Help-Seeking Attitudes and Behaviors of Graduate Psychology Students

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Abstract

Psychology graduate students (PGSs) encounter significant stressors during training but may not seek professional support despite a need for services. This study sought to expand the existing literature on the topic of help-seeking for PGSs. An online survey was sent to graduate students from accredited doctoral psychology programs to assess the barriers and facilitators associated with help-seeking in this population. We hypothesized that a six-predictor model (gender, anxiety level, years of graduate training, history of help-seeking, knowing a colleague/student in one's graduate program who has sought help, and knowing a professor/supervisor/advisor who has sought help) would predict PGSs' help-seeking attitudes (psychological openness, help-seeking propensity, and indifference to stigma) in addition to predicting professional concerns (important for professional growth/effectiveness, concern with professional credibility, concerns about confidentiality, and need for self-sufficiency). Multiple regression analyses indicated that the model was significant in predicting help-seeking attitudes and professional concerns among PGSs, with the exception of one criterion--concerns about confidentiality. The overall model was found to account for ten percent or greater total variance for the remaining criteria, except for the need for self-sufficiency. For this criterion, the model only accounted for five percent of the total variance. These results indicate that graduate training programs in psychology should consider having more open conversations around the importance of seeking therapy among PGSs who might benefit from such support.

Keywords: psychological help-seeking, graduate psychology students, barriers to help-seeking, facilitators to help-seeking

Introduction and Background

It is understood by prospective students of graduate psychology programs that they will be trained in counseling theory and practice. While these programs are focused on developing students' skills in the delivery of therapy to others, they are not necessarily focused on the practice of students receiving therapy for themselves as part of their professional development. Organizations at both the professional and student levels have only recently begun to speak more directly about this subject. In 2023, the American Psychological Association (APA) released the "Guidelines on Equitable and Respectful Treatment of Students in Graduate Psychology Programs" with the intent of promoting the well-being of all graduate students. Specifically, Guideline 1: Support for Graduate Students states that "Equitable and respectful graduate psychology programs aspire to support... the physical, psychological, and financial wellness of graduate students" (APA & APAGS- BEA Work Group, 2023, p. 6). They recommended that programs provide students with "resources and/or referral information for mental health treatment" and "consider sharing any of their own positive self-care and well-being practices," recognizing that faculty often serve as role models for graduate students (APA & APAGS- BEA Work Group, 2023, p. 6). A 2020 article by Ziede and Norcross addresses this topic further. In the article, the authors speak directly about the benefit of seeking personal therapy for graduate psychology trainees, including that this practice promotes effectiveness in one's clinical work (Ziede & Norcross, 2020). They conclude the article by stating that they "endorse beginning personal therapy as part of graduate training" in part because of the personal and professional benefits derived (Ziede & Norcross, 2020, p. 23).

The idea that graduate students may require support while managing the rigors of graduate training is not new. Research has shown that psychology graduate students (PGSs) experience issues including anxiety and depression (Lang & Haugen, 2023; Park et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2020; Victor et al., 2022), exhaustion (Park et al., 2021), and relationship difficulties (Stone et al., 2020) while working toward their degrees. A 2023 review by Lang and Haugen found prevalence rates of depression among PGSs between 20% to 40%, with up to 35% of PGSs reporting moderate depression symptoms. In that same study, prevalence rates of anxiety ranged between 27% to 41%, with up to 61% of PGSs reporting moderate anxiety symptoms (Lang & Haugen, 2023).

Higher levels of personal distress suggest that PGSs are likely to need therapeutic services (Park et al., 2021; Peluso et al., 2011; Stone et al., 2020; Victor et al., 2022). For PGSs, the training opportunities inherent in seeking personal therapy abound, as such treatment allows them to develop increased self-awareness and empathy and to seek counseling for stressors related to graduate training (Dearing et al., 2005; Farber, 2000). PGSs are in a unique position of being better equipped to recognize distress, which should encourage help-seeking behaviors (Farber, 2000). However, research on models of help-seeking has shown that these are not the only factors influencing PGSs' attitudes toward seeking help (Dearing et al., 2005; Farber, 2000).

