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Perceptions of African adolescents to seeking professional psychological help

Abstract. *In recent times, the prevalence of distress thoughts and behaviours among young people in Africa has generated concerns. However, not many researchers have focused on the attitudes of Africans towards seeking professional psychological help. In this study, we sought to examine the perception of African adolescents to seek professional psychological help when faced with life threatening circumstances. A descriptive research design of survey type was employed to analyse data collected from 786 participants from South Africa and Nigeria who completed an online measure of Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH). 385 (48.9%) of the participants were male and 401 (51.0%) were female aged between 14 and 21. The results established that a slightly high negative perception to seek professional psychological help was found among African adolescents. Spiritual agents were the most preferred source of help, followed by family members, close and friends/peers. However, South African participants preferred to seek help from their close friends or peers, followed by no-one, family members, professional psychologists, while spiritual agents were the least sources of help. Further, the finding revealed that inadequate knowledge about professional psychological services, self-concealment, self-stigma, lack of accessibility to professional service providers, waiting time, cost of service and lack of trust were barriers to seeking professional psychological help. The study concludes that to promote professional psychological help seeking behaviour among African adolescents, awareness of psychological services as well as access to professional psychological services are required. Also, culture specific interventions that are digitalized would encourage African adolescents with psychological difficulties to seek professional psychological help.*

Keywords: *African adolescent, age, gender, perception, psychological help seeking.*

Introduction

One of the most turbulent stages of life is adolescence. This is because of some major developmental changes (physical, social-emotional, and cognitive) that occur. Ordinarily, transition from childhood to adolescence and preparation for adulthood could be challenging, due to biological, social, emotional physical, cognitive, and environmental alteration that characterized this stage of life with body image formation, social attitudes, and values, exploring several activities, including choice of friends and career (Erickson 1982; Hashmi, 2013; Lawrence, 2021). Also, increase risk taking, harmful habits as well as several other careless behaviour which characterized the stage pose threat on the successful transition to adulthood (Çelik, & Sahranç, 2015; Crone, Bullens, Van der Plas, Kijkuit & Zelazo, 2008). Thus, adolescence is a stressful and challenging stage with a variety of unresolved childhood conflicts exacerbated by

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some psychopathology that increase risk factors (Barnes, 2015). Besides, there are some cultural related issues that may have negative implications on the general wellbeing of individuals at this stage especially in Africa.

Deep-rooted in Africa are cultures, beliefs, values, practices, and norms, which shape African's attitudes, political, social, and economic activities. Adofo (2016) identified spirituality as one of such beliefs such that an average African holds the belief that the universe operates from two realms: the physical and spiritual. The spiritual realm is believed to control the physical. Also, the spiritual stratified into various spaces the penultimate source of creation and those of departed ancestors, spirits (deities). Therefore, fortunes and misfortunes are attributed to either the spirit of departed ancestors, deities, or the Supreme Being (God the creator). Similarly, it is believed in Africa that all things are universally interconnected and have impacts on each other (Chakale & Marumo, 2018). That is, Africans believe in a cause-and-effect relationship on all circumstances as well as acts and thoughts, which inform thought process or pattern, actions, and relationships. It is evident by the Bantu concept of Ubuntu (a philosophical view in Africa) which provides insights to the understanding of role of each member in a community towards the wellbeing of others (Edwards, 2018; Lefa, 2015; Makhonza, Lawrence & Nkoane, 2019). Thus, in Africa the whole community is not separate from the individual and their immediate environments. Therefore, African adolescents are wired by this concept and their response and attribution of life events are based on this culture.

In recent times, adolescents in Africa are engaging in some risky and careless behaviours that are self-destructive which were considered as abominations within Africa context such as suicidality, drug use and abuse, or deliberately ingest a substance more than prescribed dosage, gaming, and social devices (Lawrence 2021, Quarshie, Waterman & House, 2020). South Africa Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) (2016) identified alcohol, sexual addiction, hopelessness, loneliness, mental stress, anxiety, depression as well as suicidal behaviour as

common psychological difficulties that require professional help. Among other associated factors necessitating psychological help in the African continent are economic hardship, poor parenting, negative influence of the social media, individualistic and collectivistic, father absenteeism, child headed households' practices and orphanage (Lawrence & Fakuade 2021; Louw & Louw, 2014). Adolescents' perception and response to psychological difficulties have been reported to have negative consequences on their emotional, social/interpersonal relationships, psychological well being, mental healthiness, and economic growth (Achdut & Refaeli, 2020). Despite this, studies showed that African adolescents with psychological difficulties such as family problems, poverty, health problems, stress, bereavement or loss of parents, unemployment, depression, alcohol, sexual addiction, hopelessness, loneliness, mental stress, and suicidality often prefer to talk to no-one basically because of perceived lack of psychological resources, (SADAG, 2016).

