

Needs, Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help, and Preferred Sources of Help Among Emirati College Students

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This investigation, conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), examined Emirati college students' needs, help-seeking attitudes, preference for source of help, and perceptions of counseling services offered on campus. Most participants reported moderate levels of personal, academic, career, and interpersonal needs, although results varied along gender lines. Overall, participants displayed slightly positive attitudes toward seeking professional help, yet showed negative attitudes toward interpersonal openness, although this, too, differed by gender. Participants preferred non-professional sources of help, such as family and friends. Participants understood counseling services on campus to refer to academic-related services. Findings are discussed within the UAE cultural context.

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Needs assessment of college students is considered one of most helpful and efficient first steps in designing counseling services on campus. Systematic and frequent needs assessment is vital in order for the college counseling centers to respond effectively to the changing needs of diverse and growing student populations (Bishop, Bauer, & Becker, 1998; Gallagher, Gill, & Sysko, 2000; Gallagher, Golin, & Kelleher, 1992; Kitzrow, 2003; Nicholas, 2002; Stone, Vespia, & Kanz, 2000). In addition, assessing students' perceived personal, career, and academic-related needs helps university counseling centers, especially those that are understaffed, efficiently utilize their limited resources to accurately relate to students' needs. Gallagher et al. (1992) cited a number of studies which reported that college students' perceptions of their own needs were different from those of the faculty, counseling center staff, and researchers. These findings suggest the importance of including students' perceptions in order to more accurately identify their needs and plan counseling interventions or services accordingly.

Students who need counseling services may or may not seek help from the university counseling center. This depends on a number of factors. Attitude toward professional help in general is one factor that seems to contribute to college students' decision about whether to seek counseling (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Samadi, 1994; Cook et al., 1984; Fischer & Farina, 1995; Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000; Nicholas, 2002; Rochlen, Mohr, & Hargrove, 1999). In addition, these studies have found gender to be the most salient variable impacting college students' attitudes toward seeking professional help. With exception to Al-Darmaki's (2003) study, women were found to report positive attitudes toward seeking help more frequently than men. Previous research has also identified other factors such as stigma (Komiya et al., 2000; Ludwikowski, Vogel, & Armstrong, 2009; Sayed, 2002; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007) and cultural beliefs (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Nicholas, 2002). College students' reluctance to seek counseling could also indicate a lack of knowledge regarding the availability, nature, and benefits of such services or simply a preference for seeking help outside the university (Nicholas, 2002).

In United Arab Emirates (UAE), the provision of counseling services on campuses is relatively new. Although there is greater demand for counseling services in UAE, many of college students who need help do not seek it. It could be that many students were unaware of and unfamiliar with the counseling services available to them, or have unclear perceptions of the nature of counseling. It could be also that Emirati individuals prefer to seek help from informal resources such as family and friends before approaching professional helpers for assistance (Osman & Afifi, 2010). Investigating Emirati students' perceptions of services provided by the university counseling center would clarify the reasons behind these preferences and usage patterns. Furthermore, focusing on students' preferred sources of help would expand our knowledge of their help seeking behavior, especially that this area of research is understudied in this part of the world (Leach, Jana-Masri, & Priester, 2009; Osman & Afifi, 2010). A study of this nature would have significant implications for the practice of counseling on campus, helping practitioners to design more effective services and programs. In addition, investigating Emirati college students' needs and perceptions of professional psychological help would add to the existing literature on college students' needs and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. As higher education become more globalized, the results of this study would be informative to educators and practitioners working with Middle Eastern individuals or Arab American population. Furthermore, college students' mental health needs are considered within a global context as such information will help educators and practitioners around the world to develop strategies for meeting needs of international college students.

The purpose of this study is four-fold: to investigate the personal, career, and academic needs of college students at a national university in UAE; to

examine Emirati college students' attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help for their concerns; to examine their perceptions of counseling services provided at the university counseling center; and to investigate their preferred sources of help. The results of these investigations have profound implications for our understanding of help-seeking behavior, counseling center-usage, and services/program design.

College Students' Needs and Concerns

College students' needs and concerns have received attention from researchers in contexts around the globe (e.g., Al-Damen & Suliaman, 2007; Al-Samadi & Al-Tahan, 1997; Bishop et al., 1998; Gallagher et al., 1992; Güneri, Aydm, & Skovholt, 2003; Nicholas, 2002; Robbins, May, & Corazzini, 1985; Shouket, 2000; Soliman, 1986). Typically, these needs are categorized as personal, career, or academic-related needs. For example, Gallagher et al. (1992) found college students mostly need assistance with overcoming procrastination and public speaking anxiety in addition to other personal needs including increasing motivation, and coping with depression. In addition, participants in this study reported career needs, such as the need for developing job search strategies and learning skills concerns such as improving study skills.

