

## **Attitudes on Mental Health and Intentions to Seek Psychological Help in the General Public of Sri Lanka**

Chalana P. Wijesuriya<sup>1</sup>, Hansini Gunasekara<sup>2</sup>

There is a gross reluctance in today's society to avoid seeking help in mental health even when required. Many factors such as stigma and negative attitudes about mental health have accounted for the avoidance of seeking help in mental health. In a country with such a collectivistic culture, seeking professional mental help is selected as a last option when other options fail. This study evaluated the relationship between attitudes on mental health and intentions to seek mental help among the general public in Sri Lanka in two phases. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the first phase of the study involved the translation and content validation of four scales that measured the TPB constructs of: attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and intentions to seek mental help. In the second phase of the research, an online survey-based quantitative study was conducted of the TPB constructs and demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications, previous mental help seeking history, previous mental health history and previous mental history of a close relative or friend. A sample of 200 English speaking participants were recruited via an online survey using stratified sampling method. All participants were above the age of 18 and were absent of a previous mental disorder. Results indicated that attitudes and perceived behavioural control had a significant relationship between intentions to seek mental help whereas there was no significant relationship between subjective norms and intentions to seek mental help. Furthermore, group differences between the demographic variables were further identified. It was discovered that while attitudes still have a strong relationship with intentions, the effect of subjective norms and behavioural control needs to be explored extensively to assess how it affects mental help seeking intentions. Necessary actions should be taken to reduce the overall stigma on mental health which will be one of the main factors in improving the attitudes of mental health in the general public. With considering the impact of educational status, it would be paramount to introduce the importance of mental health beginning from school level that will assist in reducing the stigma and attitudes on mental health for the future. Introducing positive mental health to the curriculum from a young age will assist in reducing the differences observed in gender, marital status and age from this study. Identifying the impact of the other variables will lead to better understanding of the stigma in the country and the path required to de-stigmatise mental health and increase literacy around the island.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, University of West London, London, England

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, University of West London, London, England