Even though professional psychological help seeking is one of the most important problem-solving strategies in life, yet a large proportion of troubled adolescents are reluctant to seek psychological help when troubled. Cometto (2014) lamented that adolescents with psychological challenges/difficulties hardly seek professional help. This perhaps may be partly because of stigma, lack of confidence, wrong mentality about professional psychological help providers and cultural beliefs. This is not to say that these troubled individuals do not seek help but often not from professional psychologists. Hence, adolescents with severe psychological difficulties devise coping strategies from informal resources such as family, peers/friends, spiritual agents which sometimes may not offer sufficient and professional intervention that can help to navigate nonnormative, independently and successfully normative changes that characterized this stage of development. Often, such unprofessional resources do compound the problems causing many troubled individuals to lose interest and confidence in seeking help from professional psychologists. On the other hand,

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the perception of an individual to seek help from professionals' resources may determine their economic, political, social productivity and their quality of life. Unfortunately, not known studies have attempted to understand help seeking behavior from an African perspective. Hence, the concern of this study is to assess the perception of African adolescents seeking professional psychological help.

Related literature

Professional psychological help seeking as an important coping behaviour is conceptualized as a process that involves efforts made by individual or adolescents in this case to seek assistance from other professionally trained or skilled people to cope with problems or life-threatening circumstances (Cauce & Srebnik; 2003; Cometto, 2014). In other words, it consists of action taken by a person who may be experiencing distressing situation to find some form of, advice, direction, relieve or solution (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson & Ciarrochi, 2005). Conversely, health seeking is a term used interchangeably with health-seeking and it is described as part of mental illness and wellbeing (Motau, 2015). Professional psychological help seeking was defined by Cornally and McCarthay (2011) as deliberate steps taken by a person to solicit assistance from trained psychologist in response to emotional, psychological, social, educational, physical, family, career, interpersonal relationships financial problem(s) or any crises of life that such a person is encountering.

Various past studies have revealed different opinions on professional psychological help seeking behaviours. For instance, Arnault (2009) avers that culture affects people's perception, this assertion was justified by the fact that behavioural options to promote health or relieve suffering is perception related. That is, people from different cultural groups seek help for their suffering and crises of life based on how that culture perceived crises or suffering. Sandlana and Mtetwa (2008) emphasized that cultural practices are responsible for many African displaying an ambivalent attitude towards

help seeking, especially from the traditionalist. In a quantitative study conducted by Sukati (2011) on the relationship between religiosity in terms of beliefs, affiliation and orientation and help-seeking behaviour among 100 Africans in Pietermaritzburg, South African. It was found that people with the same age group displayed positive disposition towards psychological help seeking. In another study, ii was revealed that traditional African forms of help seeking were reported to be beneficial especially in relation to culture bound syndrome (Bomoyi (2011). The study suggested that traditional healing should be instilled into the counselling process to cater for people with African backgrounds.

The research of Gulliver, Griffiths, and Christensen (2012) established that young adults perceived that seeking psychology is a sign of weakness and other friends would have negatively viewed them. Another study found that a major hurdle to psychological seeking help for adolescents with mental illness, depression and substance abuse is stigmatization (Parcesepe & Cabassa 2013). The study conducted by Lally, Conghaile, Quigley, Bainbridge, and McDonald (2013) showed that psychological help seeking was influenced by perceived public stigma. Within sub-Saharan Africa, a study by Pheko, Chilisa, Balogun and Kgathi (2013) in Botswana revealed that youths had moderate intentions of seeking professional psychological help, while stigma was perceived as a barrier to seeking psychological help. Astudy conducted by Afolabi, Daropale, Irinoye and Adegoke (2013) among university students in Nigeria revealed that seeking counselling of family and close friends is preferrable. Cost of care, excessive waiting time, insufficient health information and unfriendly attitude of health care providers were identified as barriers to seeking professional help. A similar study in Ethiopia found that youths had positive attitudes towards help-seeking (Alemu, 2014). Equally, Alex (2015) found that participants had a poor understanding of their psychological problems, thereby feeling embarrassed by seeking psychological help. Intention of seeking psychological help was found to be moderate when predicted by perceived Social Support (Andoh–Arthur, Oppong Asante, & Osafo, 2015).