In the Middle East, a number of studies have investigated college students' needs and concerns (e.g., Al-Damen & Suliaman, 2007; Al-Samadi & Al-Tahan, 1997; Güneri et al., 2003; Shawqi, 2003; Shouket, 2000; Soliman, 1986). In Güneri et al.'s (2003) study, Turkish college students expressed social concerns such as public speaking anxiety and becoming more assertive, as well as personal concerns such as coping with stress and identity confusion. They also expressed academic needs such as concentration in studies, improving grades, completing assignments on time, as well as career concerns such as managing time and getting a job after graduation. Turkish men and women also reported relationships and financial needs. Soliman (1986) indicated that young Arabs seem to have personal, career, educational, and social/ interpersonal needs for which counseling would be very beneficial. Al-Darabei and Al-Sfafah (2004) reported that Jordanian college students expressed concerns related to conduct, academics, health, adjustment to college, and family and social domains, indicating students' need for counseling services. Only two studies have examined Emirati college students' counseling needs and concerns (Al-Samadi & Al-Tahan, 1997; Shawqi, 2003). In these studies, Emirati students reported educational needs such as improving study skills and career-related needs such as identifying career interests and requirements, as well as personal and social needs and the need for academic and career information. In addition, students expressed a need for help with their concerns. Whether those students would actually seek counseling was not explored in these studies.

Previous studies reported differences in college students' needs based on college major and years of college education (Al-Damen & Suliaman, 2007; Al-Darabei & Al-Sfafah, 2004). Previous studies have also reported a change in college students' needs over time (Kitzrow, 2003; Robbins et al., 1985). Robbins et al. (1985), for example, reported a shift in the needs of college students seeking counseling services for developmental and informational problems to more severe mental health issues. This change is due to social, cultural, and economic factors as well as changing demographics of college student population (Kitzrow, 2003). Gender differences in the reported needs among college students were also identified in the literature across cultural (Al-Damen & Suliaman, 2007; Al-Samadi & Al-Tahan, 1997; Bishop et al., 1998; Gallagher et al., 1992). Gallagher et al. (1992) found women to be more concerned with controlling weight, whereas men showed more concern with discomfort in social situations, adjustment to campus, and improving reading skills. Similarly, Bishop et al. (1998) found men to report higher needs for help with bizarre thoughts and controlling drinking, whereas women reported higher needs for help with test anxiety and fear of failure. Gender differences were also found in Middle Eastern students' reported needs (Al-Damen & Suliaman, 2007; Al-Samadi & Al-Tahan, 1997; Güneri et al., 2003; Shouket, 2000). Al-Damen and Suliaman (2007), for example, found Omani college women to express a higher level of need for help with psychological, career, academic, and social problems, as well as obtaining information. Shouket (2000) found female students in Egyptian college reported concerns with leisure activities and parents' approval and love, whereas men reported a need for leadership, self-actualization, and to find a job after graduation. In Güneri et al.'s (2003) study, Turkish men expressed concern for family issues while women reported more concern for self-control and personal issues. Similarly, Al-Samadi and Al-Tahan (1997) and Shawqi (2003) reported female Emirati college students expressing a higher level of career, personal, and social needs when compared to male students. As Emirati college students' needs change over time due to factors such as rapid urbanization, change in family structure, change in values, and instability in global economy and job requirements, it becomes important to identify their counseling need in the current study in order to respond effectively to these needs. It is also to investigate their help-seeking preferences and attitudes.

Help-Seeking Preferences and Attitudes

Previous research have identified a number of factors contributing to individuals' preferences for help sources such as gender (e.g., Al-Krenawi, Graham, Al-Bedah, Kadri, & Sehwal, 2009; Cook et al., 1984; Rochlen et al., 1999; Rule & Gandy, 1994), social norms and cultural beliefs (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Soliman, 1993; Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007; Webster & Fretz, 1978), type of problem (Kahn & Nauta, 1997; Rule & Gandy, 1994; Soliman, 1993), attitudes toward counseling (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Cook et al.,

1984; Rochlen et al., 1999), self- and public stigma (Vogel, Wade et al., 2007), perceptions of the levels of problem severity (Hinson & Swanson, 1993), willingness to disclose personal problems (Hinson & Swanson, 1993), availability of social support (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998), and awareness of the availability and nature of counseling services (e.g., Al-Samadi, 1994; Cook et al., 1984; Gelso & McKenzie, 1973).

