

## **Developing a Scale of Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help: Validity and Reliability Analyses**

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*The present study was conducted to develop the scale for Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help (ASPH). Four dimensions of ASPH were determined by using factor analysis, which was conducted with 356 participants. The dimensions were named as confidence for getting psychological help; beliefs about the functions of psychological help; endurance against labelling, and self-disclosure. Reliability coefficient was found as satisfactory in the scale (.88) and subscales (.76, .77, .76, and .68). Test-retest reliability was .99. Validity of the scale was examined by using discriminant validity analysis and it was observed as sufficient. The results of the study showed that ASPH has an identifiable factor structure and it is a reliable and valid scale.*

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**KEY WORDS:** attitude scale; seeking psychological help; university students.

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The effectiveness of psychological help services depend both on the competency of the professional who serves in the area and the readiness and willingness of target group, individuals in need of psychological help. These factors which influence the individual's decision for getting psychological help are cited in the literature as expectancies about the nature of counselling, perception of the counsellor, social support sources of the individual, demographic factors that affect the use of counselling services (Strohmer, Biggs, & Mc Intyre, 1984) personality characteristics (Cepedo-Benito & Short, 1998; Türküm, 2000), and attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Tata & Leong, 1994).

Attitudes toward psychological help are measured by Likert type scales such as The Attitudes Scale Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (Fischer & Farina 1995; Fischer & Turner, 1970), and Stigma Scale for

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Receiving Psychological Help (Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000), or questionnaires, which are adopted from attitude scales (Knipscheer & Kleber, 2001).

Information concerning target group's attitudes toward seeking psychological help provide valuable data for mental helpers. Therefore new studies are necessary to investigate whether there is a relationship between target group's attitudes toward getting psychological help and variables such as personality, age, gender, socio-economic status, influence of taking information, experience of being a client.

Social support, tendency to share private information, and spending time for intimate relationships can also be affected by the culture. Along the same lines, it can be assumed that attitudes toward getting psychological help might also be affected by culture. Therefore it seems functional to develop a scale which also includes culture specific items instead of adopting existing scales from other cultures.

In the present study, a scale which measures attitudes toward seeking psychological help was developed to determine the barriers against seeking psychological help among university students. A new scale was developed for two reasons. First, studies investigating the tendencies of individuals seeking psychological help generally use questionnaires. Questionnaires, however, have limited psychometric properties when compared to Likert type scales. The processes of developing Likert type scales are more complex and time-consuming than questionnaires. However, this kind of instruments are more appropriate for conducting statistical analyses such as correlations, and regressions. Second, there is no Likert type scale on this topic in the country where this study was conducted.

This study is assumed to have the following theoretical and practical values:

- (a) This scale can be used in both experimental and descriptive studies.
- (b) Using this scale along with some questionnaires and/or interviews can make it possible to learn the barriers against individuals seeking psychological help.
- (c) Using this scale along with other scales which measure personality dispositions can be used to investigate the relations between attitudes toward seeking psychological help and personality dispositions.
- (d) The effects of experiences such as getting seminars or workshops, on the attitudes toward seeking psychological help can be evaluated by this scale.

Based on the above expectations a scale that measures the attitudes toward seeking psychological help was developed.

## METHOD

### Participants

The subjects of this study comprised of 356 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at Anadolu University Turkey. Two hundred forty eight (69.66%) of these students were female and 108 (30.33%) were male. The age range of the students was 18 to 32 (mean = 21) years.

Test-retest reliability analysis was conducted on the data, which were collected from 56 junior students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the same university. The mean of the participants' age was 20 (range = 18–28).

### Materials

The Scale for Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help (ASPH) was developed and examined in the study. The ASPH is a five point Likert type scale showing the agreement on each item. Subjects were also asked to fill out Participant Information Form consisting of questions about age, gender, and experience of getting psychological help.

### Development of The Scale

In the development of the scale, the first step was to construct attitude expressions. Mental helpers, students who had had psychological help before and students who had no experience in psychological help were interviewed by the researcher to identify attitudes towards seeking psychological help. The attitude expressions gathered were categorised as “beliefs about usefulness of seeking help,” “avoidance,” “fears and nervousness about being misunderstood,” and “being labelled.” These categories were based on the cognitive, behavioural and emotional dimensions of the attitude.

