

## THE INFLUENCE OF OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS AND WILLINGNESS TO SEEK COUNSELING AMONG STUDENTS

*Ruziliza Ibrahim & Jamaludin Haji Ahmad*

*Faculty of Educational Studies, University Putra Malaysia*

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of outcome expectations and willingness to seek counselling among undergraduate students in University Putra Malaysia (UPM). The total of N=160 undergraduate students from faculties of; Forestry, Economics and Management, Food Science and Technology and Medical and Health Science are randomly selected in the study. Among the participants 121 are female students and 39 were male students. The instruments used in this study were Disclosure Expectation Scale developed by Vogel and Wester (2003) and The Intention to Seek Counseling Inventory which is developed by Cash, Begley, McCown and Weise (1975). Researcher applied back translation technique to translate these instruments into Malay language. The obtained data n were analyzed by using descriptive statistic, the *Pearson Correlation*, *t-test* and one way *ANOVA*. The result of the study indicated that outcome expectation influences the willingness to seek counseling among students. The finding of the study also showed that there is no significant difference on outcome expectations and willingness to seek counselling between male and female students. But there was a difference on willingness to seek counselling between faculties. Generally, the findings of the study showed that UPM undergraduate students are willing to seek counselling.

### Introduction

Guidance and counselling services started in Malaysian Public Universities in the late 1970's. During that time, counselling services focused more on career counselling. Most of counselling centres in public universities were developed in order to help students on personal growth, academic, career, prevention and to encourage mental health (Taip Abu & Abdul Halim Othman, 2009). It is imperative to know what motivates people to seek counseling and their expectations from the session. In counseling psychology field, numbers of studies have been conducted on factors which influence people to seek counseling. According to Brown (2011) expectations on counseling, attitude towards seeking psychological help and psychological distress are all been showed related to intentions to seek counseling and psychological services. Greenidge, Daire & Lewis (2011) explained that people are more likely to seek professional counseling if they believe that such action will decrease their problem. In other words by seeking counseling they will get positive outcomes.

This study aims to see the relationship and correlation on outcome expectations and willingness to seek counseling among undergraduate students of University Putra Malaysia (UPM). Universities students belong in youth category who are perceived to have bright future and considered as tomorrow's leaders. Therefore during their youth age, awareness on counseling and psychological services should be high in order to avoid serious problem includes interpersonal, social and academic problems.

Pursuant to this, information obtained from this study is vital for university counselors and administrators to plan and promote the nature and benefits of meeting counselors. It can reduce the stigma and negative attitudes towards seeking counseling but perhaps can increase the awareness that seeing counselor will give positive outcomes and are beneficial to student's personal growth in academic life and other aspects. The objectives of the study are; to examine the relationship between outcome expectations and willingness to seek counseling among the undergraduates students, to know the outcome expectations towards seeking counseling services among the undergraduates students, to investigate the categories of problems which students willing to seek for counselling, to see if differences exist between male and female students on willingness to seek counselling and to see if differences exist between faculty on willingness to seek counseling. There are three hypotheses;

H<sub>1</sub>= There is relationship between outcome expectations and willingness to seek counseling among students.

H<sub>2</sub>= There is difference on the outcome expectations and willingness to seek counseling between male and female students.

H<sub>3</sub>= There is difference on the outcome expectations and willingness to seek counseling between faculties.

### **Literature Review**

Individual's expectation and perception towards counseling are different with an individual to another. In the study of psychology, many studies were conducted in order to investigate what motivate people to seek counseling. Many previous studies like Erkan, Cihangir-Cankaya, Ozbay & Terzi (2012) examined the variables that influence university students's willingness to seek counseling in 11 universities in Turkey. The data obtained from a total of 5829 colleges students and the instruments used were Personal Form, Self Concealment Scale, Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale, Problem Areas Scale, Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale, Multi Dimensional Perceived Social Support Scale and Bern Sex Role Inventory. The results then indicated that the most significant predictor for seeking counseling was the positive attitudes towards psychological help.