With regard to college students, research has examined their preferences for sources of help (e.g., Cook et al., 1984; Gallagher et al., 1992; Nicholas, 2002; Rule & Gandy, 1994; Soliman, 1993; Tinsley, de St. Aubin, & Brown, 1982; Webster & Fretz, 1978) when facing personal or career concerns. However, much of this research has been done in the United States. Regardless of culture or ethnicity, research findings suggest that women college students are more likely to seek counseling than men (e.g., Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Al-Samadi, 1994; Fischer & Farina, 1995; Komiya et al., 2000; Rochlen et al., 1999; Rule & Gandy, 1994). Men are more likely to seek professional help for instrumental problems (e.g. work, achievement, and finance), whereas women were more likely to seek professional help for interpersonal problems (Wills & DePaulo, 1991). Gallagher et al. (1992) found students to prefer receiving help in the forms of either individual counseling or printed materials (see also Cook et al., 1984). In addition, research indicates a strong preference for close friends or relatives over counselors (Cook et al., 1984; Rule & Gandy, 1994; Wills & DePaulo, 1991). Counselors were perceived as source of help mainly for vocational and educational concerns. In Cook et al.'s (1984) study, counselors were the third most preferred source of help mainly for career choice problems, and in Webster and Fretz's (1978) study they were among the five most preferred help sources for emotional or educational/vocational problems. However, Cook et al. found that counselors were not widely seen as potentially helpful even though college students displayed positive attitudes toward counseling. In addition, Tinsley et al. (1982) found that counselors are not the preferred help-giver for either personal or career concerns. Close friends were preferred as help-givers for personal problems, whereas academic advisors, instructors, close friends, and close relatives are the most frequently preferred help-givers for career concerns. However, about half of students surveyed in Tinsley et al.'s study indicated that they would seek help from professional counselors for problems of emotional stability and suicidal thoughts. Nicholas (2002) reported that most college students in South Africa prefer to seek professional help outside the university, often from religious helpers. With regard to the preferred mode of help, South African college students expressed a preference for attending lectures rather than individual or group counseling for assistance with their concerns.

In the Arab culture, help-seeking preferences and attitudes toward seeking professional help for personal problems and concerns is influenced by factors such as cultural beliefs and social norms, stigma associated with

mental illness, interpersonal openness, as well as trust in and availability of a mental health system (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Leach et al., 2009; Osman & Afifi, 2010). Research indicated that Arab individuals tend to prefer seeking help from informal resources such as family and friend (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Soliman, 1993) or from traditional healers (Eapen & Ghubash, 2004) and therefore, tend to underutilize mental health services (Osman & Afifi, 2010). When seeking formal professional help, individuals tend to seek help from medical doctors to escape the stigma attached to being mentally ill (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; El-Rufaie, Abuzied, Bener, & Al-Sabosy, 1999; Sayed 2002). In addition, there is some evidence in the literature that suggests change in attitudes toward seeking help among Arab younger generation due to factors such education and stigma tolerance (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Soliman, 1993). This shift is reflected in more willing to seek professional psychological help especially among college students. Acceptance of seeking counseling by current generation is also reported in the American culture (Kitzrow, 2003). However, reliance on Western-models of mental health services, inaccessibility of such services in most of the Arab countries, and persistent cultural beliefs about mental illness and health (e.g., sickness and health are interpreted within religion) seem to contribute to underutilization of needed services by the public or delay in receiving needed help (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Osman & Afifi, 2010).

There is a paucity of documented studies dealing with help-seeking preferences in the Arab world even though there is growing research interest in this area in relation to Arab college students (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009). An extensive literature review yielded only two studies (Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Soliman, 1993) conducted on help-seeking behaviors of Arab college students. Al-Krenawi et al. (2009) reported significant differences in attitudes towards help-seeking behavior among Egyptians, Kuwaitis, Palestinians, and Israeli Arabs. They found both Palestinians and Israeli Arabs to express positive attitudes toward interpersonal openness and confidence in mental health services yet higher levels of stigma toward those same services when compared to Kuwaitis and Egyptians. They also reported gender differences in cultural beliefs regarding mental health problems and treatment options, with women showing more openness to help-seeking in comparison to men. Soliman (1993) examined college students' choice of help sources and gender of helpers in relation to problem-type and found gender differences in the selection of helpers for personal and career problems among Kuwaitis. Most Kuwaiti college students selected the same-gender helpers for personal and career problems with exception to the problem of "concern about getting a job", for which both men and women sought out a male helper. With regard to choice of helpers for different types of problems, Soliman found that same-gender friends were the most preferred help-giving source whereas professional helpers, such as counselors and social workers, were least sought-out for help. In addition,

Soliman found both men and women college students mostly preferred to rely on themselves in solving problems (similar to western cultures, see Cook et al., 1984). With regard to gender difference, studies found men and women to be similar in their preferences in most problem areas (Cook et al., 1984).

