

# The Influence of Self-Stigma and Personality Traits on Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help Among College Students in A Faith-Based University

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**ABSTRACT** This study explores the influence of self-stigma and personality traits on the attitude toward seeking professional psychological help among college students in a faith-based university. Data was collected from 405 participants (32 from a pilot study and 373 from the main study) using both online and hardcopy questionnaires (Google Forms). Descriptive and correlational analysis were conducted using SPSS, and the suggested mediation model was validated using structural equation modelling. The respondents' low levels of self-stigma were revealed by the findings. Regarding their attitude towards seeking help, the students exhibit a good inclination to seek help and an uncertain indifference to stigma and psychological openness. In contrast, extraversion and openness were high, while neuroticism, agreeableness, and consciousness were considered uncertain. It was discovered that self-stigma predicted attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Agreeableness was revealed to be the best predictor of attitudes towards obtaining psychological assistance. In terms of gender, age, and college, it was discovered that women were more likely to be positive about asking for help, and that students in the arts, education and science colleges were more willing to do so. Personality qualities and help-seeking attitudes are positively correlated, whereas self-stigma and attitudes are negatively correlated. Personality traits were found to partially mediate the relationship between self-stigma and attitude toward seeking psychological help.

**Keywords:** self- stigma, help seeking attitudes, personality traits, college students

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health challenges are particularly prevalent during early adulthood, with research showing that 75% of individuals will have experienced a mental health condition by the age of 25 (Kessler et al., 2009). Among college students, these challenges are becoming increasingly visible, often due to the pressures of academic life, the transition to independence, reduced social support, and various psychosocial stressors (Pedrelli et al., 2014; Moeller et al., 2020). These factors can

contribute to the onset, persistence, or worsening of mental health problems, which may go untreated and have lasting negative effects on students' educational, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social functioning (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020).

Despite growing awareness and the availability of psychological services, many students still choose not to seek professional help. Global research has shown that 58% of individuals with mental health concerns do not pursue psychological services, often due to stigma, while only a small minority seek help in the absence of a diagnosed issue (Nietzel, 2021). Internalized stigma, or self-stigma, plays a key role in this avoidance, as individuals may feel ashamed, view themselves as weak, or experience a decrease in self-worth because of their mental health struggles (Vogel et al., 2006; Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Burch, 2022). These negative self-perceptions can discourage individuals from seeking help and influence their overall attitude toward psychological services (Corrigan, 2004; Martinez et al., 2020). Help-seeking attitudes are also shaped by a person's willingness to be open, comfort with stigma, and belief in the effectiveness of professional support.

While there is substantial evidence linking self-stigma to negative help-seeking attitudes (Topkaya, 2021), less is known about the potential mediating role of personality traits in this relationship. Specifically, the influence of the Big Five personality traits—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—has not been widely examined. Moreover, most existing research focuses on psychology students, who may already be more aware of mental health issues and less affected by stigma. This raises questions about how students from other academic disciplines experience these dynamics (Jennings et al., 2015; Nizam & Nen, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between self-stigma and attitudes toward seeking psychological help and to explore whether personality traits mediate this relationship among a broader population of college students.

This study sought to address the subsequent research inquiries.

1. What is the level of respondents' self-stigma, personality traits, and attitude toward seeking psychological help
2. Is there a significant relationship between the following?
  - a. Self- Stigma and Personality Traits
  - b. Self- Stigma and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help
  - c. Personality Traits and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help
3. Which of the personality traits best predicts attitude toward seeking psychological help?

## **I. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review aims to explore the relevance of the variables involved in this study, specifically personality characteristics, internalized stigma, and willingness towards

getting psychological assistance and their sub-variables. This review will understand the nature of each variable and compare different research findings both globally and locally to support the foundation of the research.

### **Relationship of Self-Stigma and Personality Traits**

Self-stigma, also known as internalized stigma, is when a person assimilates negative social views and attitudes on mental health and getting psychological assistance. This goes beyond just being aware of the stigma in society but applying it to oneself when seeking psychological assistance or dealing with a mental health issue. The level of stigma might differ depending on cultural background and geographical location however it threatens one's ability to meet daily expectations. According to Corrigan (2004), by avoiding going for treatment one can avoid developing internalized fear and embarrassment. This could be a reason why there are lower numbers of people seeking psychological help although mental issues are on the rise. Research done with a total of 3000 participants revealed that internalized sigma limited people from using services when they were at risk for psychiatric disorders. Internalizing negative perceptions associated with psychological help seeking has detrimental effects on the person experiencing them. It may cause low self-esteem, which includes low self-worth, low self-confidence, and low self-satisfaction. These negative reactions can also result in reduced help-seeking behavior, isolation from others and a reduced standard of living (Evans-Lacko et al., 2011; Corrigan & Rao, 2012).