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In the same vein, similarly, Dierks (2016) found that adolescents had negative attitudes towards seeking psychological help, because of higher personal stigma. Further, the study revealed that adolescents with less education, especially male reported higher levels of public stigma, therefore, have negative attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. The study of Ampadu (2016) among Ghanaians indicated that participants preferred to seek help from intimate mental health professionals, partners, and phone helplines for mental health problems. Furthermore, the finding of the study is strongly associated with age, attitude towards help-seeking, marital status, religious commitment, and help-seeking intention. In a qualitative study by Seerane (2016), the outcome of the focus group discussion affirmed that attributed attitudes, age, and gender affected attitudes towards help-seeking behaviours. A collaborative awareness campaign by psychologists and professional care providers towards reducing stigmatization of help-seeking behaviours was suggested. Among the reviewed studies, no study provides insights to the role of African culture in seeking professional psychological help. Given this evidence, we can speculate that some African adolescents may not be seeking professional psychological help given their cultural orientation. A gap this study is out to fill.

Theoretical framework

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) propounded by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) was used to provide a theoretical lens to understand human behaviour in relation to help-seeking and psychological wellness. Theory of Reasoned Action has successfully been used in the past to determine peoples' beliefs, values or customs, culture, intention, or willingness to seek help. Basically, there are two assumptions that underpinned the theory. The first is that human behaviour is under volitional control and that people are rational beings. That is, the choice of behaving in a particular way is personal, and that people are always rational in the process of taking decisions or executing their action plans.

Thus, bahaviour is understood through attitude to a particular event or issues. Secondly, TRA posits that an individual's behavioural intent is either positive or negative which determines values and beliefs about the consequences arising from the action. Several theories are closely related to help seeking behaviour, including the social construction theory Bern (1993), health behaviour model (Glanz, Rimmer &Lewis, 1997), functionalist theory (Katz (as cited in Frenzoi, 2008), psychosocial theory (Erikson 1963).

However, given the focus of this study, the TRA was adopted by the authors because it sheds light on factors that determine an individual's behaviours such as: attitude (A), subjective norm (SN) and behavioural intention (BI). This theory holds that people's intention to carry out a particular action depends on their attitudes towards that behaviour and the subjective norms $(A + SN = BI)$. In this present study, if an adolescent with difficulties intends to seek professional psychological help such adolescents will take some actions including problem recognition, decide to seek help, and seek professional help. On the other hand, if a negative outcome is anticipated, such an individual will assume that everybody has one problem or the other and will decide not to seek psychological help (Ajzen, 2011). Thus, the aim of this study is to access perceptions of African adolescents to seeking professional psychological help.

Specifically, the study also:
- explored the perceived sources of psychological help when psychologically disturbed.
- determined barriers to seeking professional psychological help by Africa Adolescents.
- assess the perception of Africa adolescents to seeking professional psychological help.

It was considered that the findings of this study would enable Africa adolescents to have change of perception toward seeking professional psychological help, and access professional psychological service that are available to them, as well as assist professional help service providers or counselling psychologists to understand areas of concern of Africa adolescent

with psychological difficulties that prevent them from seeking professional psychological help.

Research questions

In other achieve the above stated objective, the following research questions will be asked and answered:

1. What were the sources of psychological help for African Adolescents when psychologically troubled?

2. What were the barriers to seeking professional psychological help as perceived by the participants?

3. What was the perception of African adolescents seeking professional psychological help?

Methods

The quantitative design of survey type was employed to achieve the objectives of the study. Participants were 786 school going Adolescents from Nigeria and South Africa, 385 males (48.9%) and 401 females (51.0%) with a mean age of 18 years (SD=1.56). Participants ages between 13 and 15 comprised 30.5 %, between 16 and 18 was 65.7 %, those between 19 and 21 accounted for 2.5 %, and those above 21 was just 1.2 % of the sample. The majority (98 %) of the participants were single. The sample consisted of 239 were secondary school students, 187 first year students in higher institutions, 95 second year students, 156 third year students and 109 fourth year. Most of the participant 87 % rated their socio-economic status to be moderate, and the remaining 13 % considered their socio-economic status to be low. Over percent (54.4 %) of the participants were Christians, those who were Muslims accounted for 43.4 %, while just 2.2 % belonged to other religious affiliations.

