTION

Psychological support is a hot topic on the research agenda and in the daily routines of people experiencing high anxiety levels and other problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People frequently require specialized psychological assistance and psychotherapy. However, several internal choices must be made between making a conscious request for this kind of assistance and making an appeal.

On the one hand, people's social status and position influence these decisions. Ideas about what is acceptable and what is required vary from person to person based on factors like wealth, education, social circle, and capital. According to R. Collins' theory, social status determines consumer and cultural habits: hobbies for particular music, regularity, and preferences in leisure activities (Guillén et al., 2002). Numerous practices establishing social status can also be linked to requesting psychological assistance as an exceptional service. It also includes the general concept of psychology and psychotherapy and information about people seeking help. The presence or absence of free time or financial resources for psychotherapy sets the apparent differences. This representation may change depending on the occupation, level of education, and income.

There are various points of view regarding how social status affects willingness to seek help in general and psychological help in particular. According to Asser's research, those with higher social statuses are likelier to be independent and uphold their autonomy than those with lower social statuses. As a result, the latter requested and accepted assistance more frequently Asser (1978). In an earlier work, Fischer E.H. and Cohen S.L., however, write that change occurred among students in the 1970s. Unlike earlier studies, students are equally willing to seek psychological help, regardless of their social status and the well-being of the family in which they grew up. (Fischer

& Cohen 1972). Contemporary research on this subject has produced conflicting results. According to a 2018 study by Piff, Kraus, and Keltner, those with lower social status are more likely to experience psychological stress, which increases their risk of developing mental disorders. At the same time, they have less access to psychological support.

Consequently, they get less psychological assistance when they ask for it more. (Piff, 2018). People with lower social status are typically less willing to seek psychological assistance, especially when race is involved. Additionally, they typically rate the assistance given to them negatively, as evidenced by the work (Wolkon et al., 1973).

Age is another significant factor influencing a person's readiness to seek psychological help. A large study on attitudes (prejudices) regarding seeking help of various kinds and psychological well-being is presented in the work (Yamauchi et al., 2020). The authors point out that older generations (40–59 years old) among Japanese civil servants are more likely to seek assistance and consequently have better psychological well-being than members of the 20–39-year-old generation. Yeh C. J. also examined the connection between attitudes toward age and willingness to ask for and accept psychological assistance. According to the author, age had no discernible influence on these indicators (Yeh, 2002). It demonstrates uncertainty regarding this factor's effect on willingness to seek psychological assistance. The work of Zivian et al. also shows differences in attitudes toward psychotherapy depending on age; as people aged, their skepticism toward psychotherapy grew (Zivian, 1994). Westerhof G. J. et al. obtained synonymous conclusions. Older people (65-75 years old) are more likely than the average in society to find it challenging to seek help of this kind (Westerhof, 2008). In addition, age plays a vital role in shaping treatment adherence (Duncan, 2003).

Another consideration is the degree of education. Students' attitude toward psychological assistance is the subject of many studies. We can refer to the study done by Antonova et al. (2021) when discussing domestic work. The authors conclude that students are not very willing to get psychological assistance if they need it. A maximum of 25% of respondents are prepared to do it (Antonova et al., 2021). The education factor is an often-explanatory variable in cross-country studies, particularly in the work (Sheikh & Furnham, 2000; Al-Krenawi et al., 2009).

The person's beliefs also play a role in deciding whether to get psychological assistance. They may be connected to the respondent's social standing as well as his personal experiences or those of his trusted relatives. People with a biased opinion of psychiatrists or psychotherapists are less likely to seek psychological assistance and are typically more critical of such assistance (Katsena & Dimdins, 2015). A broad research direction is the influence of self-stigma beliefs on the decision to consult a specialist. This topic is taken up in the works of Vogel et al. (2006) and Cheng et al. (2018). However, it is essential to note that such studies often refer to people who belong to a stigmatized group with mental disorders. Our study is also focused on people whose condition is pre-clinical. Bergin, A. E., in the classic work "Psychotherapy and Religious Values," demonstrates that attitudes towards psychotherapy can be influenced by religious beliefs and views (Bergin, 1980). Ozmen et al. (2005) find a link between prejudices about the pharmaceutical industry and attitudes towards psychotherapy. Skepticism about pharmacological treatment leads to skepticism about psychotherapy (Ozmen et al., 2005).