***Personality traits and Self Stigma.*** The persistent pattern of emotions, behavior and the thoughts which stay the same over time and differ among individuals" are known as personality traits. These distinctions could help to explain why some individuals with mental illness are more likely to experience stigma, while others are able to create flexible coping mechanisms (Szcześniak et al., 2021). One study had discovered that personality was an important predictor of stigma and help-seeking intentions. Their study found that agreeableness consistently showed protective effects across all models, indicating that individuals high in agreeableness are less likely to accept stigma and develop self- stigma and more likely to have positive attitudes and intentions toward seeking help (Murphy & Mackenzie., 2024).

### **Relationship of Self-Stigma and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said that about 25% of people worldwide experience anxiety and sadness, according to a prior study. A person's life may be significantly impacted by mental illness, which can lead to extreme distress and incapacity. Unfavorable opinions about mental illness and getting psychological assistance can discourage individuals from seeking psychological assistance and hinder their ability to recover from mental illnesses (Alluhaibi & Awadalla, 2022).

***Psychological Openness.*** It has been demonstrated that having a positive outlook or being psychologically prepared to ask for assistance, when necessary, promotes real help-seeking behavior. Individuals who are open about mental health and understand its impact are more willing to seek assistance (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). Feeling listened to, respected, and free from judgment also increases the likelihood of sharing psychological concerns; however, studies suggest that individuals may still hesitate to confide in a stranger (Chen et al., 2020).

People who lack mental health literacy may be even less inclined to seek psychological assistance since they may not completely comprehend its advantages. Studies involving adolescents show that both they and the adults around them may not recognize mental illness, leading to reluctance in discussing these issues (Hellström & Beckman, 2021). Conversely, individuals who attribute symptoms of mental illness to supernatural causes may be more inclined to seek culturally conventional or religious forms of healing, often perceiving professional psychological help as ineffective (Tan et al., 2020).

***Indifference to Stigma.*** The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines stigma as a collection of unjust and unfavorable opinions that others hold about something. Numerous studies have examined how public stigma influences people's decision to seek help. Due to the stigmatization of psychological help in society, people may choose not to seek it out (Beukema et al., 2022).

Mentally ill people are seen as dangerous, incapable, and responsible for their affliction. (Corrigan et al., 2006). Those who may be struggling with mental illness not only deal with mental health but also the stereotype and prejudice that result from misconceptions about it (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

***Help Seeking Propensity.*** A person's predisposition to obtain assistance when confronted with a problem is known as their "help-seeking propensity." If a person perceives psychological help as inaccessible, they may be less likely to seek it, even if they have a positive mindset toward help seeking (Tomczyk et al., 2020). This propensity is influenced by different factors, including culture, past experiences, self-reliance, and personality traits. According to Tomczyk et al. (2020), if people believe that psychological assistance is in line with their values and aims, they are more inclined to seek it out. For instance, those who prioritize mental health and set it as a goal are more willing to seek assistance.

### **Relationship between Personality Traits and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help**

The Big Five Personality Traits (OCEAN) is a main research paradigm in personality psychology, and one of the most influential models in all of psychology (McCrae, 2012). As indicated in APA (American Psychological Association) Dictionary of Psychology, the big five personality model has different dimensions of personalities that vary among individuals. It is labeled as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The openness factor enhances a person's ability to process information by allowing them to handle complexity and adapt with flexibility. In contrast to neuroticism, which is linked to negative emotions like anxiety, depression, and emotional instability, conscientiousness is associated with rule-following and strong self-control. Extraversion contributes significantly to a person's personality and is significant aspect of their life, and agreeableness reflects a person's propensity to be caring and maintain positive relationships with others (Lynn, 2021).

Personality also influences every human behavior in social and personal contexts, and it may also trigger conflicts with the person's environment, it also influences heavily in making

decisions (Sucio et al., 2021) including our attitude toward obtaining psychological assistance and negative perceptions of self-due to stigma.