College students' diverse, changing needs and the increasing demand for counseling services represent real challenges for those designing appropriate and effective services in response to those needs. Research also indicates that most of those who need help do not seek it or seek it outside the university. This investigation is an attempt to answer the following questions: (a) What are the personal, career, and academic needs of Emirati college students?, (b) What are their attitudes toward receiving professional help?, (c) What are their help-seeking preferences?, and (d) What are their perceptions of the counseling services offered at the university?

Based on the literature review above, it was hypothesized that Emirati college students would experience personal, career, and academic concerns at a moderate level or above. Also, there would be gender differences in the reported needs. It was hypothesized that Emirati college students would, in general, exhibit positive attitudes toward seeking professional help with women showing more positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help than men. Finally, it was hypothesized that college students would prefer seeking help from non-professional helpers rather than professional helpers.

Method

Participants

Four hundred and ninety two men ($n = 228$) and women ($n = 264$) college students from a notional university in UAE and who were taken general education courses participated in this investigation. The participants' mean age was 21.33 years. Of the total sample, there were 65.4% (322) residing in the university housing and 34.6% (170) was living off campus. The majoring of the participants were UAE nationals (86.2%; $n = 419$) and 13.8% (67) from other countries. About 86.6% (426) of the participants were single, 12.8% (63) married, and the remaining 0.6% (3) did not reveal their marital status. Of the total sample, 24.8% (122) were from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 14.6% (72) from Law, about 14.2% (70) from Business Administration, 11.2% (55) from each of Education and Engineering, 9.6% (47) from Information Technology, and the remaining 14.4% (71) from other colleges.

Instruments

Needs Assessment Survey. Based on the common needs of college students reported in the literature and clinical observations and experiences of the investigator in working with college students, a Need Assessment

Survey was developed for the purpose of this investigation. It consists of 55 items in areas related to college life. There are items on personal needs (e.g., "increasing self-satisfaction and acceptance"), career needs (e.g., "deciding on a career path"), academic skills (e.g., "increasing academic performance"), and interpersonal needs (e.g., "learning skills to develop friendship"). The needs items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (no need) to 4 (very much). This survey was checked by two experts in psychology and was found to be culturally relevant and appropriate for assessing college students' needs and concerns. In addition, the survey was piloted on 20 Emirati college students to check for its readability and wording of the survey items and to add any items they believe it should be included in the survey. Their feedback was used to further modify the survey.

Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale. The Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help scale (ASPPH; Fischer & Turner, 1970) consists of 29 items designed to assess general attitudes toward seeking professional help for psychological problems and issues. Fischer and Turner (1970) found four factors for ASPPH scale. These factors are: 1) recognition of personal need for psychological help (8 items); 2) stigma tolerance associated with psychological help (5 items); 3) interpersonal openness regarding one's problems (7 items); and 4) confidence in mental health professionals (9 items). Items are rated using a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from (0) disagree to (3) agree. Eleven items are positively keyed so that agreement indicates positive attitudes, and 18 were negatively keyed so that disagreement with the item shows positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Total scores range from 0 to 87, with a higher score indicating positive attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. Internal reliability estimates for the entire scale, as measured by coefficient alpha, range from .83 to .73 and for the four factors from .74 to .62 and from .76 to .53 (Fischer & Turner, 1970; Good & Wood, 1995). Test-retest reliabilities of .89 (two weeks) to .84 (two months) were reported (Fischer & Turner, 1970). Fischer and Turner (1970) provided support for construct validity of the scale.

The Arabic translated version of ASPPH (Al-Darmaki, 2003) was used in this study. The Arabic translated version of the ASPPH consists of 22 items with scores ranging from 0 to 66. Al-Darmaki (2003) reported three factors for the ASPPH that were moderately internally consistent. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were .70 for Factor I, Confidence in Professional Help Providers; .66 for Factor II, Stigma Tolerance; and .57 for Factor III, Interpersonal Openness. The reliability estimate for the overall ASPPH scale was .78, which was higher than the reported alpha (.73) by Good and Wood (1995). In this study, Cronbach alpha was .72, .71, .56, for Confidence in Professional Help Providers, Stigma Tolerance, Interpersonal Openness, respectively, and .78 for the overall ASPPH. These reliabilities are considered satisfactory.