Various theories and models of help-seeking have been proposed over the years. A 2005 review by Rickwood et al. examined young people's attitudes toward seeking help for mental health concerns and identified four factors: awareness, expression, availability, and willingness. According to the model, individuals must

first recognize their problem on a personal level (awareness) and then must be able to understand and express the problem they are experiencing and feel comfortable doing so (expression). Third, potential help sources must be readily available, accessible, and identifiable to potential help-seekers (availability). Finally, individuals must be both willing and able to share their symptoms and express their need to the help source identified (willingness).

In 2010, Vogel and Armstrong proposed an alternative model, examining factors of self-concealment (one's tendency to hide or conceal information), distress, negative/positive social experiences, and willingness to seek help. According to their model, negative social experiences and distress mediate the relationship between self-concealment and willingness to pursue professional mental health treatment. They found that those high in self-concealment are more likely to have experienced negative social events, with these combined factors contributing to an increased level of psychological distress; moreover, due to their distress, these individuals will be more willing to seek counseling (Vogel & Armstrong, 2010).

Salinas-Oñate et al. proposed a more recent model of help-seeking in their 2024 article, outlining how factors of self-concealment, depressive symptoms, and professional help-seeking are related, while also accounting for the influence of gender. They posited that self-concealment, defined as the tendency to conceal embarrassing or upsetting details about one's personal experiences, would negatively influence help-seeking and have a direct impact on depressive symptoms regardless of gender; furthermore, they posited that self-concealment would have an indirect impact on help-seeking, with depressive symptoms serving as a mediator. The overall findings indicated that females exhibited less willingness to seek professional help as levels of self-concealment increased, regardless of levels of depression. For males, the authors found an indirect relationship between self-concealment and help-seeking, with depressive symptoms mediating this relationship (Salinas-Oñate et al., 2024).

Certain demographic variables are also associated with more positive attitudes towards help-seeking. Previous studies (Roxo et al., 2021; Sagar-Ouriaghli et al., 2019; Smith & Hebdon, 2023) have shown that females tend to be more open to and more likely to engage in counseling. Studies have also shown that age is an important factor in help-seeking. For PGSs, typical ages range from age 20 to mid-30s; based on research into age and help-seeking attitudes, one would expect these students to be open to and more likely to be engaged in mental health treatment (Stone et al., 2020; Victor et al., 2022).

Specific barriers to seeking counseling dissuade many PGSs from getting the support they need (Farber, 2000; Klein et al., 2023; Stone et al., 2020). PGSs are hesitant to seek help for several reasons, including denial or minimization of their symptoms; difficulty navigating dual relationships at mental health practicums on campus and in the community; and lack of time and finances for therapy (Klein et al., 2023; Stone et al., 2020). Additionally, PGSs have reported concerns that their credibility or graduate standing will be affected if others found out they were seeking mental health treatment (Farber, 2000; Klein et al., 2023).

Factors that increased college students' openness to seeking help included recognition of the need for mental health treatment and encouragement to seek help from peers (Kosyluk et al., 2021; Lui et al., 2022). A study by Vogel et al. (2007) identified that knowledge of a friend or

family member's history of help-seeking was correlated with more positive attitudes towards and higher rates of mental health treatment utilization among college students. This knowledge exerts an even greater influence on men's help-seeking (Disabato et al., 2018). For PGSs, their closest relationships during training normally include other PGSs in their program as well as their supervisors and professors, the latter of whom wield a great amount of influence on students' success. From what the research has shown on the importance of relationships in help-seeking, it would follow that PGSs would value knowing that their peers and/or their professors have sought their own counseling when contemplating mental health treatment for themselves.