Another key finding is that high levels of neuroticism correlate with avoidance coping strategies. High neurotic individuals tend to use avoidance when dealing with stressful events. Neurotic individuals often resort to avoidance strategies, such as pretending nothing happened, sleeping more, trying to forget events, or avoiding social contact to feel more comfortable during stress (Galopeni et al., 2018). Neuroticism has also been found to be the strongest predictor of self-stigma as it is described as one's ability to feel negative emotions. Prolonged feelings of negative emotions have been shown to reduce thinking efficiently about oneself and one's situation, thus leading to maladaptive coping skills. Neurotic people tend to relate stigma to stress and thus experience more fully than others (Szcześniak et al., 2021).

Among the Big Five traits, agreeableness exerts the strongest influence on help-seeking attitudes, followed by conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, and neuroticism. This emphasizes the role of personality in shaping the willingness to find psychological aid.

## II. METHODS

### Research Design

The study used descriptive correlation design with structural equation modeling. It determines the relation between self-stigma and the attitude towards seeking psychological help and the mediating role of personality traits. It allows for the simultaneous modelling and estimation of intricate interactions between the independent and dependent variables by researchers (Collier, 2020). This was used to investigate the mediating effect of personality trait on self-stigma and attitude toward seeking psychological help.

### Population and Sampling Techniques

The study targeted students from a faith-based university, involving a total of 405 participants from eight different colleges during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Of these, 32 participated in a pilot study, and 373 were included in the final sample. The researchers used proportionate stratified sampling, where the number of participants from each stratum matched their proportion in the overall population, giving everyone an equal chance of selection (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021). To determine the sample size, the researchers used Yamane's formula (Asenahabi & Ikoha, 2023) and then randomly selected participants from each college based on their proportional representation.

### Research Instrumentation

Three questionnaires were used in the study: Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help (SSOSH), the Inventory of Attitude Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS) and the Big Five Inventory (BFI).

### Data Gathering

Data were collected through an online survey platform to ensure accessibility and convenience for participants. Participants were allotted at least 30 minutes to complete the

questionnaire. Data collection was done over two months. Once the data collection was concluded, the data underwent statistical analysis.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were considered for this study. The researchers made sure to follow the ethical guidelines of the Psychological Association of the Philippines, Code of Ethics and follow the Data Privacy Act of 2012 by protecting the privacy of the participants. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

### Data Analysis

The respondent's profile in terms of self-stigma, attitude towards seeking psychological help and personality traits were measured using descriptive statistics such as means, and standard deviation. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Correlational analysis examined relationships between variables. Description statistics were utilized for demographic frequency distribution of the participants such as age, gender, and colleges of the participants. The correlational method was used to gauge the relationship between the variables. Furthermore, regression analysis using stepwise multiple regression identifies the variable with the strongest influence or association with the dependent variable (Henderson & Denison, 1989). It was used to identify which variable best predicted attitude toward seeking psychological help. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Smart Pls were used for the validation analysis.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation of Descriptive

*Table 1: Self-Stigma Level, Psychological, and Indifference Stigma of College Students*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Scaled Response	Verbal Interpretation
Self-Stigma Level	2.4176	.54045	Disagree	Low Self-Stigma
Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help (Psychological Openness)	3.2475	.42652	Undecided	Undecided
Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help (Indifference to Stigma)	3.4901	.54281	Undecided	Undecided
Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help (Help Seeking Propensity)	3.5409	.42517	Somewhat Agree	Positive

The overall results indicate that the sample population has low self-stigma. This shows that they do not adopt negative beliefs about themselves when they seek psychological help. Fox et al. (2017) found that people who experience negative views of self due to seeking help are more likely to experience higher levels of depression, lower levels of self-esteem, and more severe symptoms if they are dealing with any problems. The findings indicate that the sample

population is less likely to experience these problems because they have a low level of internalized stigma.

A study by Rickwood and Braithwaite (1994) and Chen et al. (2020) state that an individual is hesitant in sharing psychological concerns when they are in a culture where suppressing emotions is emphasized. This illustrates that even those students who understand the comfort of seeking help still resist being open in seeking psychological help.

With an overall mean score of 3.49 (SD = 0.54) reflects an undecided attitude seeking mental health services. The results show that most of the respondents are not strongly influenced by the stigma for their attitude toward seeking psychological help.

Respondents have overall positive help seeking propensity  $M=3.54$  (SD of .425). This means that the sample population are willing to seek help if needed due to a positive view of seeking psychological help potentially due to their personal and cultural beliefs.

According to Griffiths et al. (2011) people who sought out help from friends for depression were more likely to report the benefits with over 80% discussing the benefits. This indicates people see the benefits of seeking help even though it might be informal.

### Respondents Big Five Inventory Profile

This section contains the mean, standard deviation, scaled response and the verbal interpretation related to the personality types included in the Big Five Inventory. Table 2 shows the extent of different personality types among college students at the faith-based university.