Preferred Sources of Help. The survey contained 10 items about the preferred source of help with students' concerns listed in the Needs Assessment Survey (i. e., individual counseling, group counseling, workshops and programs, lectures, consultation and information, psychological professional help from outside the university, "Mutawaa" (religious healer), friends or peers, family, or advisors). Participants were asked to rank these 10 sources of help from 1 through 10 according to their preferences for obtaining help in dealing with their needs identified in the Needs Assessment Survey.

Perceptions of the Services Provided at the University Counseling Center. The survey also included 11 common counseling services that are offered by the UAE University Counseling Center. These are individual counseling, group counseling, outreach programs, workshops, academic counseling, tutoring, career counseling, advising, a special program for improving academic skills, consultation, and psychological testing. These services even though are similar to what most college and university counseling centers in the US offer students, they have been recently established in this institution. These services are advertised to students via the university website, during orientation, and by posters and flyers to increase student awareness of the availability of such services and increase its utilization. To examine whether Emirati college students know of such services, participants in this study were asked to indicate on a 3-point rating scale 0 (do not know), 1 (disagree), and 2 (agree) whether each of these services is offered by their university counseling center.

Procedure

A packet of questionnaires along with a consent form and a demographic sheet was distributed to the volunteer participants during class time and they were instructed to fill out the survey and return it before leaving the classroom. All students who were present during class visitation agreed to take a part in the study even though they were informed that there was no penalty for deciding not to participate in this study. The administration time was about 25 minutes.

Data Analysis

Frequencies of distribution and descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were obtained for the data in this study. In addition, T-tests were performed on the Needs Assessment Survey data to look at the urgency of needs experienced by participants in this study and to examine gender differences. A T-test was also conducted to identify gender differences on the ASPPH.

Results

College Students' Needs and Concerns

Of the 55 needs listed in the Needs Assessment Survey, 46 needs were reported to be "moderate" to "very much" a concern by about 77.5%- 50.5% of the participants. Students reported needing help "very much" with only 6 of the needs (i.e., time management, overcoming procrastination, increasing motivation, increasing academic performance, controlling feelings of tension and anxiety, and learning study skills). Only 36% to 49% of the participants indicated that they required help with the remaining 3 needs (i.e., desire to become independent from family, overcome suicidal ideations, and resolve conflicts in values and morals) at levels from "moderate" to "very much".

To determine the urgency of needs among Emirati college students the following criteria was established. First, 95% confidence interval of the difference that will take into consideration the standard error of difference was selected. Second, the scale for response on the Need Assessment Survey is a 4-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, here is 1 is a midpoint for the first category of response "no need", and thus, the real point of this category range from .50 to less than 1.50 and the same with the other categories. Based on this, .50 is subtracted for the lower and .50 is added to the upper limit of each category. Accordingly, the real limits for the four categories as follows: if the lower and upper mean difference for a particular need ranged from .50 to less than 1.50, it was considered not a need at all; from 1.50 to less than 2.50 was categorized as a minor need; from 2.50 to less than 3.50 was regarded as moderate need; and from 3.50 to 4 was considered urgent need, with $p < .05$. Accordingly, three of the 55 needs appeared to be urgent among Emirati college students (i.e., time management, overcoming procrastination, and increasing academic performance). In addition, two of the remaining 52 needs were reported as minor needs (i.e., desire to be independent from the family, and overcoming suicidal ideations). The other 50 needs seem to be moderate needs among participants.

Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

The means for the three ASPPH subscales were 17.72 (SD = 4.89; score range = 3-27) for Confidence in Professional Help Providers, 14.69 (SD = 4.97; score range = 1-27) For Stigma Tolerance, and 3.26 (SD = 2.247; score range = 0-12) for Interpersonal Openness, respectively. The mean for the total ASPPH 22 items was 35.68 (SD = 9.15; score range = 8-66). The mean scores for the overall ASPPH and the mean scores for Confidence in Psychological Help Providers and Stigma Tolerance subscales indicate that the Emirati college student participants have slightly positive attitudes toward seeking professional help, however, they seem to have negative attitudes toward interpersonal openness.

