Powerpoint presentation:

Do high school students intentions predict actual help seeking from school counsellors?
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Why is professional psychological help-seeking important?

- Definition of “professional” help seeking

- National Survey of 10,600 Australians found that while 1 in 5 meet the criteria for a mental disorder “62% of persons with a mental disorder did not seek any professional help for mental health problems” (Andrews et al., 1999)

Why is professional psychological help-seeking important?

- Stiffman, et al., (1988) N= 2787 Less than one third of adolescents with suicidal ideation sought or received professional mental health care for their problem
- Suicide usually occurs on “a continuum beginning with ideation, continuing to attempted suicide, and ending with completed suicide” (Cole et al., 1992, p. 813).
- Appropriate help seeking has the potential to reduce risk

- Approach-avoidance model
- N = 263 university students
- Treatment fearfulness factors predicted professional help-seeking intentions ($R^2 = .08$)
  - Image concerns (judged negatively by oneself)
Stigma concerns (judged negatively by others)
Coercion concerns (pushed to think, do or say things)
Psychological distress also predicted

- N = 107 university students (XM & Int)
- Those with prior contact had less treatment fearfulness
- Help-seeking for “personal-emotional” problem and “suicidal thoughts”
- Help-seeking for suicidal thoughts significantly higher than for personal-emotional problem

- Together, distress, attitudes, treatment fears & gender accounted for 50% of variance in help-seeking intentions for Personal-Emotional problems and
- 16% for Suicidal Thoughts
- Attitudes only unique predictor
- Stigma concerns predicted attitudes

- N = 221 high school students 14 -18 years
- Non-clinical
- Together, attitudes, treatment fears, distress & suicidal ideation, prior help and gender predicted 23% of variance in help-seeking intentions for both PE problems and suicidal thoughts
- Attitudes was the only unique predictor of help-seeking for PE problems
- Distress & suicidal ideation correlated, r = .44

- Intentions for suicidal thoughts higher than PE
- Suicidal ideation, attitudes & prior help were all unique predictors of help-seeking intentions for suicidal thoughts, but
- Contrary to expectations suicidal ideation was negatively related to help-seeking intentions
- As suicidal ideation increased help-seeking intentions decreased, r = -.24

- 52 medium security male inmates
Structured interview based on development of measures of specific beliefs from Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

- Advantages & disadvantages of seeing a psychologist in prison
- Help seeking if suicidal
- Preferred organisational response if suicidal

Theory of Planned Behaviour
(Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)


- Theory of Planned Behaviour
- 500 male prison inmates
- Actual help-seeking behaviour tracked over one year
- Attitudes, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, Distress, Suicidal ideation, Prior contact, Age, Education, Ethnicity


- Full TPB model (specific & general measures) accounted for 56% of the variance in prison inmates’ intentions to seek help for a personal-emotional problem.

- 34% of help seeking intentions for suicidal feelings


- Of the 400 valid responses, 90 inmates sought help from a psychologist over the next year
- Significant differences between those who sought help and those who did not on:
  - General attitudes
  - Specific attitudes
  - Specific subjective norms
  - Psychological distress and age (older more likely to seek help)


- Whilst those who sought help also had higher intentions to seek help, this difference was NOT significant

Together, TPB measures, demographic variables, psychological distress and prior contact were the most effective at predicting those who sought psychological help (22% correctly identified).

Intentions did not mediate the relationship Attitudes, PBC, SN and Behaviour.

Age and prior contact in prison were unique predictors of actual help seeking behaviour.

Older inmates and those who had prior contact in prison tended to be more likely to seek help.


Why did the TPB not work?
- Large time delay to behaviour
- Definition of help seeking behaviour was “referral to psychologist” but was for all kinds of issues e.g. personal problems, offending, administrative
- “Help seeking” may not have been self directed
- Actual help seeking “observed” vs self-report
- TPB prediction of health behaviours low


NHMRC Grant Dr. Debra Rickwood, UC

302 undergraduate university students

Help-seeking intentions measure
- 3 problem domains & 6 helping sources

Suicidal ideation predicted help-seeking intentions but in the negative direction

As suicidal ideation increased help-seeking intentions for suicidal thoughts decreased for all sources of help except friends.


NSW DET Strategic Research Directorate

Anonymous survey then non-anonymous

173 male high school students, grades 9 & 10, 14-15 years old

Non-anonymous data

Suicide Ideation

Help seeking intentions

Help seeking behaviour.


Help seeking intentions: 6 main sources

“If you were experiencing suicidal thoughts, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people?”
1 = Extremely Unlikely, 2 = Extremely Likely

Friend, teacher (school advisor, classroom teacher), parent, other relative/family member, school counsellor, and phone help line (and no-one)


SIQ critical items, (Reynolds, 1987) (past month)
- I thought about killing myself
- I thought about how I would kill myself
- I thought about when I would kill myself
- I thought about what to write in a suicide note
- I thought about writing a will
- I thought about telling people I plan to kill myself
- I thought about how easy it would be to end it all
- I thought if I had the chance I would kill myself

6 = almost every day, 5 = couple of times a week


Help seeking behaviour

Would you like to be confidentially approached by your school counsellor to talk about how you are feeling?
- Yes
- No


Help negation: Intentions to seek help from all sources was negatively correlated with suicidal ideation (e.g. Parent $r = -.37$, $p < .01$; School counsellor $r = -.17$, $p < .05$)

22.5% (39) of the 173 students asked to see the school counsellor!
4% (7) students were identified as “at risk” and requiring additional assessment by the school counsellor


Significant differences between those who requested help and those who did not on intentions to seek help from a:
- Teacher/School advisor
- School counsellor
- Friends (but negative)


Logistic regression with help seeking sources as predictors of help seeking behaviour

Statistically reliable with predictors, as a set, reliably distinguishing
between those who did and did not seek help

- 13% of variance in help seeking behaviour was accounted for
- Prediction success was 99% for those who did not seek help and 21% for those who did seek help


- Only intentions to seek help from friends and intentions to seek help from Teacher/School advisor were reliable predictors
- The greater intentions to seek help from friends the less likely students were to request help from a school counsellor
- Greater intentions to seek help from Teachers/School advisors the more likely a request to see the school counsellor


- NSW DET Strategic Research Directorate
- Anonymous survey then non-anonymous
- Male high school students, grades 9, 10, & 11
- 14-16 years old
- Full sample N = 289


- SIQ critical items, (Reynolds, 1987) (past month)
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- Anonymous 13 out of 289 (4.5%) met 2-item “at risk” criteria
- 10/289 (3.5%) met 3-item criteria
- Non-anonymous 10 out of 287 (3.5%) (met 2-item “at risk” criteria
- 9/287 (3%) met 3-item criteria
- Reynold’s (1987) normative data suggests identification rates of around 2.5%