**Table 2. Big Five Inventory**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Scaled Response	Verbal Interpretation
Openness	3.3461	.46177	Agree and Disagree Equally	Uncertain
Conscientiousness	3.6917	.46177	Somewhat Agree	High
Extroversion	3.5966	.47260	Somewhat Agree	High
Agreeableness	3.3008	.46176	Agree and Disagree Equally	Uncertain
Neuroticism	3.2751	.41098	Agree and Disagree Equally	Uncertain

With an overall mean score of 3.35 (SD = 0.462), this interprets that the sample population has an uncertain level of openness, this indicates that the respondents show an unsure level of being open to new discoveries and experiences. While the conscientiousness has an overall mean score of 3.92 (SD = 0.538), this interprets that the sample population has a high level of conscientiousness. This indicates that the respondents tend to have a good interpersonal relationship and have the means to connect with people in a positive way.

The overall results of extraversion indicate that the sample population has a high level of extroversion. This suggests that participants generally view themselves as outgoing, curious, and open to new experiences. The overall results indicate that the sample population demonstrates an uncertain level of agreeableness, with a mean score of 3.3008. These findings suggest that while participants may appear shy at times, they also possess strong social energy

and enthusiasm. Overall, the results reflect a generally agreeable and enthusiastic group, with a few traits showing more neutrality. With an overall mean score of 3.28 (SD = 0.411), this interprets that the sample population has an uncertain level of neuroticism.

### Correlation of Self-Stigma and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help

Table 3 presents how self- stigma correlates with attitude toward seeking psychological help using correlational statistics. The results prove a significant relationship at  $p > 0.01$ .

Table 3: Self- Stigma and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help

		Psychological Openness	Help Seeking Propensity	Indifference to Stigma	Attitude towards Seeking Mental Health Services
Self Stigma	<i>r</i>	-.099	-.192**	-.201**	-.557**
	<i>p-value</i>	.055	.000	.000	.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The sub-variables of attitude toward seeking psychological help such as the help seeking propensity and indifference to stigma have a significant relationship with self-stigma. However, the psychological openness sub-variable is found to be insignificant with self-stigma showing that there is no meaningful relationship between the two variables. Overall self- stigma has a moderate negative correlation with attitude toward seeking psychological help which implies that the higher the self-stigma the lower the likelihood of seeking psychological help.

According to Vogel et al. (2006) self-stigma is an important factor in people's decisions not to engage in therapy. In addition, a study conducted by Pattyn et al. (2014) identified that respondents with higher levels of self-stigma attached less importance to care provided by general practitioners or psychiatrists. Self-stigma may also lead people to avoid seeking help because it affects feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

### Correlation of Self-Stigma and Personality Traits

Table 4 presents correlation analysis to determine how self- stigma correlates to personality traits.

Table 4: Self- Stigma and Personality Traits

		Openness	Conscientiousness	Extroversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Self Stigma	<i>r</i>	.040	-.214**	-.171**	-.188**	-.169**
	<i>p-value</i>	.445	<.001	<.001	<.001	.001

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results shown in table 4, the sub variables of the personality traits such as the neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extroversion have a significant relationship with the self-stigma. This means that when self-stigma is high or increases then personality traits such as neuroticism, conscientiousness, extroversion, and agreeableness tend to be low or decrease. In contrast, the openness personality trait does not exhibit a significant relationship with self-stigma. This means that these traits of personality are less relevant in understanding an individual's self- stigma.

In support of this, a study conducted by Murphy and Mackenzie (2024) found out that an individual with a high agreeableness is less likely to endorse stigmas. In addition, Hu (2023) and Shabrina et al (2022) demonstrates that personality traits such as conscientiousness and extraversion are connected in having healthy copy strategies, can regulate their emotions, and have a greater help seeking intentions.

### Correlation of Personality Traits and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help

Table 5 presents the correlation between Personality Traits and attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help.