Ethical procedure

The international ethical protocols for research were observed. Ethical clearance was granted by the research committee of a university in South Africa with ethical number (UZREC 171110-030 Dept./15). In line with the international

research ethics standard, the confidentiality of the information provided by the participants was guaranteed as it will only be used for research purposes only. Also, participation was voluntary, and no penalty for non-participants, and an electronic consent form was completed by those who indicated interest in that study.

Instrument

The perception of the study participants on seeking professional psychological help was assessed using the modified version of Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPH) by Fischer and Farina (1995). The measure was originally developed by Fischer and Turner (1970). The revised version consists of 10-Items with response format rated on a 4-point Likert ranging from Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1). Items 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10 on the measure are reverse with score above 27 indicates more positive attitudes, scores between 14 and 26 implies moderate attitudes, while score below 13 reflect negative attitude toward seeking professional help. Internal consistency of the measure reported α=0.82 which is found to be acceptable (Vogel et al. 2005). Currently, the coefficient alpha value of the measure accounted for 0.60. Example of the items are; I might want to have psychological counselling in the future and Given the amount of time and money involved in psychotherapy, I am not sure that it would benefit someone like me.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected lasted for a month period using an online survey Google questionnaire comprising three sections. Section A deals with demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, religion affiliation, and socio-economic status. Section B involves sources of psychological help when psychological disturbed. Section C includes what constitutes barriers to seeking professional psychological help as perceived by the participants Data collected was analysed using quantitative methods of analyses. In this case, percentages of frequency as used.

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Results

The findings of this study are presented in two sections. The first section revealed the demographic characteristics of the participants as shows in table 1 as explained in the method section under sub-heading participants. Section two presents the three research questions in the study. The first research question which sought to know the sources of help of African Adolescents when troubled. The result in table 2 indicates that more South Africans 437(55.5%) participated in the study than Nigerians 349(44.4%). Of the Nigerian adolescents who seek help, their preferred source of help was identified as spiritual agents 289(82.7%), followed by family members 233(66.7%), followed by none 159(45.7%), close and friends/peers 152(43.6%). None of the Nigerian adolescents seek help from professional

psychologist 0(0%). The results in table 2 further shows 364(83.3%) South African adolescents preferred to seek help of their close friends or peers, followed 280(64.4%) who preferred not to seek help from nobody (none), 265 (60.7%) family members, professional psychologists 192 (44%), while spiritual agents 185 (42.0%) was the least source of help for South African adolescents who participated in the study.

The second research question intended to gain insight into some of the barriers to seeking professional psychological help as perceived by the participants. The result of the analysis as presented in table 3 reveals that inadequate knowledge about professional psychological services 746(95.9) was the greatest barrier to seek professional psychological help, followed by self-concealment 714 (90.8), self-stigma 623(79.2), lack of accessibility to professional service providers

Table 1. Demographic of participating African Adolescents (n = 786)

Categorical variables		Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	385	48.9
	Female	401	51.1
	Total	**786**	**100**
Age in years	13-15	240	30.5
	16-18	516	65.7
	19-21	20	2.5
	Above 21	10	1.3
	Total	**786**	**100**
Educational status	Secondary school	239	30.4
	First year in higher institution	187	23.7
	Second year in higher institution	95	12.1
	Third year in higher institution	156	19.9
	Fourt year in higher institution	109	13.9
	Total	**786**	**100**
Perceived Social Economic status	High	31	3.9
	Moderate	659	83.8
	Low	96	12.3
	Total	**786**	**100**
Religion Affiliations	Christianity	428	54.4
	Islam	341	43.4
	Others	17	2.2
	Total	**786**	**100**

Table 2. African Adolescents' source of help

Source	Nationality	
	Nigerian (n =349)	South African (n =437)
Family members	233(66.7 %)	265 (60.7%)
Close friends/peers	152(43.6%)	364(83.3%)
Spiritual agents	289(82.7%)	185 (42.0%)
None	159(45.7%)	280 (64%)
Professional psychologists	0(0%)	192 (44.0)

537(68.3), waiting time 403(51.3), cost of service 321(40.8), while lack of trust 211(26.8) was indicated as least barriers to seek professional psychological help by African Adolescents.

