

# The Influence of Mental health Literacy and Peer Support Towards Help-Seeking Behavior on Victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

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## Abstract

Help-seeking behavior in women who have been victims of intimate partner violence can be influenced by mental health literacy and peer support. The purpose of this study is to empirically examine the effect of mental health literacy and peer support on help-seeking behavior in early adult women who have been victims of intimate partner violence and have a tendency to depression. This study was conducted on female respondents who had been victims of intimate partner violence. Respondents in this study were obtained by snowball sampling technique. The measuring instruments used are Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help: Shortened Form, Mental Health Literacy, and Social Provisions Scale. The analysis used in this study used multiple regression analysis. The results of this study indicate that mental health literacy and peer support have a significant influence on help-seeking behavior. Mental health literacy had a greater influence on help-seeking behaviour than peer support. This can be influenced by other factors outside the study such as stigma and family support.

Keywords: Toxic Relationship; Dating Violence; Help-Seeking Behavior; Mental Health Literacy; Peer Support; Intimate Partner Violence

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## 1. Introduction

Humans are social animals, which means they need to connect, communicate, and form relationships with others. Humans may connect, communicate, and form relationships with their friends, family, and lovers. There are two types of couples: married couples and unmarried couples. Unmarried couples are also referred to as dating couples or couples in romantic relationships. Dating relationships are interactions between men and women who are attracted to one other and form emotional attachments as a result of their particular sentiments. Individuals in romantic relationships experience specific sentiments such as love, appreciation, and a sense of belonging. However, not all romantic relationships in dating end well, such as when you experience dating violence, also known as intimate partner violence. Modi, Palmer, and Armstrong (2014) define intimate partner violence as conduct in intimate relationships that can inflict physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including psychological violence, sexual coercion, verbal and physical hostility, and dominating behavior.

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According to data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (2023), there were 12,530 incidents of violence. Female victims dominated the cases of violence, with 11,234 cases against women and 2,429 incidents against male victims. According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, husbands or boyfriends are the most common perpetrators of violence in Indonesia, accounting for 3,077 instances. Victims' experiences with violence vary; in Indonesia alone, there are 5,520 incidents of physical violence, 5,138 cases of psychological abuse, 7,282 cases of sexual assault, 195 cases of exploitation, 258 cases of trafficking, 1,596 cases of neglect, and 2,121 cases of other violence. According to the World Health Organization (2022), victims of intimate partner violence have a number of consequences, including an increased risk of depression, anxiety, reproductive and sexual health problems, and other mental health issues. To overcome the psychological damage, sufferers must begin to engage in help-seeking behavior.

With the conditions that victims of intimate partner violence treatment must begin promptly. Help-seeking might be critical since quick therapy can help victims mitigate the effects of intimate partner violence. Help-seeking behavior is the passionate pursuit of assistance from health care providers or trustworthy individuals. When people are struggling to deal with a challenging circumstance, they seek help in the form of understanding, direction, care, and general support (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). Victims of intimate partner violence can seek aid informally, such as from friends and relatives. Meanwhile, official aid is available from specialists such as physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists. Individuals require expert assistance, such as psychiatrists and psychologists, in order to fully recover from the effect and trauma. However, some people may not seek urgent aid, particularly from specialists. If an individual does not seek and get professional care right once, their symptoms may intensify, increasing the risk of self-harm (Motjabai & Olfson, 2006). Johnson, Devdutt, Mehrotra, Bhola, Sudhir, and Sharma (2020) discovered that there are various reasons why people do not seek professional care, including a lack of resources, mental health awareness, and mental health literacy.

Victims of intimate partner violence are expected to understand their emotions and have access to health-care resources when seeking treatment. According to Jorm (2000), mental health literacy is an individual's capacity to obtain, comprehend, and use knowledge in a way that promotes and maintains good mental health. Meanwhile, Thai and Nguyen (2018) define mental health literacy as people's knowledge and views about mental diseases, such as recognition, management, and prevention. Individuals with better mental health literacy may seek assistance more frequently because they are more aware of mental health issues, including detecting symptoms and knowing support and treatment services. This understanding of health literacy might enable a person to seek care if they have a mental health issue.