Table 5: Personality Traits and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help

		Psychological Openness	Help Seeking Propensity	Indifference to Stigma	Attitude towards Seeking Mental Health Services
Extroversion	<i>r</i>	.083	.140**	.095	.150**
	<i>p-value</i>	.109	.007	.068	.004
Neuroticism	<i>r</i>	.003	.265**	.056**	.159
	<i>p-value</i>	.949	<.001	.283	.002
Conscientiousness	<i>r</i>	.032**	.131**	.178**	.169**
	<i>p-value</i>	.536	.012	<.001	.001
Openness	<i>r</i>	.000	-.003	-.084	-.045
	<i>p-value</i>	.999	.948	.105	.384
Agreeableness	<i>r</i>	.161**	.243**	.224**	.302**
	<i>p-value</i>	.002	<.001	<.001	<.001
Big Five Inventory	<i>r</i>	.222**	.752**	.636**	.209**
	<i>p-value</i>	.000	.000	.000	.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results show that there is a significant relationship between personality traits and attitudes toward seeking mental health services, indicating that personality influences help-seeking behavior. Specifically, agreeableness showed the strongest and most consistent positive correlation across all four dimensions. This suggests that agreeable individuals, characterized by empathy and cooperativeness, are more likely to seek help and less influenced by societal stigma. Extraversion was also significantly associated with help-seeking propensity and positive attitudes, likely due their sociability and comfort in engaging with others. Meanwhile, conscientiousness and neuroticism also showed positive associations with help-seeking behaviors, though to a lesser extent. In contrast, openness to experience did not show any significant relationship with help-seeking variables. These findings

emphasize that personality traits like extraversion and agreeableness have a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive mental health help-seeking, specifically in terms of their willingness to seek help and disregard stigma.

Personality traits appear to be significant predictors of help-seeking stigma, attitudes, and intentions, even when controlling for other known factors. These findings suggest that personality may help identify individuals at greater risk of avoiding psychological help (Murphy & Mackenzie, 2024, as cited in *PsychInfo*, 2024).

Table 6 presents regression analysis related to the research question "Which of the personality traits best predicts attitude toward seeking psychological help?"

*Table 6: Predictor of Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help*

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Agreeableness	.302	.091	.222	.036	.302	6.085	<.001

Sig. at 0.05

Table 6 shows the regression analysis which revealed that agreeableness ( $B=.222$ ,  $t=6.085$ ,  $p<.001$ ) was the significant predictor of attitude toward seeking psychological help. Agreeableness accounts for 9.1% of variance of a person's attitude toward seeking psychological help. This implies that those with high agreeableness tend to have a higher attitude toward seeking psychological help. The other personality traits such as conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness did not have a statistically significant ( $p>.05$ ) effect on attitude toward seeking psychological help.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among self-stigma, personality traits, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help among college students at a faith-based university. The findings show that the participants have a low level of self-stigma, suggesting that they do not internalize negative beliefs about themselves when considering seeking psychological help. However, despite the overall low self-stigma, the results indicate that it remains a central psychological barrier, and has a subtle but meaningful influence on help-seeking behavior.

In addition, their attitudes toward seeking psychological help; the psychological openness was uncertain, meaning that the students did not reject the idea of seeking help but were also not fully confident or open about it. Considering indifference to stigma, most of the respondents were not significantly influenced by the public stigma surrounding seeking psychological help. Furthermore, help-seeking propensity was notably positive, indicating that the respondents were generally inclined to seek help if necessary.

The personality traits of the participants were determined using the Big Five Inventory, it showed that openness was uncertain, displaying a neutral interest and openness to new experiences. Conscientiousness and extraversion were all high, suggesting that students are organized and socially outgoing. Neuroticism and agreeableness was at an uncertain level, this reflects an uncertain tendency toward emotional instability and cooperation.

The study found several significant differences between key variables. Self-stigma showed a significant negative relationship with most personality traits except for openness and with attitudes toward seeking help, specifically help-seeking propensity and indifference to stigma. Furthermore, a moderate negative relationship between self-stigma and attitude toward seeking psychological help, particularly with the subscales of help-seeking propensity and indifference to stigma. On the other hand, personality traits had significant positive relationships with attitudes toward seeking psychological help, with agreeableness being the strongest and most consistent predictor across all subscales. Extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism also showed moderate but significant relationships with help-seeking behaviors, while openness showed no significant relationship.

Regression analysis showed that self-stigma significantly predicted attitudes toward seeking psychological help, accounting for 31% of the variance. Among personality traits, agreeableness was the best predictor, explaining 9.1% of the variance.

### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

The authors worked together to realize this paper. Marielle Azares worked in the introduction and research questions, Luzungu Faith Mseteka for the related literature and research paradigm, Rafnielle Joy Salvio for the interpretation and tables, Ma. Ellaine Tobias for the conclusion and recommendations, Levy Fajnilan for the instruments and final checking and Dr. Rhalf Jason Guanco as the thesis adviser. Everyone involved in the gathering of data.

This study is

an academic achievement and a testament to the collective support, guidance, and faith

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