The third research question sought to assess the perception of participants towards seeking professional psychological help. The findings, as shown in table 3 established that the participants had a slightly high negative perception to seek professional psychological help, with five items rated above the average mean estimate of 1.8 and five items scoring a mean below the average mean. Specifically, item ten: 'Personal and emotional troubles, are common to everybody and tend to work out by themselves' yielded the highest score (mean = 2.31), followed by item nine: 'People should solve their own problems, therefore, getting psychological counselling would be their last resort (mean = 2.24)'. This was followed by item eight: 'Given the amount of time and money involved in psychotherapy, I am not sure that it would benefit someone like me.' (mean = 2.14). Next was item one, 'I admire people who are willing to cope with their problems and fears

without seeking professional help' with a mean = 2.09, and then item seven: 'Talking about problems with a psychologist seems to me as a poor way to get rid of psychological difficulties/ problems' (mean =2.03). However, item five: 'I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time' had the lowest mean value (mean =1.41), followed by item two: 'If I thought I was having a mental breakdown, my first thought would be to get professional attention' with a mean =1.45. Next was item six: 'If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis, I would be sure that psychotherapy would be useful', with a mean value of 1.52, followed by item four: 'I might want to have psychological counselling in the future' (mean =1.68) and item three: 'A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is more likely to solve it with professional help' (mean = 1.76). In summary, items 10, 9, 8, 7 and 1 had the highest mean score which indicates negative perception towards seeking professional psychological help. Although equal number of items were also below the weighted mean. Despite the equal number

Table 3. Barriers to help seeking as identified by African Adolescent's participants

Barriers	N =786	Mean
Inadequate knowledge about professional psychological services	746(95.9)	1.95
Self-concealment	714 (90.8)	1.85
Self-stigma	623(79.2)	1.711
Lack of accessibility to professional service providers	537(68.3)	1.71
Waiting time	403(51.3)	1.69
Cost of service	321(40.8)	1.64
Lack of trust	211(26.8)	1.57

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Simple percentages showing the responses of the participants to attitude
towards psychological help wellbeing items

S/N	Items	SD%	D%	A%	SA%	M	SD
1.	I admire people who are willing to cope with their problems and fears without seeking professional help.	404(51.4)	15(1.9)	257(32.7)	110(14.0)	2.09	1.18
2.	If I thought I was having a mental breakdown, my first thought would be to get professional attention	621(79.4)	29(3.7)	67(8.4)	67(8.4)	1.45	0.96
3.	A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is more likely to solve it with professional help.	507(64.5)	15(1.9)	206(26.2)	59(7.5)	1.76	1.07
4.	I might want to have psychological counselling in the future.	558(71.0)	15(1.9)	118(15.0)	95(12.1)	1.68	1.12
5.	I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time.	639(81.3)	29(3.7)	59(7.5)	59(7.5)	1.41	0.92
6.	If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis, I would be sure that psychotherapy would be useful	602(76.6)	0(0)	140(17.8)	44(5.6)	1.52	0.97
7.	Talking about problems with a psychologist seems to me as a poor way to get rid of psychological difficulties/ problems	404(51.4)	44(5.6)	242(30.8)	95(12.1)	2.03	1.14
8.	Given the amount of time and money involved in psychotherapy, I am not sure that it would benefit someone like me.	331(42.1)	73(9.3)	316(40.2)	66(8.4)	2.14	1.07
9.	People should solve their own problems, therefore, getting psychological counselling would be their last resort	272(34.6)	132(16.8)	301(38.3)	81(10.3)	2.24	1.04
10.	Personal and emotional troubles, are common to everybody and will tend to work out by themselves	227(29.0)	162(20.6)	316(40.2)	81(10.3)	2.31	1.00

Average weighted mean value = 1.86

Key: SD, strongly disagree; D, disagree; A, agree; SA, strongly agree; M, mean; SD: standard deviation.

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of items, the overall results establish that the participants have negative perception towards seeking professional psychological help when faced with difficulties of life.