A pool of items was formed in the second step. In the formation of initial pool of items, three different sources were utilised. One source was the attitude expressions gathered in the interviews discussed above. These expressions were transformed into items. The second source was Turkish cultural prejudices about getting psychological help and about professionals in the area. The third source was selected items from Fischer & Turner's (1970) “Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help Scale.” These items were selected due to categories which developing scale was based and opinions of three experts from the guidance and counselling department. According to their suggestions modifications were conducted. As a result, a pool of ASPH was formed.

To reduce the possible negative connotations some terms may arouse, the following terms were avoided: psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor, psychiatric

disease, and mental health clinic. Instead, terms such as emotional problem, emotional difficulties, specialist, mental disturbances, and professional were used. (e.g. “*I can share my personal secrets with a specialist if this is necessary to resolve my emotional conflicts.*”)

The final version of ASPH before factor analysis consisted of 43 items. While some of these statements were positive, some were reversed. Likert type scale was used and the choices at each item were as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. In this scale, the higher the score is, the more positive the attitude toward seeking professional psychological help is.

## Procedure

The ASPH and the Participant Information Form were given to the participants in their regular psychology class hour by researcher. Instructions were read out loud. Participants were asked not to write their names on any of the questionnaires to ensure the anonymity of their responses. Completing the forms takes 25 minutes.

## RESULTS

### Validity Findings

#### *Construct Validity*

In order to determine the structure of the attitude scale as defined by the items on the ASPH, principal component analysis with varimax rotation was applied. Six principal factors with eigenvalues greater than one were identified. When too many factors as a result of factor analysis emerge, the use of Scree test to decrease the number of factors is suggested (Tabachnick & Fidel, 1996). When factors up to the first sudden change in the slope of the curve were considered on the Scree test plot, the factors could be reduced to four. The data were then forced to fit a four factor solution with a new analysis. The following criteria were considered to hold the items in the scale:

- (a) the item should be in only one factor with a factor load of .30 or above and
- (b) if an item appears in more than one factor, the difference between two loadings should be at least .10.

As a result of the application of the above criteria, thirteen items were excluded from the scale since they did not meet the criteria. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table I.

**Table I.** The Results of The Factor Analysis of The Scale of Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help, and Factor Loading

Item	Factor loading			
	I	II	III	IV
1	.56			
12	.47			
3	.58			
4	.50			
29	.56			
6	.52			
27	.44			
8	.42			
19	.46			
30	.51			
21		.55		
2		.72		
23		.74		
14		.72		
15		.58		
26		.44		
17		.52		
28			.63	
9			.58	
20			.56	
11			.58	
22			.33	
13			.68	
24			.66	
25				.69
16				.61
7				.46
18				.47
10				.52
5				.49
	23.7	8.6	5	4.4

As seen in Table I, 30 items with factor loading from .33 to .74 were loaded on one of the four factors. These four factors accounted for 41.70% of the variance. Factor 1 accounted for 23.7% of the variance and contained 10 items all characterised by confidence in taking psychological help (e.g., “*I can understand the reasons of my distress in getting psychological help.*” Factor 1 consists of general range of expressive items about effectiveness of getting psychological help. Factor 2, referred as beliefs about the functions of psychological help accounted for 8.6% of the variance and included seven items all on beliefs about functions of psychological help (e.g., “*Psychological help increases the strength of people in coping with difficulties*”) Factor 3, accounted for 5.0% of the variance and contained seven items spanning across the endurance against labelling (e.g., “*I hesitate to get psychological help for the fear of other people may talk about me*”). Factor 4,

accounted for 4.4% of the variance and contained six items all characterised by self-disclosure (e.g., “*The most difficult part of getting psychological help is to have to share one’s private matters with somebody else*”).

Factor structure of the scale was evaluated separately for male and female groups. It was found that factor structures and items in the factors did not change significantly according to gender. Based on this finding, data were combined across gender.

### *Discriminant Validity*

Discriminant validity analysis was conducted to examine the following idea: People who had psychological help have positive attitudes toward getting psychological help as compared to people who did not have psychological help (Fisher & Turner, 1970). There was a significant difference between the two groups in favor of students who had psychological help ( $t = 3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result was evaluated as a strong support for the scale’s discriminant validity.