Therefore, Brown (2011) conducted a correlational study on 291 college students in Midwestern United States to examine the relationship among counseling expectations, attitudes towards psychological help, psychological distress and intentions to seek psychological help. The instruments used in his study were The Expectations about Counseling Questionnaire, The Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale, The Beliefs About Psychological Services questionnaire, The Hopkins Symptom Checklist-21, The Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory. The research showed that attitudes towards psychological help were found inter correlated with counseling expectations and intentions to seek help.

Studies shows that both *anticipated benefits* and *anticipated risks* reported have influence on intention to seek counseling. Vogel & Wester (2003) have conducted a research to investigate their hypothesis about how low tendency for an individual in disclosing distressing information lead to negative attitudes towards counseling and are less likely to seek counseling. In order to test the hypothesis, they had 209 students of Midwestern University and have used few measures used included Distress Disclosure (DDI), Emotional Disclosure (ESDS), Perceived Risks and Utility of Disclosing Emotions Questions and Attitudes towards Seeking for Psychological Help (ATTSPH) used to measure participant's attitudes towards counseling. The results have indicated that individuals with high anticipated risks will avoid meeting a counselor.

### Sampling procedures

Four faculties were randomly selected and N=160 students were also randomly selected from the Faculties; Economics and Management, Forestry, Science and Food Technology and Medical and Health Science. From the total of 160 undergraduate students 53 (24.8%) students were first year students, 64 (29.9%) were second year students, 31(14.5%) students were in their third years and another 12 students were in fourth year (5.6%). Among the participants 121 are female students and 39 were male students.

### Data collection

The students were directly approached by the researcher in their classroom at the faculties. The set of questionnaires were distributed and the purpose and the instruction of the study were explained to the respondents before they started to answer the questionnaires. Approximately students completed the questionnaires around 10-15 minutes.

### Instruments

The instruments used in this study were self - administered questionnaire which are Intentions To Seek Counseling Inventory ( ICSI), and Disclosure Expectations Scale (DES). The Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ICSI) was developed by Cash, Begley, McCown and Weise in 1975 in order to measure individual's intentions to seek counseling for psychological and interpersonal concerns. For the Disclosure Expectation Scale, it was introduced in order to measure individuals anticipated benefit and risk by Vogel &Wester (2003). The Disclosure

Expectations Scale (DES) consists of an 8-items questionnaire which is designed to assess participants' expectations about the utility and the risks associated with talking about an emotional problem with a counselor. Each the two identified subscales consist of four items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very*). It is reported that internal consistency for anticipated benefits is at  $r = .83$  and for anticipated risks is  $r = .74$ . It is reported that the reliability of DES is  $r = .788$ . Therefore this instrument is reliable and suitable to use in this study.

The Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory (ISCI) consist of 17-items that ask participants to rate how likely they would be to seek counseling if they were experiencing the problem listed. The scale is Likert scale type and rating from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*). Some of these which are issues presented in the instrument include relationship difficulties, depression, personal concerns, and drug-related problems (Hobson, 2008). Three subscales exist within the ISCI that include Interpersonal Problems (10 items), Academic Problems (4 items), and Drug/Alcohol Problems (2 items). Total scores ranging from 17 – 42 indicate the participant is less likely to seek counseling services whereas scores ranging from 43 – 68 indicate the participant is more likely to seek counseling services. The ISCI has sufficient internal consistency estimates for the three subscales measuring  $r = .90$  for Interpersonal Problems,  $r = .71$  for Academic Problems, and  $r = .86$  for Drug/ Alcohol Problems. Scores can be totalled to reflect intentions to seek counseling for each of the three subscales or to gather an overall score on willingness to seek counseling. The reliability of ISCI was tested and the reliability is indicated at  $r = .952$ .

#### Pilot study

The instruments used in this study were translated from English to Malay language by Back Translation technique. Thirty (30) UPM undergraduate students were participated in the pilot test. To see the reliability of both instruments, the *Alpha Cronbach* statistical procedure was conducted in order to test the reliability. The results indicated ICSI has high reliability at  $r = .952$  and DES is reliable at  $r = .788$ . Therefore these instruments were suitable to use in conducting this study.