Gender Differences

With regard to gender difference in the needs reported by the participants, an independent two-way t-test was performed. Results displayed in Table 1 indicate significant differences for the mean scores of men and women college students on seven of the 55 needs listed in the Needs Assessment Survey. In particular, these mean scores differences were for overcoming shyness ($t = 2.27$; $p = .024$), deciding on a career path ($t = 2.93$; $p = .004$), resolving conflict in values and morals ($t = 4.15$; $p = .000$), quitting socially unacceptable behaviors ($t = 2.72$; $p = .007$), and overcoming suicidal ideations ($t = 3.07$; $p = .002$); suggesting that men expressed more need for assistance with these issues than women. However, the mean scores differences for controlling feelings of tension and anxiety ($t = -2.01$; $p = .045$) and learning decision making skills ($t = -2.25$; $p = .025$) indicate that women expressed a higher level of need for help with these issues. Significant gender differences were also found in the attitudes toward seeking professional help (Table 2). Women indicate more favorable attitudes toward seeking professional help ($t = -3.47$; $p = .001$). Women participants' mean scores for confidence in professional help providers ($t = -2.93$; $p = .004$) and stigma tolerance ($t = -3.09$; $p = .002$) were higher than those of men, indicating that Emirati women have more confidence in mental health providers and more stigma tolerance for seeking help when compared to men. However, no significant gender differences were found for interpersonal openness.

Preference for Sources of Help

Regarding participants' preferred source of help, the percentages of participants who ranked each of the services from 1 to 5 were combined (Table 2). Accordingly, individual counseling was preferred by only 45.1%, group counseling by 34.1%, and professional psychological help outside the university by 35.3%; suggesting less preference for professional psychological help by most Emirati men and women surveyed in this investigation. Group counseling seems to be the least preferred mode of counseling. Workshops and outreach programs were preferred by 42.3% and consultation and information were preferred by 46.7%. Receiving guidance from academic advisor and help from the *Mutawaa* were preferred by 43.4% and 44.4% of participants, respectively. However, more than half of the participants seem to be more comfortable with receiving help in the form of lectures (61.1%). Interestingly, most participants preferred to obtain help from family (78.1%) and a friend or a classmate (72.3%) for all types of concerns.

Regarding participants' perceptions of services provided at the UAE University counseling center, about 44.0% and 54.8% of the participants did not know or agree that individual and group counseling are offered (Table 3). In addition, 52.6% of Emirati college students did not know or agree that

consultation is available and 58% did not know that psychological testing is offered at the counseling center. These results suggest a need for more marketing of counseling services on campus. However, more than half of the participants knew that the counseling center offers tutoring (67.3%), a special program for improving academic skills (68.6%), and career counseling (63.7%). The majority of participants acknowledged that the counseling center offers outreach programs (75.4%), advising (73.9%), academic counseling (72.9%), and workshops (68.1%).

Discussion

The findings of this investigation provided support for the hypotheses of the study. Specifically, the majority of Emirati college students reported experiencing different kinds of needs at least at the moderate level, which provides support for the first hypothesis of the study. They appeared to have personal, career, academic, and social needs. These findings are similar to those reported in previous studies in several different cultural contexts (e.g., Al-Damen & Suliaman, 2007; Al-Samadi & Al-Tahan, 1997; Cook et al., 1984; Gallagher et al., 1992, 2000; Güneri et al., 2003; Nicholas, 2002; Shawqi, 2003; Shouket, 2000; Soliman, 1986). Academic needs such as time management, overcoming procrastination, increasing motivation, learning study skills, increasing academic performance, and controlling tension and anxiety seem to represent important needs among Emirati college men and women. This is to be expected among college students as academic life is very important for them, yet very challenging. In addition, the need for help with time management and increasing academic performance were the main two needs with which Emirati college students indicated requiring assistance with. However, the need to be independent from the family, to resolve conflicts in values and morals, and to overcome suicidal ideations did not seem to be urgent needs. They were regarded as minor needs by the majority of participants. The family in the UAE plays an essential role in the life of its members. It provides emotional, financial, and social support to them and, therefore, it is valued by its members. In addition, the UAE culture does not encourage individuals to be independent from the family. Thus, it is expected that the desire to be independent from the family would not be a significant need for many young individuals, including college students. Participants in this study did not appear to experience much of a conflict in values/morals or suicidal ideations.

Gender differences were found for seven of the needs on the Needs Assessment Survey, providing support for the second hypothesis of the study. Men expressed more need for assistance with overcoming shyness, deciding on a career path, resolving conflict in values and morals, quitting socially unacceptable behaviors, and overcoming suicidal ideations. On the other hand, women expressed more need for controlling feelings of tension and anxiety and for learning decision-making skills.