### *Reliability Findings*

To examine the reliability of the scale, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient as an internal consistency estimate of reliability, test-retest correlations, and extreme group comparison were calculated. The calculated Cronbach alpha coefficient is .88 for the whole scale, .76 for the first factor which includes seven items, .77 for the second factor which includes seven items, .76 for the third factor which includes seven items, and .68 for the fourth factor which includes six items.

ASPH was administered to 56 students for test-retest measurement. Participants were tested and retested within 15 days. A Pearson correlation coefficient of .99 ( $p < .0001$ ) was obtained.

Item-total correlations were also evaluated. Minimum and maximum correlation coefficients were .20 ( $p < .05$ ) and .63 ( $p < .0001$ ). The average of the correlation coefficients was .42.

For the extreme group comparison participants were ranked according to the points they received from ASPH. T-test was performed to the top (27%) and bottom (27%) groups’ average points for each item. The results showed that t-values of all items in the scale were significant at  $p < .0001$  level.

## **DISCUSSION**

Like in many personality and personal differences, attitudes towards seeking psychological help may be effected by cultural aspects as well as universal

factors. Depending on this idea, a scale which measures attitudes towards seeking psychological help was attempted to be developed.

The results of the factor analysis suggest that there are four factors in the ASPH: (a) confidence in taking psychological help, (b) beliefs about getting psychological help, (c) endurance against labeling, and (d) self disclosure. Keeping in mind the attitudes towards seeking psychological help presents more complex structures than viewing the scale as measuring the above mentioned four dimensions.

Reliability studies showed that the whole scale and sub-scale internal consistency values and test-retest correlation coefficients are at acceptable levels. However there are some items whose item-total correlation values are between .20 and .45. Items of the scale were chosen after controlling if (a) items with low item-total correlation values were excluded internal consistency values, and (b) factor loadings would be affected or not. And, also item analysis of extreme group comparison and the comparison of the two groups who had or did have previous psychological help were evaluated. Since dropping these items did not improve the reliability values. It is decided to hold the items, which had low correlation coefficient (i.e. .20).

Findings in studies of attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Fischer & Turner, 1970; Kelly & Achter, 1995; Strohmer et al. 1984; Tata & Leong, 1994) have shown that attitude toward seeking psychological help can differ according to gender. Generally women have more positive attitudes than men do. While one third of women are seeking psychological help, the ratio is 1:7 for men (Good et al., 1989). Related literature has shown that not only do women have more opposite attitude toward seeking psychological help; they also attempt to get help more often than do men. Thus, a scale measuring attitude toward seeking psychological help must be sensitive to gender differences. In the process of developing the current ASPH, the process followed by Fischer & Turner (1970) and Fischer & Farina (1995) were into consideration. In the following study, the factor structure of scale was analysed separately for males and females. Items distribution according to factors and no changes according to factor structure in the developing of ASPH let us to think that the scale measures attitudes independently from gender factor.

The result about significant difference between the two groups in favour of students who had psychological help and had not was evaluated as a proof of scale's discriminant validity.

Results of the validity and reliability studies show that the scale has acceptable psychometric properties. As some sub-scales consist of 6–7 items, it is suggested that the total score of the whole of the scale should be evaluated.

The present study has some limitations. First, the data were collected from college students. The psychometric properties of the scale may be investigated in further studies by collecting data from individuals with different educational backgrounds and developmental stages. Second, validity of the scale was evaluated using construct validity and discriminant validity. The concurrent validity

could not be used since there are no other scales, which measures attitudes towards seeking psychological help in the country where the scale was developed. Additional studies may be conducted by using scales that measure self-disclosure, which is positively related to the attitudes toward seeking psychological help.

Getting psychological help could be a real support for some people but for some others it could be a threatening issue. While planning psychological help services, information on the attitudes of the target group may assist the professional in preparing the group for getting help, to increase their self awareness, and to predict the possible barriers against getting help. It is possible to plan effective programs by collecting information about developmental needs and attitudes of various groups, which are from different developmental stages and have different demographic structures. Descriptive studies, which are designed to explore the relationship between personality and attitude towards getting psychological help, can be planned.

Overall, the ASPH demonstrates good psychometric properties and holds promise for use in research, which investigates the relationships between attitudes towards seeking psychological help and stereotypical beliefs of different genders, self-concept and barriers against seeking psychological help.

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