#### **Research Finding**

The descriptive statistic shows, overall finding for the willingness to seek counseling according to the categories, 1 (*less likely*) scores range from 17-42 and 2 (*more likely*) scores range from 43-68 indicated that 64 (40%) respondents are less likely to seek counseling while 96 respondents (60%) are more likely to seek counselling. (Please refer to Table 6). Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) for subscales under ICSI indicated Mean=27.40, SD= 7.32 for interpersonal problem, Mean=4.47, SD=2.17 for drug problems and Mean=11.79, SD=2.79 for academic problem. Thus, this study found that interpersonal problem is the major problem which students would like to seek for counseling (Please refer Table 7).

Table 6: Frequency and percentage scores for ICSI

Scores	Values	Frequency	Percentage(%)
17-42	1	64	40
43-68	2	96	60

Table 7: Mean and SD for ICSI Subscales

Subscales	Mean	SD
Interpersonal Problem	27.40	7.32
Drug Problem	4.47	2.17
Academic Problem	11.79	2.79

The finding for students outcome expectation shows that anticipated benefits indicated  $M=13.40$ ,  $SD=3.61$  and anticipated risks  $M=13.51$ ,  $SD=3.58$  (Please refer Table 8). This result shows that students have negative expectation toward seeking counseling. However, the mean indicated that there are only slightly differences between mean anticipated benefits and anticipated risks.

**Table 8: Mean and SD for DES subscales**

Subscales	Mean	SD
Anticipated Benefits	13.40	3.61
Anticipated Risks	13.51	3.58

The *Pearson Correlation*, *T test* and *One Way ANOVA* were used to test the following hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub>= There is relationship on outcome expectation and willingness to seek counseling
- H<sub>2</sub>= There is difference on outcome expectation and willingness to seek counseling between male and female students.
- H<sub>3</sub>= There is difference on outcome expectation and willingness to seek counseling between faculties.

Results of correlation indicated that outcome expectation (anticipated benefits and anticipated risks) was positively correlated with the willingness to seek counseling among students ( $r=.40, p<.05$ ). Hence, this finding supported the first hypothesis that there is relationship between outcome expectation and willingness to seek counseling. However,  $r=.40$  only indicated moderate correlation (Please refer Table 9).

**Table 9: Correlation between outcome expectation and intention to seek counseling**

Correlation	N	r	Sig.
DES	160	.405**	.000
ISCI	160	.405**	.000

\*Significant at alpha level. 05

Result for the *t test* showed that the mean difference on outcome expectation between genders is not significant [ $t (158) = -1.58, p>.05$ ]. Therefore there is no significant difference on outcome expectation between genders (Please refer Table 10). Further, the result of *t test* showed that there is no significant different on intention to seek counselling between genders. The result of *t-test* indicated that [ $t (158) = -1.25, p>.05$ ]. Therefore these results concluded that the second hypothesis is not supported (Please refer Table 11).

**Table 10: t test result for outcome expectation**

Group	Mean	sd	t	df	p
Gender					
Male	25.1	8.5	-1.58	158	.11
Female	27.4	5.4			

\*Significant at alpha level. 05

**Table 11: t test result for intention to seek counselling**

Group	Mean	sd	t	df	p
Gender					
Male	44.23	12.23	-1.25	158	.21
Female	47.10	12.54			

\*Significant at alpha level. 05

ANOVA results indicated that ( $F=12.73, p<.05$ ). It shows that there is a difference on willingness to seek counseling between Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of

Forestry, Faculty of Food and Science Technology and Faculty of Medical and Health Science. Thus, the third hypothesis was consistent with this finding (Please refer Table 12). However for the outcome expectation ANOVA result, indicated that there is no difference between the four faculties ( $F=.372, p>.05$ ). *Pos Hoc test* was conducted because there is significant difference for willingness to seek counseling between faculties. *Pos Hoc Scheffe test* was conducted to see mean differences between the four faculties. (Please refer Table 13).