To date, research has not directly assessed the relationship between knowing that a professor or supervisor has sought help and PGSs' thoughts about seeking mental health treatment. Additionally, very few studies have used empirically validated measures to explore the relationship between distress levels and attitudes about seeking treatment in the graduate student population. By better understanding the concerns and barriers PGSs face when considering personal therapy, faculty and supervisors will be better equipped to intervene with students in promoting self-care and help-seeking practices. This study aimed to gain an understanding of what predicts help-seeking attitudes among PGSs and promote positive changes at the institutional level.

Study Design and Hypotheses

This study utilized a quantitative correlational design incorporating simultaneous regression to predict relationships between variables of interest. The six predictor variables (anxiety, gender, years of graduate training, history of help-seeking, knowing a colleague/student, and knowing a professor/supervisor/advisor) were regressed onto seven criterion variables (help-seeking propensity, psychological openness, indifference to stigma, important for professional growth, concern with professional credibility, concern with confidentiality, and need for self-sufficiency). It was hypothesized that the model would predict general help-seeking attitudes, including psychological openness, help-seeking propensity, and indifference to stigma. It was also hypothesized that the model would predict professional concerns associated with help-seeking, including importance for professional growth/ effectiveness, concern with professional credibility, concerns about confidentiality, and need for self-sufficiency.

Methods

Recruitment Procedure

This study was approved by the university's institutional review board in March 2014. (Editor's Note: Due to the age of the data associated with this study, an additional peer reviewer with expertise in the area of the study was consulted. The consensus among all peer reviewers and the editor was that the data were still very relevant at the time of publication.) To obtain a representative sample, universities across the United States that held APA-accredited counseling, clinical, and combined doctoral psychology programs were targeted for inclusion in the study. A study invitation was sent via email to clinical training directors of the identified APA-accredited doctoral psychology programs to be forwarded to enrolled students. Students provided consent prior to completing the study via an informed consent document included in the study link, and upon consenting, were directed to the online survey hosted on Qualtrics. Web-based self-report questionnaires, taking

approximately 20 minutes to complete, were accessed by students beginning in spring 2014 and continuing through summer 2014 to obtain the necessary number of participants.

Participants

Among a total of 418 respondents, 111 respondents did not complete the full survey and were removed. A final sample of 317 participants who completed all questions was included in this study. Ages of participants ranged from 21 to 68 years ($M = 29$, $SD = 6.82$), with 87.1% female (n = 276); 12.9% male (n = 41); 80% White (n = 255); 6.3% Hispanic or Latino (n = 20); 5.0% Black or African American (n = 16); 2.2% biracial or multiracial (n = 7); and 5.4% who identified as other (n = 17). Most students were enrolled in either a clinical psychology doctoral program (46.4%, n = 147) or a counseling psychology doctoral program (26.5%, n = 84). Years of graduate training ranged from one year to more than nine years. See Table 1 for additional information on participant characteristics.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Sample Characteristics	n	%	M	SD
Gender				
Female	276	87.1		
Male	41	12.9		
Age (in ranges)			29.02	6.82
18-24	63	19.8		
25-31	187	58.9		
32-38	42	13.2		
39-45	16	5.0		
46+	11	3.5		
Ethnicity				
White	255	80.4		
Black/African American	16	5.0		
Hispanic/Latino	20	6.3		
Multiracial	7	2.2		
Other	17	5.4		
Program Type				
Clinical	147	46.4		
Counseling	84	26.5		
Combined	18	5.7		
Other	68	21.5		
Years in Graduate Training				
5 years or more	81	25.5		
4 years or less	236	74.4		

Sample Characteristics	n	%	M	SD
History of Help-Seeking				
Yes	242	76.3		
No	75	23.7		
Whom Do You Know				
Close Friend/Immediate Family	269	84.9		
Relative	202	63.7		
Acquaintance	181	57.1		
Colleague/Student in Program	231	72.9		
Supervisor/Professor/Advisor	105	33.1		
No One	6	1.9		
Other	8	2.5		
Anxiety Levels (GAD-7 Scores)				
0 to 4: Minimal	153	48.3		
5 to 9: Mild	125	39.4		
10 to 14: Moderate	27	8.5		
15 to 21: Severe	12	3.8		