Gorczynski, Sims-Schouten, Hill, and Wilson (2017) found a favorable correlation between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior. In this scenario, those with mental health issues have a greater degree of literacy than people without a mental health background. Individuals often seek assistance from friends or family members, and they may acquire mental health information online. In keeping with the findings of Waldmann, Staiger, Oexle, and Rüschi (2020), mental health literacy is considerably positively linked with help-seeking behavior. The findings of this study indicate an intention to seek mental health care as well as formal help-seeking activity, namely from mental health experts (Jorm, 2012). Almanasef's (2021) research demonstrates the positive correlation between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior. People who are well-informed about mental health are more likely to seek treatment. Individuals with a history of mental illness had better mental health literacy than those who did not. In contrast, Laksamono, Lestari, and Karimah (2020) found no relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior. Individuals with high mental health literacy demonstrated suspicion in confidentiality from mental health practitioners in non-life-threatening situations, treatment procedures, and a reluctance to participate in activities with people suffering from mental illnesses. This is consistent with Ratnayake and Hyde's (2019) findings, which show no link between mental health literacy levels and help-seeking intentions. Samar and Perveen's (2021) research found a negative

association between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior. The study's negative association suggests that the more people know about mental health, the less likely they are to seek treatment.

According to Pambudi, Rahmadani, and Nurmala (2023), victims of violence in relationships can take many different forms and pose significant and long-term hazards. According to the World Health Organization (2022), victims of violence require help in order to assist other victims. As a result, sufferers require social assistance from others. According to Sarafino and Smith (2011), social support is a behavior displayed by others toward the beneficiary of aid. Individuals' sentiments and views that there is comfort, care, and aid accessible if required are also considered social support. Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) identified that there are numerous forms of social support, including family support, significant others, and friend support, also known as peer support.

Peer support is social emotional support, frequently accompanied with instrumental help, that persons with mental health disorders provide or share with other individuals with comparable mental health conditions in order to effect desired social or personal change (Solomon, 2004). Gregory et al. (2022) discovered that peer support can serve as a buffer against the detrimental impact that victims of intimate partner violence will experience. Peer support may foster empathy, allowing individuals to feel fully understood and validated regarding their experiences. This also offers victims of intimate partner violence the strength to admit and accept their situation. Furthermore, victims of intimate partner violence typically feel more at ease when they are supported by friends who have been through similar situations. This can help victims feel heard, trusted, appreciated, and understood. Peer support can inspire people to seek care for their mental health concerns. According to study performed by Cheesmond, Davies, and Inder (2020), peer support influences help-seeking behavior by making it simpler for people to seek help from mental health specialists. This demonstrates that peer support can help individuals seek help because it creates a sense of understanding and empathy, reduces the stigma associated with help-seeking behavior, and motivates individuals to seek support from mental health professionals. Nuqul and Rahayu's (2022) research found that peer support influences individual help-seeking behavior. This is because peers may be viewed as those capable of providing emotional support, as well as empathy, to victims of intimate partner violence. Peers frequently share comparable experiences and may understand the difficulties and emotions that victims face, which fosters trust and comfort. Peer support can also assist individuals in overcoming emotions of isolation and humiliation, which are typical hurdles to getting treatment.

Ross, Caton, Gillestrup, and Kølves (2019) found that peer support significantly influences help-seeking behavior. Peers who share their experiences with others will provide a sense of comfort and relatability, making it simpler for others to seek help. This study is consistent with the findings of DeAndrea and Anthony (2013), who discovered that peer support influences help-seeking behavior. This is because the support provider may give a sense of belonging, understanding, and validation to people who require peer support. When people gain support from others who are going through similar experiences, they feel more at ease and inspired to seek professional treatment to address their mental health issues. Bennett et al. (2022) shown that peer support for victims of violence had a favorable effect on help-seeking behavior. Peer support is vital in enabling individuals to seek knowledge, understanding, and acceptance when they are victims of violence. Peer support is nonjudgmental and empathic, which can help lessen perceived social stigma and detrimental social assessments. As a result, people are more likely to seek expert aid. This is consistent with Isaac and Muchanan's (2021) findings, which suggest that peer support has a major impact on help-seeking behaviour. Peer support has an essential influence in shaping individual behavior while seeking help. However, no study has been discovered that examines the impact of mental health literacy and peer support on help-seeking behavior in young adult female victims of intimate partner violence. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of mental health literacy and peer support on help-seeking behavior in early adult female victims of intimate relationship violence.