Discussion

This study accessed the perception of African adolescents towards seeking professional psychological help. It also explored the sources of help of the participants when faced with life challenges as well as likely barriers to seeking professional psychological help. Findings revealed a contrasting source of help. For Nigerian participants, spiritual agents were the most preferred source of help, followed by family members, close and friends/peers. However, South African participants preferred to seek help from their close friends or peers, which is closely followed by no-one, family members, professional psychologists, while spiritual agents were the least sources of help for South African adolescents when experiencing problems. This implies that African adolescents do seek help when the need arises but not from professional psychological sources. The only plausible explanation for these outcomes may perhaps be because of African beliefs, and practices that is deep-rooted spirituality as well as being humane. As mentioned earlier that Africans like to attribute both pleasant and unpleasant circumstances to God (Chakale & Marumo, 2018). That is, every event as a cause-and-effect relationship which to a large extent shape Africans' perception and inform their behaviours. Likewise, the Ubuntu philosophy also uphold the communal roles which provides for close tie with friends and family members towards the wellbeing of others (Edwards, 2018).

This finding corroborates previous studies on a similar topic AlDarmaki (2011); Lefa (2015); Makhonza, Lawrence and Nkoane (2019); Motau, (2015); Sukati (2011). Logically, this trend can be associated with African nature which affirms one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and establish some humane relations with others (Makhonza, Lawrence & Nkoane, 2019; Ramose, 2015), thus make it easier to seek help from a friend and family member (Motau, 2015). Interestingly, Christianity is the largest dominant religion in South Africa, while Nigeria population is mostly Muslims, hence pastors and Imams provide psychological and emotional supports to members who are facing psycho-social problems (De Kok, 2005; Motau, 2015). In addition, literature on African shows that faith and traditional healing-based system plays crucial roles in help seeking behaviour of Africans (Andoh–Arthur, Oppong Asante, & Osafo, 2015; Asamoah, Osafo, & Agyapong, 2014; Osafo, J., Agyapong & Asamoah, 2015). According to the theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) reviewed in this study, with emphasis on people's intention, their attitudes, and the subjective norms (A + SN =BI). Thus, the participants preferences are significantly influenced by subjective norms of their actions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Hence, African adolescents with distress will prefer to consult their spiritual agents, close friends, and family members when facing psycho-social difficulties.

The finding further revealed that inadequate knowledge about professional psychological services, self-concealment, self-stigma, lack of accessibility to professional service providers, waiting time, cost of service and lack of trust in the professional psychologist were the most endorsed barriers to seek professional psychological help. People are likely to be reluctant to seek professional psychological help simple because they are inadequately informed on various therapeutic services that are beneficial to helping overcome their challenges. Similarly, the adolescence stage is marked by a sense of autonomy which explains the ability of individual adolescents to regulate their own behaviours and actions (Smetana, 2017). At this stage of development, styles of thinking also grow and change and may discourage help seeking efforts (Schonert-Reichl, & Muller, 1996). In line with other studies which found that self-concealment limits young people's likelihood of seeking professional help, because self-disclosure may be perceived as a threat to their autonomy. This finding agrees with several previous

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research such as Del Mauro and Williams (2013); Dierks (2016); Wilson and Deane (2012) who found higher personal stigma as the main barrier towards seeking psychological help. Parcesepe and Cabassa (2013) revealed that adolescents with mental illness, depression and substance abuse when stigmatized may not seek help. Other studies that support this claim are Afolabi, Daropale, Irinoye and Adegoke (2013) cost of service and lack of trust, Lally, et al., (2013); Pheko, et al, (2013) public stigma as perceived barriers to seeking psychological help.

Overall, the results also show that the participants had a slightly high negative perception to seek professional psychological help. This is evident in the rating of the items on ATSPPH with personal and emotional troubles, tend to work out by themselves' yielded the highest mean value followed by the belief that people should solve their own problems, therefore, getting psychological counselling would be their last resort. The participants also believe that psychotherapy service is costly, people who are willing to cope with their problems and fears without seeking professional help are admirable and self-disclosure was regarded as a poor way to get rid of psychological difficulties/ problems. The reason for this negative perception to seek professional psychological help may not be unconnected to the barriers listed earlier. Consistent with extant studies, this study showed African adolescents have negative and poor perception towards seeking professional psychological help. The meanings of African adolescents' most psychological, social, personal, and emotional problems typically inform their attitudes towards seeking professional help. This perception is enmeshed within African culture.