Note: $N = 317$

Measures
Demographic Survey

The demographic survey collected information on the following: program type, age, gender, race/ethnic group, years of graduate training, history of help-seeking, knowing someone who has sought therapy, and help-seeking behavior during graduate training.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 Scale

The Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 Scale (GAD-7) (Spitzer et al., 2006) is a seven-item self-report survey that measures the symptoms of anxiety in adults. Participants rate their symptoms of anxiety using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from zero ("Not at all") to three ("Nearly every day"), and total scores range from zero to 21. The total score indicates the level of anxiety severity: mild (zero to five); moderate (six to 10); or severe (scores at and above 15). Test-retest reliability and internal consistency of the GAD-7 are also high, with an $r = .83$ and Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .89 to .92 (Spitzer et al., 2006). For the current study, the alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .86$.

Trainees' Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychotherapy Scale

The Trainees' Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychotherapy Scale (TATSPS) (Farber, 2000) is a 22-item self-report instrument that measures future psychotherapists' attitudes toward seeking personal therapy. The TATSPS has four subscales: (1) Important for Personal Growth/Effectiveness, (2) Concern with Professional Credibility, (3) Concerns about Confidentiality, and (4) Need for Self-Sufficiency. For each item, participants are asked to rate how much they agree using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). An example item includes, "If I were to seek psychotherapy for myself, my colleagues would see me as incompetent." For this current study, the TATSPS total scale had an

internal consistency of α = .90. Higher scores on this measure indicate higher levels of concern related to seeking personal therapy among trainees.

Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services

The Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS) (Mackenzie et al., 2004) is a 24-item self-report instrument that measures attitudes toward and barriers related to seeking professional psychological help across three subscales: (1) Psychological Openness, (2) Help-Seeking Propensity, and (3) Indifference to Stigma (eight items). For each item, participants are asked to rate how much they agree using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from zero (disagree) to four (agree). An example item is "There are certain problems which should not be discussed outside of one's immediate family." Internal consistency for the IASMHS was reported as .87, and the test-retest reliability for the IASMHS was moderate, at $r = .85$ (Mackenzie et al., 2004). For this study, the alpha coefficient for the IASMHS total scale was α = .83. See Table 2 for additional information on measures.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Scale and Subscales	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
TATSPS				
Important for Professional Growth/	31.66	5.82	-.67	.04
Concern with Professional Credibility	9.68	3.35	1.00	1.16
Concerns about Confidentiality	9.68	2.25	.41	.13
Need for Self-Sufficiency	10.40	2.89	.12	-.24
Total Score	85.90	10.14	-.49	.28
IASMHS				
Psychological Openness	32.45	4.13	-.60	-.03
Help-Seeking Propensity	32.02	4.33	-.51	.30
Indifference to Stigma	33.08	4.98	-.84	.90
Total Score	97.56	11.66	-.75	.57
GAD-7				
Total Score	12.14	4.06	1.11	1.19

Note: $N = 317$

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Data analyses were completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Preliminary analyses determined that all data met assumptions for multiple regression. No multicollinearity concerns were noted, with Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values greater than 10 and tolerance levels less than 1.0 (Cohen et al., 2003). Histograms showed a slight positive skew for concern with professional credibility and anxiety; however, kurtosis and skewness values were

between –1 and +2, which are acceptable for normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2019).

Multiple simultaneous regression analyses were conducted with six predictor variables. Due to their categorical nature, four of the predictor variables (gender, history of help-seeking, knowing a colleague or student with a history of help-seeking, and knowing a supervisor, professor, or advisor with a history of help-seeking) were coded as dummy variables. As multiple models were analyzed, a Bonferroni correction was used to help control for Type 1 error, reducing the alpha level from .05 to .007.

An a-priori power analysis determined the minimal sample size needed for a linear multiple regression (fixed model, R^2 deviation from zero) with six predictors using the program G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). As this study examined a novel model of help-seeking, a medium predicted effect size ($f^2 = .15$) was deemed acceptable. Using a proposed power of .80 indicated that 143 participants were needed for this study to reach statistical significance.