As we can see, various factors contribute to one's attitude toward psychotherapy. However, how do these factors interact, and what impact do they ultimately have on someone's willingness to seek assistance? Additionally, the inconsistent results on several important factors (social status, age, and income) raise an urgent question: What current contribution can we find for these factors?

METHODS

Theoretical research is based on the pluralistic model of social reality by Kovalevsky (1910). Receiving psychological assistance is a social action, and as M. Kovalevsky writes, numerous factors contribute to it simultaneously. A more crucial condition than the simple sum of the factors is which combination of those factors falls into place. Additionally, none of the factors can be decisive due to the complexity of the social world. Social status will be understood by several sociologically significant variables, including income, status as a foreign-born person, education, employment, and marital status (Carr et al., 2018). The respondent's personal opinions about the common causes for seeking psychological assistance and his perceptions of his relatives' assessments and their own experiences make up his perceptions of psychological assistance.

The inhabitants of St. Petersburg are the study's subject. The study's focus is on residents' willingness to receive psychological support. The study's primary goal is to determine how social status and beliefs about psychological assistance affect a person's willingness to receive it. Regarding readiness to act after the survey, V. Vakhstain brings up the issue of trusting the intentions stated by the respondents – the readiness is always very hard to verify. The question of lived experience appears to be much more appropriate. Psychological assistance is an actively achieving readiness (Vakhstain et al., 2009). Therefore, the dependent variable is the presence or absence of the experience of seeking psychological help from the respondent. Respondents who said they did not need psychological help were excluded from the sample. Thus, the analyzed sample consists of respondents needing psychological help. Moreover, the dependent variable is whether they asked for help or not.

As a method of collecting empirical data, we used a telephone survey based on the "Center for Applied Sociological Research" of St. Petersburg State University. The study involved 547 people. The sample is representative in terms of sex and age for residents of St. Petersburg. The resulting sample included 43.5% of men and 56.5% of women with the following distribution by age groups: from 18 to 29 years old - 23.2%, from 30 to 39 years old - 17.8%, from 40 to 49 years old - 16.6%, from 50 to 59 years old - 17.6%, from 60 years and older - 24.7%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Attitude on Seeking Psychological Assistance. The study found that residents of St. Petersburg have mixed feelings about receiving psychological care. As a result, most respondents (65.7%) concur with the statement that people only seek psychological assistance as a last resort when in a crisis. In addition, 92.6% of respondents agree that "anyone can seek psychological help," while about one-fifth of respondents (20.4%) think that only people with illnesses or mental disorders do so. Only very wealthy people, 10.7%; people with incomes not below the average, 33.5%; all people, regardless of income level, 40.2%; and 15.2% of respondents found it difficult to answer, were the opinions that were divided on the affordability of high-quality psychological assistance in St. Petersburg.

In the event of serious personal or emotional issues, 41.9% of St. Petersburg residents will consult a psychologist and 13% a psychiatrist; however, 30.2% of residents will not consult mental health professionals, and 7.6% will consult other specialists, such as psychotherapists, religious leaders, or their immediate environment. 39.3% of respondents said they would favor speaking with a specialist, 36% said they would react indifferently, 4.5% said they would not, and 19.5% said it was difficult to predict how acquaintances might respond. The fact that every fifth resident finds it difficult to assess the attitude of his acquaintances towards psychological assistance indicates that this topic is excluded from everyday conversations and, probably, its taboo status. At the same time, most St. Petersburg residents (41.9%) know that some of their acquaintances seek or have sought counseling from a psychologist, 9.5% - that many, and 35.8% - that no one or practically no one. 12.8% of respondents found it difficult to estimate the share of acquaintances who applied for psychological help.