This finding concurred with Achdut and Refaeli (2020) who reported that adolescents have negative perception and response to psychological difficulties which has resulted in negative consequences on their emotional, social/ interpersonal relationships, psychological well being, mental healthiness, and economic growth. Likewise, Gulliver, Griffiths, and Christensen (2012) established that young adults perceived that seeking psychology is a sign of weakness

and other friends would have negatively viewed them. Equally, this finding laid credence to the research of Cometto (2014) who bemoaned that adolescents with psychological distress hardly seek professional help. On the contrary, this finding opposes the studies of Andoh–Arthur, Oppong Asante and Osafo (2015); Ampadu (2016) who indicated that Ghanaian adolescents had moderate intention to seek psychological help, although they claimed that the moderate intention varied according to the participants' year of study. This notwithstanding, the African nature in adolescence is an undeniable factor that may shape the participants' perception to seek professional psychological help. Also, a typical adolescent most times prefers to keep their problems more to themselves, ignore/cope with their problems or try to solve them on their own instead of expressing them (Demir, Murat & Bindak, 2020).

Implications for psychological interventions

The study has practical implication for psychological intervention as follows. Firstly, the preferred sources of help by African adolescents emphasized the urgent need for public awareness of services and benefits of professional psychological help providers in Africa. It is germane that African adolescents change their perception toward seeking professional psychological help and explore available professional psychological service that are accessible to them. Noticeably, the very nature of the psychological help system been practiced today in Africa is incongruous with traditional and faith norms. Thus, professional help service providers or counselling psychologists should integrate credible faith-based counselling approaches into counselling services by selecting therapeutic regimens that are consistent with the Africa beliefs, values, and cultural practices. Professional Counselling centres are not common in Africa, efforts should be made to ensure that professional counselling services are readily available and accessible to all. Barriers that were identified in this study can be incorporated into interventions. Importantly, collaboration with

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professional psychological help providers and faith/traditional-based systems can provide rich insights and make the psychological help service more attractive. Although Adolescents may be seeking help from spiritual agents, training of personnel in this area in basic therapeutic roles could help ameliorate negative consequences that such service may have on the society.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This present study was not without some biases. First, the sample size was relatively small compared to millions of adolescents in Africa and potentially not large enough to generalise the findings. A larger sample size would improve the ability of the results to be generalised. This study was concerned with the perception of African adolescents, whereas there are several contributory factors that may be responsible for their negative perception as found in this study. However, future studies may consider other factors such as self-esteem, family socio-economic status, age, gender, emotional intelligence, type of family, social support among other. This study adopted the survey design, a mixed-method and intervention approach that would focus on building of African adolescent on help seeking skills are suggested. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the findings of the study have added to current literature about the perception African adolescents to seek professional psychological help and highlighted likely barriers in African context.

Future research is needed to explore adolescent' intentions to seek help from other sources, as this study only concentrated on seeking from professional psychological help providers. This study can also be replicated in another continents.

Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to access perceptions of African adolescents seeking professional psychological help, explore the perceived sources of psychological help when psychologically disturbed, and determine barriers to seeking professional psychological help by Africa Adolescents. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) propounded by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) was used to provide a theoretical lens in the study. We found that spiritual agents were the most preferred source of help, followed by family members, close and friends/peers. However, South African participants preferred to seek help from their close friends or peers, which is closely followed by no-one, family members, professional psychologists, while spiritual agents were the least sources of help for South African adolescents when experiencing problems. Further, the finding revealed that inadequate knowledge about professional psychological services, self-concealment, self-stigma, lack of accessibility to professional service providers, waiting time, cost of service and lack of trust in the professional psychologist were the most endorsed barriers to seek professional psychological help. A slightly high negative perception to seek professional psychological help was found among African adolescents. Consequently, these findings should be considered appropriate interventions in the African context.