Research Question One

The first research question asked, "How well does a six-predictor model predict help-seeking attitudes?" Multiple regression analyses provided support for the model, with a medium effect size, in predicting all three variables: psychological openness ($F (6, 310) = 6.52$, $R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$), help-seeking propensity ($F (6, 310) = 6.04$, $R^2 = .10$, $p < .001$), and indifference to stigma ($F (6, 310) = 7.91$, $R^2 = .13$, $p < .001$). For psychological openness, knowing a colleague/student had a significant, unique contribution when all other variables were controlled for, and the relationship was positive. For indifference to stigma, having a history of help-seeking had a significant, unique contribution when all other variables were controlled for, revealing a positive relationship between these variables. No variables had a unique contribution to help-seeking propensity. See Table 3 for additional results from Research Question One.

Table 3

Regression Results for Six Predictor Model and Criterion Variables from IASMHS and TATSPS

Instrument and Criterion Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
IASMHS							
Psychological Openness							
Gender	1.33	.67	.11	2.00	.047	.02	2.64
Anxiety (GAD-7)	-.14	.06	-.14	-2.51	.013	-.25	-.03
History of seeking counseling	.78	.54	.08	1.45	.147	-.28	1.83
Years of graduate training	.05	.06	.05	.94	.346	-.06	.17
Knowing a colleague/student	1.65	.54	.18	3.05*	.002	.58	2.71
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	1.17	.50	.13	2.35	.020	.19	2.15
Help-Seeking Propensity							
Gender	1.12	.70	.09	1.61	.109	-.25	2.50
Anxiety (GAD-7)	-.11	.06	-.10	-1.83	.067	-.22	.01
History of seeking counseling	1.44	.56	.14	2.56	.011	.33	2.55
Years of graduate training	.08	.06	.07	1.31	.191	-.04	.20
Knowing a colleague/student	1.30	.57	.13	2.30	.022	.19	2.42
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	1.25	.53	.14	2.38	.018	.21	2.28
Indifference to Stigma							
Gender	1.60	.79	.11	2.02	.044	.04	3.16
Anxiety (GAD-7)	-.17	.07	-.14	-2.55	.011	-.30	-.04
History of seeking counseling	2.32	.64	.20	3.65**	.000	1.07	3.58
Years of graduate training	.07	.07	.06	1.04	.299	-.06	.20
Knowing a colleague/student	1.59	.64	.14	2.47	.014	.32	2.85
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	1.31	.59	.12	2.21	.028	.14	2.48

Instrument and Criterion Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
TATSPS							
Important for Professional Growth/Effectiveness							
Gender	.15	.94	.01	.16	.870	-1.69	1.99
Anxiety (GAD-7)	.10	.08	.07	1.28	.202	-.06	.26
History of seeking counseling	2.81	.76	.21	3.722**	.000	1.32	4.30
Years of graduate training	.05	.08	.03	.56	.576	-.11	.21
Knowing a colleague/student	.70	.76	.05	.92	.359	-.79	2.19
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	2.12	.71	.17	3.00*	.003	.73	3.51
Concern with Professional Credibility							
Gender	-.20	.54	-.02	-.36	.522	-1.26	.86
Anxiety (GAD-7)	.06	.05	.07	1.25	.213	-.04	.16
History of seeking counseling	-.81	.46	-.10	-1.86	.085	-1.71	.09
Years of graduate training	-.03	.05	-.03	-.62	.334	-.07	.13
Knowing a colleague/student	-1.28	.44	-.17	-2.92*	.004	-2.14	-.42
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	-1.27	.41	-.18	-3.12*	.002	-2.07	-.47
Concerns about Confidentiality							
Gender	.39	.37	.06	1.04	.300	-.34	1.12
Anxiety (GAD-7)	.08	.03	.15	2.69*	.007	.02	.14
History of seeking counseling	-.55	.30	-.10	-1.82	.070	-1.14	.04
Years of graduate training	-.02	.03	-.04	-.62	.533	-.08	.04
Knowing a colleague/student	.29	.30	.06	.96	.336	-.30	.88
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	-.66	.28	-.14	-2.35	.019	-1.21	-.11