Willingness to Seek Psychological Assistance. Following the information provided, 12.6% of St. Petersburg residents required psychological support during the study (June 2021). At the same time, about a third of the respondents (31.1%) believed their circumstance to be a crisis, meaning it was highly uncomfortable and resolved immediately. A little over half (52.2%) of the respondents who indicated a need for psychological support intended to apply for it; nearly a quarter (22.8%) did not, and roughly one-fifth (19.1%) had already received it.

Practices for Seeking Psychological Help. In St. Petersburg, 26.5% of people have sought out a psychologist. 17.7% of them sought out a psychologist more than once. Most of the time (47.3%), in a third of the cases (32.7%), in 2021, and for 16.6% of respondents in 2020, the last appeal occurred in 2019. Relationships with children (18.2%), personal growth and self-development (13%), relationships with a partner (12.8%), interpersonal relationships outside the family (12.2%), relationships with parents or other older relatives (11%), psychodiagnostics (career guidance, personal characteristics) (8.40%), and career-related issues (8%). These are the problems for which the respondents last contacted a psychologist.

The most popular form of receiving psychological help among St. Petersburg residents is individual counseling, and it was used by 96.5% of all those who have ever turned to psychological help. Other forms of receiving psychological assistance are used much less often: group sessions/training (14.2%), couples counseling (for example, family counseling for marital/partner relations, child-parents) (9.4%), and self-help groups (2.7%).

Most of those who applied for psychological help are satisfied with the help they received (41.3% are delighted, and 26.5% are somewhat satisfied).

Regarding the subjects of providing psychological assistance, St. Petersburg residents prefer privately practicing psychologists (44.5%) and specialists from state organizations (42.5%); 22.3% of respondents turned to a private organization. The preferences of St. Petersburg residents regarding the affordability of seeking psychological help are slightly dominated by paid assistance (44.2% versus 38.8%). At the same time, 15.6% of respondents have experience receiving both paid and free assistance.

Objections to Not Seeking Psychological Assistance. The reasons for not applying are of interest because most St. Petersburg residents (72.6%) need to gain experience applying to a psychologist. The lack of a need for psychological assistance was the most common justification given by Petersburg residents (73%). However, nearly a fifth (19.8%) of respondents delayed applying or managed independently. Other reasons given for not applying included the following: I did not think a psychologist could help me (6%), there was not enough money for one (5%), I did not know who to turn to (4.1%), and I believed (a) that psychological help was of low quality (3.6%), I was afraid of the consequences [to be registered/reported to work] (1.2%), I was afraid of condemnation/misunderstanding from the relatives (0.8%).

Attitude on Seeking Psychological Assistance. Three weighted least squares regression models were created due to the analysis (Table 1). The first regression model accounts for 58.5% of the variability of the dependent variable and includes the variables of the respondent's relationship to psychotherapy and acquaintances. The second model, which accounts for 59% of the variance in the dependent variable, includes some social status variables. The third model accounts for 53.6% of the variance in the dependent variable by using the respondents' educational attainment as an independent variable. Apart from respondents' age, income level, and gender, no other marital status variables were included in the analysis because there was no evidence of a significant correlation between them and the dependent variable.

Prejudices toward psychological assistance are depicted in Table 1 as respondents' responses to the statement, "Only people with illnesses or mental disorders seek psychological assistance." The response is given as a rank scale, where a higher score indicates less agreement with the statement by the respondent. The respondent notes how many of his acquaintances sought counseling in the experience of acquaintances, which also functions as a rank scale. As we can see, the respondent is more willing to seek help if necessary the more firmly he believes that not only people with mental disorders seek psychological assistance and the more acquaintances he has who have done so.