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Африкалық жасөспірімдердің кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгінуін қабылдау

Аңдатпа. Жақында Африкадағы жастар арасында стресстік ойлар мен мінез-құлықтардың тара-луы алаңдаушылық туғызды. Алайда, көптеген зерттеушілер африкалықтардың кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгінуге деген көзқарасына назар аудармады. Бұл зерттеуде біз африкалық жасөспірімдердің өмірге қауіп төндіретін жағдайлар туындаған кезде кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгінуге деген көзқарасын зерттеуге тырыстық. Оңтүстік Африка мен Нигериядан келген 786 қатысушының «кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгіну» (ATSPPH) онлайн сауалнамасын толтырған деректерін талдау үшін зерттеудің сипаттамалық әдісі қолданылды. Қатысушылардың 385-і (48,9%) ерлер, ал 401-і (51,0%) 14 пен 21 жас аралығындағы әйелдер болды. Нәтижелер африкалық жасөспірімдер арасында кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгінуге біршама жоғары теріс көзқарас табылғанын көрсетті. Көмектің ең қолайлы көзі рухани агенттер болды, содан кейін отбасы мүшелері, жақындары мен достары/құрдастары. Алайда, оңтүстік африкалық қатысушылар өздерінің жақын достарынан немесе құрдастарынан көмек сұрауды жөн көрді, содан кейін ешкім, отбасы мүшелері, кәсіби психологтар, ал рухани агенттер ең аз көмек көзі болды. Со-

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нымен қатар, зерттеу нәтижелері кәсіби психологиялық қызметтер туралы білімнің жеткіліксіздігі, өзін-өзі жасыру, өзін-өзі стигма, кәсіби қызмет көрсетушілердің қол жетімсіздігі, күту уақыты, қызметтердің құны және сенімсіздік кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгінуге кедергі болатындығын көрсетті. Зерттеу африкалық жасөспірімдер арасында кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгіну мінез-құлқын ынталандыру үшін психологиялық қызметтер туралы хабардар болу, сондай-ақ кәсіби психологиялық қызметтерге қол жеткізу қажет деген қорытындыға келді. Сонымен қатар, мәдени ерекшеліктерді ескере отырып және цифрлық технологияларды қолдана отырып араласу психологиялық қиындықтарға тап болған африкалық жасөспірімдердің кәсіби психологиялық көмекке жүгінуіне ықпал етеді.

Түйін сөздер: африкалық жасөспірім, жас, жыныс, қабылдау, психологиялық көмекке жүгіну.

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**Восприятие африканскими подростками обращения
за профессиональной психологической помощью**

Аннотация. В последнее время распространенность дистрессовых мыслей и поведения среди молодых людей в Африке вызывает озабоченность. Однако немногие исследователи уделяли внимание отношению африканцев к обращению за профессиональной психологической помощью. В данном исследовании мы попытались изучить отношение африканских подростков к обращению за профессиональной психологической помощью при возникновении угрожающих жизни обстоятельств. Для анализа данных, полученных от 786 участников из Южной Африки и Нигерии, заполнивших онлайн-опросник «Отношение к обращению за профессиональной психологической помощью» (ATSPPH), был использован описательный метод исследования. 385 (48,9%) участников были мужчинами и 401 (51,0%) - женщинами в возрасте от 14 до 21 года. Результаты показали, что среди африканских подростков было обнаружено несколько высокое негативное отношение к обращению за профессиональной психологической помощью. Наиболее предпочтительным источником помощи были духовные агенты, за которыми следовали члены семьи, близкие и друзья/ровесники. Однако южноафриканские участники предпочитали обращаться за помощью к своим близким друзьям или сверстникам, за ними следовали члены семьи, профессиональные психологи, в то время как духовные агенты были наименее предпочтительными источниками помощи. Кроме того, результаты исследования показали, что недостаточные знания о профессиональных психологических услугах, самосокрытие, самостигма, недоступность профессиональных поставщиков услуг, время ожидания, стоимость услуг и отсутствие доверия являются барьерами для обращения за профессиональной психологической помощью. В исследовании делается вывод, что для стимулирования поведения по обращению за профессиональной психологической помощью среди африканских подростков необходима осведомленность о психологических услугах, а также доступ к профессиональным психологическим услугам. Кроме того, вмешательства с учетом культурных особенностей и с использованием цифровых технологий будут способствовать тому, что африканские подростки, испытывающие психологические трудности, будут обращаться за профессиональной психологической помощью.

Ключевые слова: Африканский подросток, возраст, пол, восприятие, обращение за психологической помощью.

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