The UAE society has gone through rapid changes in all aspects of life (e.g., social, economic, values). These changes appear to effect individuals of all ages both positively and negatively. In addition, changes that have occurred in the labor market and in job requirements have created new challenges for Emirati college students as they decide on a career path. This problem is especially acute for men, as they are considered the head of the family, responsible for supporting the family financially. These changes seem also to create conflict in values and morals for college men. This, in turn, could have an effect on their behavior and mood. Traditionally, Emiratis are not trained to make decisions as individuals, as important decisions are typically made by a consensus of the men in the family. Therefore, it is expected that women would express a need to learn decision-making skills at university, as, in the academic setting, they are faced with the challenge of having to make decisions for themselves for the first time. Emirati women seem to experience tension and anxiety more than men. This could be related to the pressure experienced by young women trying to meet their own expectations as well as the expectations of their families and the society at large. They may be also the first women in their families to study at a university.

This study also revealed gender differences in attitudes toward seeking professional help, with women expressing more confidence in the mental health providers and more tolerance to stigma than men. This result is consistent with previous research findings (Fischer & Cohen, 1972; Fischer & Farina, 1995; Fischer & Turner, 1970). In UAE culture, attitudes toward seeking psychological help and preferences for source of help may be influenced by factors such as education, family values, accessibility of psychological services, and cultural beliefs regarding psychological health and mental illness. Emiratis are encouraged to share personal and emotional issues within the family only. Disclosure of personal/emotional issues to outsiders is not only discouraged but it is also seen as a weakness in the individual (Al-Darmaki, 2003). In this study, participants displayed overall slightly positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, supporting the third hypothesis of the study. They seemed to perceive professional help providers with more confidence and to have more tolerance to the stigma of receiving psychological help. However, they expressed negative attitudes toward interpersonal openness. These findings are consistent with a previous study conducted with Emirati college students (Al-Darmaki, 2003). Furthermore, these results are in line with previous research findings (Fischer & Cohen, 1972; Fischer & Farina, 1995; Fischer & Turner, 1970). Stigma and reluctant to disclosure have been identified as key factors in avoiding counseling (Al-Darmaki, 2003, Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Hinson & Swanson, 1993; Komiya et al., 2000; Sayed, 2002), yet college students in the current study seemed to be more accepting and more tolerant to stigma resulting from seeking help for psychological issues. This is consistent with current trends among the new generations in the US and the Arab counties regarding acceptance of counseling and other mental health

services. It is unclear, however, if the participants of this study would consider seeking psychological help if they experienced a need for it. More research is needed in this area.

With regard to preferences for sources of help, the majority of participants in this study seem to prefer relying on traditional methods such as family and friends for help with all types of concerns. This result provides support for the third hypothesis of the study and can be explained within the UAE culture context. The family in the UAE culture is responsible for providing all sorts of support including emotional support and guidance to its members. Therefore, individuals are expected to turn to their families for advice and help. Contrary to their overall positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, participants in the current study expressed less preference for receiving psychological help in the form of individual or group counseling on campus or even outside the university. This is to be expected as counseling requires disclosure of personal concerns and Emirati college students have expressed negative attitudes toward interpersonal openness. However, they seem to prefer obtaining help in the form of consultation, lectures, and information. This may be less threatening to Emirati college students, as these types of help do not require disclosure of personal information and are less stigmatizing. It could be also related to their perceptions of the services provided recently at the university counseling center.

Most participants in this study agreed that the university counseling center offers academic related services such as tutoring, advising, academic counseling, outreach programs, and career counseling. About half of the participants seem to be unaware that the counseling center at their university offers individual or group counseling or psychological testing. In the UAE, psychological services are not yet widespread or well accepted as it is in the West. Seeking psychological help is still considered a sign of weakness or insanity in the Emirati culture. In addition, Emirati people may experience psychological problems in the form of physical complaints (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; El-Rufaie et al., 1999). It is more acceptable and less stigmatizing to seek help from a physician than a psychological help provider; therefore, individuals may prefer obtaining help from a medical doctor. A psychiatrist, psychologist or counselor may be considered last.

In conclusion, findings of this investigation reveal that Emirati college students have at least a moderate level of personal, career, academic, and interpersonal needs. With the exception of interpersonal openness, Emirati college students showed slight confidence in psychological health providers and tolerance for stigma, reflecting a trend that may make seeking professional psychological services less stigmatized. Emirati college students seem to prefer seeking help from family and friends over counselors.

Moreover, Emirati college students prefer obtaining help in the form of information through lectures and consultation rather than individual or group counseling. Their perceptions of counseling services indicated that most of them believe that the university counseling center offers mainly career counseling and academic advising which may contribute to their help-seeking preferences.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations worth mentioning. First, this study did not examine help-seeking preferences in relation to each type of needs. Rather, it investigated Emirati college students' general help-seeking preference regardless of the domain of needs. The findings of this study can be generalized to UAE college students in general only with caution, as the participants in this study were recruited from only one campus. In addition, the findings on attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help should be interpreted with caution due to relatively low reliability of the Interpersonal Openness subscale of ASPPH.