Instrument and Criterion Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Need for Self-Sufficiency							
Gender	-.26	.48	-.03	-.55	.585	-1.20	.68
Anxiety (GAD-7)	-.04	.04	-.05	-.94	.347	-.12	.04
History of seeking counseling	-.60	.38	-.09	-1.57	.117	-1.34	.14
Years of graduate training	.01	.04	-.02	-.26	.791	-.07	.09
Knowing a colleague/student	-.93	.39	-.14	-2.41	.017	-1.69	-.17
Knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor	-.70	.36	-.11	-1.95	.052	-1.41	.01

*Note: *$p < .007$; **$p \leq .001$*

Research Question Two

The second research question asked, "How well does a six-predictor model predict professional concerns associated with help-seeking?" The model predicted three out of four variables tested, including important for professional growth/effectiveness (F (6, 310) = 6.25, R^2 = .11, p < .001), concern with professional credibility (F (6, 310) = 6.18, R^2 = .11, p < .001), and need for self-sufficiency (F (6, 310) = 3.76, R^2 = .05, p = .001). Concerns about confidentiality did not reach significance. For important for professional growth/effectiveness, history of help-seeking, and knowing a professor/supervisor/advisor had significant unique contributions when all other variables were controlled for, revealing a positive relationship between these variables. For concern with professional credibility, knowing a colleague/student and knowing a supervisor/professor/advisor had significant unique contributions when all other variables were controlled for in the model, revealing a negative relationship between these variables. No variables made a unique contribution to the need for self-sufficiency. For concerns about confidentiality, anxiety was the only variable that had a significant unique contribution when all other variables were controlled for, and the relationship was positive. Two variables, important for professional growth/effectiveness and concern with professional credibility, had a medium effect size for the overall model. Effect sizes for both concerns about confidentiality and the need for self-sufficiency were small. Additional results from Research Question Two are also available in Table 3.

Discussion

Understanding barriers to help-seeking among PGSs is important for several reasons. Research has established that PGSs deal with increased stress and pressures associated with graduate training as well as clinically significant mental health symptoms. In this study, we expected that PGSs who have sought therapy in the past and those who know someone who has sought help would have more positive help-seeking attitudes. Knowing a colleague or student who has sought help was associated with increased openness to both admitting a need for help and seeking counseling among PGSs, which indicates that the nature of the relationship plays a substantial role in influencing help-seeking openness. Having a personal history of help-seeking was associated with a decrease in stigma concerns related to seeking help, which is in line with previous research findings (Farber 2000; Mackenzie et al., 2004).

We sought to add to the literature on help-seeking by exploring the impact of professional/advisory relationships on help-seeking. In this study, we found that among PGSs, a history of help-seeking and knowing a professor, supervisor, or advisor who has sought help were both associated with an increase in viewing therapy as important to their professional growth. Knowing a colleague or student who has sought counseling, as well as knowing a supervisor, professor, or advisor who has sought help, was associated with a decrease in concerns about losing credibility. We also found that higher levels of anxiety were associated with an increase in concerns about confidentiality for PGSs. These findings illustrate the importance of knowing respected others who have sought help for themselves, with those holding a position of authority, like professors and advisors, exerting a stronger influence on PGSs views on seeking counseling for themselves and addressing barriers such as fears of losing credibility. Likewise, knowing that another PGS has sought help

improved other PGSs' views on seeking their own counseling. In line with findings on general help-seeking attitudes, PGS's help-seeking was influenced by knowing that students and/or staff in their training programs have sought help, in terms of not only increasing positive views about help-seeking but also decreasing potential barriers to seeking help (Lui et al., 2022; Vogel et al., 2007; Disabato et al., 2018).