Table 12: ANOVA result for willingness to seek counselling and outcome expectation

	Between Groups	Within Group	F	sig
ICSI	16.88	68.96	12.73	.000
DES	.714	99.754	.372	.773

\*Significant at alpha level. 05

Table 13: Pos Hoc Scheffe Test result for willingness to seek counseling

	Economics	Forestry	Food Science	Medical&Health
Economics		.73	.78	.72
Forestry		-.73	.04	-.01
FoodScience		-.78	-.04	-.06
Medical &Health		-.72	.01	.06

\*Significant at alpha level. 05

The findings of the present study explain the influence of outcome expectations which consists of anticipated benefits and anticipated risks and the willingness to seek counseling among undergraduates UPM students. The information from the study has contributed to understand UPM student's perceptions and willingness to seek counseling. Beside this information is vital for universities counselors and administrators.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that there is a relationship on outcome expectations and willingness to seek counseling among students. In other words, students' perception towards counseling has an influence towards their willingness to seek counseling. Statistical analysis of *Pearson Correlation* shows ( $r=.045, p<.05$ ). Therefore this finding is consistent with study conducted by Vogel, et al. (2005) which reported that positive and negative outcome expectation of anticipated benefits and risks can influence and has an important role in individual's intentions to seek help. Further, Capeda-Benito & Short, as cited in Vogel, et al. (2005) also found that psychological factors such particular outcome expectation was directly related to seeking help attitudes. This results also supported by Shaffer e.t al., (2006) in the study of mediating roles of anticipated benefits and risks towards the decision to seek professional help. These factors are very influential toward the willingness to seek counseling. People will only come for counseling if they have positive attitudes toward counseling. Positive attitudes can be explained by having strong belief that seeing counsellors may lead to the positive results. For those who have negative attitudes, they will tend to avoid and less likely to seek counseling for help.

Furthermore, this study indicated that UPM students are willing to seek counseling for all categories which have been measured under the Intention to Seek Counseling Inventory (ICSI) and the results showed that 60% of undergraduate students are more likely to seek counseling. This finding is consistent with Morgan, Ness and Robinson (2003) on the study of student's help seeking behavior by gender, racial background and status. The previous study found that undergraduate students indicated 58% higher on their intention to seek counseling compared to postgraduate students. However, finding on outcome expectation showed higher mean of anticipated risk among undergraduate UPM students. But the mean difference is not significant, only slightly higher than anticipated benefits. This result is similar to previous research conducted by Bloecher (2011) she found that, a part of (TRA) did not match with her finding and anticipated risk found associated with counselling seekness more.

This study also found that among three major problems; interpersonal problems, drug problems and academic problem, UPM students indicated that interpersonal problems as the most factor that leads them to seek for counseling services. The finding shows that interpersonal problem means ( $M=27.40$ ) is the highest mean compared to academic problem ( $M=11.79$ ) and drug problem ( $M=4.47$ ).

Moreover, this research indicated that there is no significant different between genders on their willingness to seek counseling. *T test* results showed ( $t=-1.58, p>.05$ ). Although, previous study reported that the attitudes and willingness to seek counseling are more likely for female students, but this study found inconsistency in the result. This is might happened because the number of male and female students in the sampling procedure are not equal. However, the study on gender differences toward attitudes on seeking counseling, Seyoum (2011) also reported that there was no significant difference on female and male perception and willingness to seek for counseling.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the counselling field by adding new findings to the body of knowledge and verifying similar findings as reported from previous researchers. For instance this finding is similar and consistent with the results of Shaffer et. al., (2006), who found anticipated benefits, anticipated risks influenced the help seeking behaviour of 821 undergraduate Psychology students in Midwestern University. However, the result in this study is inconsistent with research finding of Suradi (2010) which reported that university students in Malaysia were not ready to seek counselling. Therefore, this study contributed new information to the counseling field specifically counseling in Malaysian universities with the finding that UPM undergraduate students are willing and have great intention to seek counseling.

Practically, this study explored vital information relating to students perception about UPM counseling services. The higher scores on anticipated risk which can be described as fear of seeking counseling, lack of trust on confidentiality issues or concerned on other people stigmatization of seeking counseling shows that UPM students need to have more awareness on the advantages of seeking counseling.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, results in this study shows that students' expectation on counseling has influence on their intention to seek counseling. The percentage of students who are likely to seek counselling is higher than less likely. Although the result showed only slight difference on anticipated benefits and risk but this should be given attention in order to avoid students have negative perceptions and refuse to seek counseling .

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