## 2. Research Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 92 early adult female victims of intimate partner violence, who were obtained using snowball sampling techniques. Snowball sampling is a commonly used sampling method in quantitative research. However, the diversity of samples generated through this method has been repeatedly questioned (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). The criteria for participants in this study were women aged 20-30 years who had received physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional violence by an ex-boyfriend.

### 2.2. Method

This is quantitative research. The data for this study were gathered using a questionnaire that included participant identification and measures to assess help-seeking behavior, mental health literacy, and peer support. The questionnaire was distributed and completed online using a Google Form.

### 2.3. Research Instrument

The scales employed in this study provide four potential answers: extremely inappropriate, unsuitable, suitable, and very suitable. The Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form (ATSPPH-SF), created by Fischer and Farina (1995), was used to assess help-seeking behavior in this study. This scale is unidimensional and has ten statement items. According to Azwar (2018), the selection criteria are based on a minimum item-total correlation of 0.30 to provide sufficient distinction. After data analysis, two out of ten items had an item-total correlation value of less than 0.30. The total item correlation of the other eight items moved from 0.415 to 0.666. The reliability test was carried out by looking at the value on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.802.

The Mental Health Literacy Measure, created by Jung, Sterberg, and Davis (2016), was used in this study to assess mental health literacy. This scale has 26 statement items. After data analysis, one out of 26 items had an item-total correlation coefficient of less than 0.30. The item-total correlation for the remaining 25 items increased from 0.391 to 0.704. The reliability test was done by examining the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.802.

This study using Orpana, Lang, and Yurkowski's (2019) Social Provisions Scale to assess peer support. This scale has ten statement items. The item-total correlation for the ten items increases from 0.622 to 0.739. The reliability test was performed by looking at the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.918.

### 2.4. Research Procedure

In advance of being asked to complete the questionnaire, participants indicated their desire to participate in the study. Following that, individuals can complete the questionnaire's identification section before moving on to the scales of help-seeking behavior, mental health literacy, and peer support. The outcomes of people filling out the scale are then examined using multiple regression statistical tests.

### 3. Results

Based on the data analysis that has been carried out on each scale of the research variables, it is known that on the scale of help-seeking behaviour, the total item correlation of the other eight items moves from 0.415 to 0.666. The reliability test was carried out by looking at the value on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.802. On the help-seeking behavior scale, categorisation has been carried out, the help-seeking behavior of respondents in this study is in the moderate category. On the mental health literacy measurement scale there are 25 good items out of 26 existing items. The item-total correlation for the remaining 25 items increased from 0.391 to 0.704. The reliability test was done by examining the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.802 and mental health literacy owned by respondents in this study is in the moderate category. Furthermore, on the peer support scale the item-total correlation for the 10 items increases from 0.622 to 0.739. The reliability test was performed by looking at the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.918 and respondents in this study had peer support that was in the high categorisation.

Based on the 92 data collected, researchers used multiple regression statistical tests with the SPSS for Windows version 25 software to investigate the influence of mental health literacy and peer support on help-seeking. The regression test analysis revealed that mental health literacy and peer support had a substantial effect on help-seeking, with a 26.6% influence. Meanwhile, each variable exerts a large influence. The mental health literacy variable has a considerable impact on help-seeking behavior with an influence value of 20.9%, as does the peer support variable with an influence of 15.6%.