Unlike previous studies, there was no significant association found between gender and openness to help-seeking or between history of help seeking and openness to help-seeking (Roxo et al, 2021; Sagar-Ouriaghli et al., 2019). This could be due to population characteristics, as this study examined the help-seeking attitudes of the future helper, which represents a specific subset of the general population with its own guiding principles and beliefs about counseling. As many of the studies on help-seeking have focused on college students or graduate students without limiting program type, the odds that males enrolled in psychology programs would have increased mental health literacy could explain this disparity, as could their higher education status, both of which have been linked to increased openness to help seeking (Smith & Hebdon, 2023).

Limitations and Constraints on Generality

This study focused on help-seeking attitudes of PGSs and whether certain variables would facilitate or hinder their openness to help-seeking. There is potential bias in our sample, as those who chose to take this survey may have a greater interest or experience in seeking therapy. While the influence of training program staff and other students was considered, the study did not differentiate by the level of closeness or trust the students had for their training staff. The PGSs were not asked to identify a specific individual from their program when considering the influence of training program staff on help-seeking attitudes. This study did not inquire whether the training programs of the PGSs were online, hybrid, or in person. These variables could influence the impact of such relationships between PGSs and other students and staff. Also, although we used the directory of APA-Accredited Counseling and Clinical PhD and PsyD programs, we did not collect data about the programs themselves from student respondents. Our sample is also limited in that we only included students from APA-accredited programs in the United States, and therefore, our sample is not representative of programs outside of the U.S., nor programs lacking APA accreditation. Finally, we did not consider age in the model, and we do not have information on how this might have impacted the results.

Future Directions and Recommendations

The findings of this study show just how much influence other students and training program staff have on PGSs. Knowing a colleague or professor who sought help was found to increase PGSs' openness to seeking help for themselves. Future studies might examine more specific characteristics, such as the gender or age of professors or colleagues, to determine if other variables are exerting an influence. Given that higher anxiety predicted concerns about confidentiality, future studies might focus on how concerns such as depression or the absence of coping mechanisms impact one's help-seeking concerns. Longitudinal research might examine how and whether help-seeking attitudes shift as PGSs move into their profession. In addition, exploring potential differences in help-seeking behaviors among PGSs for group differences such as socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation may provide useful information for those who

seek to support PGSs during their academic work.

Encouraging PGSs to be open to seeking help during training can help set a precedent in promoting continued openness to help-seeking as they enter the professional world. Training programs should address and decrease barriers to PGSs' help-seeking and focus on ways of encouraging help-seeking. Training programs could create an open dialogue around therapy and work to directly address student concerns related to confidentiality, loss of credibility, or other negative repercussions related to seeking help during training. Having staff and faculty disclose their own therapy experiences would likely bolster students' willingness to seek help for themselves.

The results of this study also highlight the need for graduate programs to develop mental health programming and support networks for identifying and intervening on behalf of PGSs who are struggling with emotional distress; working with staff in the department itself and at the college counseling center level would help to ensure the success of such efforts. Recent studies by Klein et al. (2023) and Lang and Haugen (2023) offer support for this approach. Making therapy a requirement of PGSs while in training was proposed by

Stone et al. (2020). This would likely offset some of the stigma associated with seeking help by decreasing concerns about losing credibility since help-seeking would be a requirement (Farber, 2000).

As noted in both this study and the 2023 APA Guidelines on Equitable and Respectful Treatment of Students in Graduate Psychology Programs, faculty and staff serve as role models for PGSs, and their own stories surrounding personal therapy would likely encourage PGSs to seek such services for themselves if needed. The findings of this study offer additional support for the guidance shared by Ziede and Norcross in their 2020 article, positing that PGSs should pursue personal therapy throughout their time in graduate training to enhance both their own well-being and clinical work. Having a better understanding of the factors that encourage and dissuade PGSs from seeking psychological help will enable training programs to better support and retain trainees, thus ensuring the success of their programs while normalizing help-seeking both during and following completion of graduate training. It is up to training programs to make a concerted effort at shifting the dialogue away from help-seeking as part of a remediation plan and towards help-seeking as part of professional training and good practice.

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