The most excellent willingness to seek psychological help to receive it is expressed by people who run a household and do not work. Among marital status, a significant relationship is observed only for divorced people.

The third model includes only the level of education among other socio-demographic factors since there is a significant statistical relationship with the dependent variable. The level of education is a ranking scale from incomplete schooling to Ph.D.

Table 1. Regression Models of Factors of Seeking Psychological Help.

Models	Independent variable	coef	std err	t-ratio	p-level
model 1 R ² = 0.585	housekeeper	0.8149	0.201	4.061	0.000
	unemployed	0.5759	0.276	2.089	0.039
	employee	0.5545	0.057	9.785	0.000
	business owner	0.5006	0.147	3.402	0.001
	student	0.4975	0.171	2.913	0.004
	self-employed	0.4930	0.102	4.831	0.000

	pensioner	0.3319	0.135	2.463	0.015
	divorced	0.2740	0.122	2.241	0.027
model 2 R ² = 0.590	prejudices about mental help	0.0820	0.022	3.665	0.000
	experience of relatives	0.1022	0.047	2.151	0.033
model 3 R ² = 0.536	the level of education	0.0998	0.008	13.080	0.000

The study's findings demonstrate how the importance of psychological assistance to citizens is rising. The third time respondents appealed was in 2021. Furthermore, both domestic and international studies have noted this upward trend. Yu.E. Shmatova mentions this trend among Russians (Shmatova et al., 2021). A systematic review by Salari N., Hosseini-Far A., and Jalali R. allows us to conclude that the growing need for psychological assistance over the past few years can be a global problem (Salari et al., 2020).

In light of the proposed hypotheses regarding the factors influencing the need for psychological assistance, we can sum up that, in contrast to the findings of foreign studies, the influence of social status is not particularly significant. It is consistent, for instance, with M. Sokolov's writings about forming communication groups in Russia (Sokolov, 2020a). Social groups that develop daily are typically constructed based on their shared social status. In other words, since these people have a comparable level of education, income, and societal position, doctors will be friends with lawyers, engineers, prominent managers, and actors. They will establish a small communication group to discuss various aspects of psychology, including the necessity of using psychology to address current issues. M. Sokolov noted that these groups hardly ever form in Russia. Instead of money, education, or social standing, joint occupation is the foundation for friendship (Sokolov, 2020b). Thus, even though these individuals will have vastly different levels of education, income, and social status, the doctor from the first example will communicate with other doctors, nurses, orderlies, and officials from the health committee. The formation of ideas about psychology and psychological assistance occurs in such diverse groups during conversation. These factors make our dependence on social status less pronounced than in studies conducted abroad. Notably, there needed to be a discernible connection between income level and willingness to seek psychological assistance. Assumptions made in the literature review about the ambiguity of the influence of this factor on the willingness to seek psychological help are confirmed by our failure to find a relationship concerning age. In contrast to the findings of Staiger et al. (2017), who note that the unemployed more frequently face difficulties in obtaining psychological assistance, it seems interesting that among the respondents, the unemployed more frequently realized their willingness to receive psychological assistance (Staiger et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

The study revealed a significant need for psychological assistance among the populace. Additionally, a sizeable portion of the responders report psychological issues that could be related to COVID-19's effects. Lack of stable employment, positive experiences with close friends and family, and education level are essential characteristics that positively influence the readiness to obtain psychiatric care.

The study's geographical scope was restricted by the survey's participation of St. Petersburg residents. The study's factors are present elsewhere as well, but how frequently people perceive them depends on the area, the activity of migration, and the operation of social services. Another restriction is the need for comprehensive methods for evaluating respondents' self-stigma. Applying such methods in a population study might be a line of inquiry for future study. As Sue S. notes, cultural values may be considered explanatory variables (Sue, 2003), which may also be a direction for future study.

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