Table 1. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.516	.266	.247	3.449

a. Predictors: (Constant), PeerSupport, MentalHealthLiteracy

Table 2. Anova Result

Model		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	332.619	166.309	13.977	.000
	Ressidual	916.181	11.898		
	Total				

a. Dependent Variable: HelpSeekingBehavior

b. Predictors: (Constant), PeerSupport, MentalHealthLiteracy

### 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate at how mental health literacy and peer support affected help-seeking behavior in early adult female victims of intimate partner violence. Multiple regression tests have revealed that mental health literacy and peer support, when combined, have a substantial impact on help-seeking behavior. In addition, it was discovered that mental health literacy had a bigger effect on help-seeking behavior (20.9%) than peer support. Mental health literacy might influence help-seeking behavior because it increases people's worry about their mental health. Furthermore, having strong mental health literacy enables people to know how to obtain information about mental health as well as how to get support from specialists, particularly

those working in the field of mental health. Almanasef (2021) discovered that mental health literacy had a beneficial impact on help-seeking behavior. People who are well-informed about mental health are more likely to seek treatment. Individuals with a history of mental illness have greater levels of mental health literacy than those without. Maya (2021) also discovered that those who have utilized mental health services have greater levels of mental health literacy. Peer support has a substantial impact on help-seeking behavior (15.6%). Peer support can influence help-seeking behavior because when dealing with an individual situation, individuals require certain resources, such as peer support, to assist them make decisions about seeking help. Individuals who have been victims of intimate partner violence and get peer support may convince themselves to seek treatment. Simmons, Cartner, MacDonald, Whitson, Bailey, and Brown (2023) found that peer support can affect individuals' decisions to seek treatment. Individuals with specific concerns are more likely to seek peer support before seeking or participating in professional help. Other findings indicate that mental health literacy and peer support, when combined, have a substantial influence on help-seeking behavior of 26.6%, with 73.4% as the influential factor. This suggests that stigma, family support, and self-consciousness can all have an impact on help-seeking behavior.

The help-seeking behavior of respondents in this study is in the moderate category. This shows that the help-seeking behaviour possessed by respondents is in the moderate category due to the lack of awareness and knowledge of the importance of seeking help. In addition, individuals also feel that there is a stigma given by society regarding someone who asks for professional help, especially professional help in the field of mental health. This is in accordance with Latunji and Akinyemi (2018) who suggest that there are several causes of individuals not seeking help from professionals such as a lack of awareness or knowledge about the importance of getting help from professionals, the stigma given by society so that individuals feel afraid of judgement or being discriminated against by the surrounding environment.

Mental health literacy in this study was also in the moderate category. This can occur due to lack of access to information about mental health and lack of awareness about mental health. This is in accordance with Mohfouz et al. (2016) who revealed that the quality of mental health literacy possessed by individuals can be influenced by lack of awareness and lack of adequate access to information about mental health. This is also supported by the results of the answers to the open-ended questions regarding the reasons why respondents did not seek professional help, namely because respondents did not know how to get professional help. The peer support possessed by respondents in this study was in the high category. This can happen because victims of violence really need support, one of which is support from peers. Peer support can provide a sense of security to victims of violence, so that it can make victims able to increase their confidence to survive and in making decisions to seek help. This is in accordance with Latunji and Akinyemi (2018) who suggest that individuals who have strong support can influence help-seeking compared to individuals who lack support from the surrounding environment.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

According to the research, mental health literacy and peer support have a substantial impact on help-seeking behavior. Partially, mental health literacy has a bigger effect on help-seeking behavior; research indicates that the better an individual's mental health literacy, the greater their desire to engage in help-seeking activity. However, peer support had less of an impact on help-seeking behavior than mental health literacy.

Researchers acknowledge that this research is far from flawless, and there are still flaws. Based on the explanation and study that has been undertaken, various proposals may be made, as follows:

- Researchers indicate that this study might assist victims of intimate partner violence by enhancing mental health literacy and identifying available resources for aid. Furthermore, victims of intimate partner violence require emotional assistance from a trustworthy individual.



- For future researchers who are interested in researching the same theme, it is recommended to look at the influence of mental health literacy, self-stigma, family support, and other factors that have an influence on help-seeking behavior.

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