Implications

This study has a number of implications for researchers and practitioners. College student needs should be investigated periodically as these needs and their urgency may change over time. The findings of such research would provide useful information that may guide the counseling centers' efforts in designing effective services and programs to meet the students' needs. In addition, preferences for sources of help should be investigated in relation to type of needs and concerns. This study investigated college students' needs in relation to gender, yet there are other variables such as level of academic performance and living status (on-campus vs. off-campus) that could be considered when examining college students' needs. Future research is also needed to examine college students' attitudes toward counseling in relation to the likelihood of seeking professional help.

The current study revealed that Emirati college students have negative attitudes toward interpersonal openness. In counseling, disclosure is expected in order to receive psychological assistance. Therefore, Emirati individuals who have negative attitudes toward interpersonal openness may become reluctant to disclose personal information and problems to the counselors or may decide against seeking help for their concerns. In working with Emirati clients, counselors need to focus on developing a strong working alliance and addressing clients' fear of disclosure in order to be more effective helpers. Counseling outreach programs should focus on educating college students about the nature of counseling and its goals. Also, counseling center staff need to market their services through a variety of methods (e.g., brochures, counseling awareness day, video presentations, class visitations, delivering information to students' personal emails).

Counseling center staff may want to design non-traditional counseling services such as online counseling and online workshops to help reduce stigma and encourage students to utilize the counseling services.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations and T-Test for Men and Women for the Needs Assessment and Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

| Variable | Men (M; SD) | Women (M; SD) | t | df | sig |
|--|----------------|------------------|-------|-----|------|
| 6. Controlling feelings of anxiety & tension | 3.15; .92 | 3.31; .91 | -2.01 | 488 | .045 |
| 10. Learning decision making skills | 3.11; .94 | 3.29; .91 | -2.25 | 485 | .025 |
| 18. Overcoming shyness | 2.89; 1.09 | 2.67; 1.04 | 2.27 | 487 | .024 |
| 20. Deciding on a career path | 3.08; .96 | 2.81; 1.09 | 2.93 | 489 | .004 |
| 41. Resolving conflict in values & morals | 2.73; 1.14 | 2.31; 1.12 | 4.15 | 484 | .000 |
| 42. Overcoming suicidal ideations | 2.25; 1.28 | 1.89; 1.25 | 3.07 | 482 | .002 |
| 52. Quitting socially unacceptable behavior | 2.63; 1.12 | 2.35; 1.18 | 2.72 | 485 | .007 |
| Confidence | 17.03; 4.75 | 18.32; 4.95 | -2.93 | 490 | .004 |
| Stigma Tolerance | 13.96; 4.90 | 15.33; 4.95 | -3.09 | 490 | .002 |
| Interpersonal Openness | 3.16; 2.30 | 3.34; 2.62 | -.783 | 490 | .434 |
| ASPPH | 34.15; 8.69 | 36.99; 9.34 | -3.47 | 490 | .001 |

Note: Numbers 6, 10, 18, 20, 41, 42, 52 are needs items on the Needs Assessment Survey; ASPPH = Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help. Confidence = Confidence in Psychological Help Providers; Stigma Tolerance; and Interpersonal Openness are the subscales of Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help. $P < .05$

Table 2

Ranking of Help Sources Preferred by Emirati College Students and Percentages

| Ranking | Source of Help | Percentage |
|---------|---|------------|
| 1. | Family | 78.1% |
| 2. | Friend or Classmate | 72.3% |
| 3. | Lectures | 61.1% |
| 4. | Consultation and Information | 46.7% |
| 5. | Individual Counseling | 45.1% |
| 6. | Religious Healer "Mutawaa" | 44.4% |
| 7. | Academic Advisor | 43.4% |
| 8. | Workshops/Outreach Programs | 42.3% |
| 9. | Psychological Help Outside the University | 35.3% |
| 10. | Group Counseling | 34.1% |

Table 3

Participants' Knowledge of the Counseling Services Offered by the University Counseling Center

| NO. | Services | Percentage |
|-----|-----------------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Outreach Programs | 75.4% |
| 2. | Advising | 73.9% |
| 3. | Academic Counseling | 72.9% |
| 4. | Improving Academic Skills Program | 68.6% |
| 5. | Workshops | 68.1% |
| 6. | Tutoring | 67.3% |
| 7. | Career Counseling | 63.7% |
| 8. | Individual Counseling | 56% |
| 9. | Consultation | 47.4% |
| 10. | Group Counseling | 45.2% |
| 11. | Psychological Testing | 42% |

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