

Research Article

Predicting the Intention of Seeking Psychological Help among Emerging Adults with Divorced Parents using the Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the factors that influence the intention of emerging adults with divorced parents to seek psychological help using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) terminology. A total of 118 participants aged 18-25 years old took part in the study. Participants completed self-report questionnaires using the Mental Health Intention Scale, Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale, Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help Scale, and Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help. The multiple linear regression analysis showed that the intention to seek psychological help was significantly associated with the TPB predictors. The attitude toward help-seeking was found to be the most influential predictor of an emerging adult's intention to find out psychological help. Based on the findings of this study, the interventions related to the psychological help-seeking intention should consider individual attitudes, norms, and beliefs.

Keywords: emerging adult; divorce parents; help-seeking intention; TPB; youth well-being index.

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In recent decades, parental divorce is known to be one of the traumatic events that cause pressure on children (Shafer et al., 2017). Parental divorce could change children's lives in many ways and start many confusion and chaos during their important developmental stages. A child that comes from a divorced family is exposed to stressors compared to those that come from a complete family (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

According to several studies, children and adolescents with divorced parents have a high risk of experiencing emotional, behavioral, and decreased academic performance (Tebeka et al., 2016). Previous study revealed that parental divorce can negatively affect individuals throughout the rest of their lives regardless of age (Ross & Miller, 2009). Even the bad effects felt in childhood due to parental divorce can last into adulthood (Huurre et al., 2006).

Emerging adult is known to be a crucial stage in life for mental development (Wilson et al., 2005). Individuals in emerging adult are developmentally considered to have better adaptability, while the demands of developmental tasks such as establishing an independent identity and establishing intimate relationships may be vulnerable to disruption due to parental divorce stress (Schwartz, 1985). They begin to find work, love, and find a place to start a stable life (Santrock, 2013).

For some individuals the transition to adulthood takes a long time. It's because individuals tend to explore what jobs they like, what kind of identity they want, and what kind of lifestyle they want to use. As the formative age where there are many uncertainties in life, the transition effect due to parental divorce at this age increases the risk of mental problems towards young adults, because they are forced to make uncomfortable decisions (Jensen & Bowen, 2015)

People whose parents are divorced have higher risk to develop mental health problems (Bohman et al., 2017; Tebeka et al., 2016). Symptoms of depression due to parental divorce are



known to be more common in individuals in the age range which emerging adults are included starting from 18 to 30 years (Shafer et al., 2017). Adolescents who experience depression after parental divorce are known to have a vulnerability to depression as adults. This vulnerability is accompanied by greater disturbances such as self-harm and attempted suicide. In addition to depression, it is known that 7 out of 10 individuals with a parental history reported having other disorders such as drugs, OCD, anxiety, and panic disorder when they were over 17 years old (Tebeka et al., 2016).

Compared to a child who comes from a complete family, a child that comes from a divorced family will commonly show hardships psychologically such as low academic performance, struggle to develop a social connection, as well as the tendency to have low *self-esteem* (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Other than that, psychiatric problems such as increased rate of depression, disturbed mood, drug abuse, OCD, anxiety, and suicidal attempt are commonly found in seven out of ten individuals with a history of a divorced family (Tebeka et al., 2016). The prevalence of depression, anxiety, aggression, and the social problem was found in 10% of children who never had a divorced family, while 20% of cases are found in children who experienced parental divorce (Howe, 2012).

Divorce is also known to have a long-term negative effect on the majority of children depending on the age, gender, and characteristics of each child (Hetherington, 1999; Wallerstein, 2005). Those who experienced parental divorce, when they were between 5 to 10 years old, showed more symptoms of emotional conflict and problems with close friends (Howe, 2012). During teenagehood, these phenomena will become a problem to their academic performance, usage of drugs, social interaction, as well as their self-development (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Amato & Keith, 1991). These problems will affect their development towards adulthood such as the appearance of anxiety, fear of marriage, as well as low confidence in having a relationship (Wallerstein, 2005).

Emerging adults are known to be the age group most affected by divorce (Ross & Miller, 2009). This makes them one of the groups at risk for mental health problems. Individuals who are in groups at risk of mental disorders are often not aware that they are susceptible to the disorder (Rickwood et al., 2005). This can lead to a slow process of seeking help when needed, especially if there is a limited social support from the immediate environment. Given the weak emotional abilities, the pressure that occurs during parental divorce, also lack affection from family as the main source, all of these factors are important for influencing one's attitude and



behavior to seek psychological help. However, many of them are not seeking help as they should be (Pattyn et al., 2014).

Theory of Planned Behavior is known to be able to explain how psychosocial factors can influence an individual's intention to seek psychological help. It was found that attitudes towards help-seeking have a positive relationship to the formation of psychological help-seeking intentions (Pheko & Kgathi, 2014). When an individual's attitude towards seeking help is high enough, the intention to perform the behavior will tend to be high. Furthermore, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are known to have a negative relationship in the formation of individual intentions to seek psychological help (Pheko & Kgathi, 2014). This shows that the high subjective norm and perceived behavioral control in individuals will lead to a low intention to seek help. However, these results were reported differently in several studies.

This research aims to predict the intention to seek psychological help on emerging adults who came from a divorced family using the *Theory of Planned Behavior* (TPB). According to this theory, the intention to seek psychological help can be predicted from the behavior, subjective norm, and *perceived behavioral control*. The Theory of Planned Behavior is the result of the development of the previous theory introduced by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975, namely The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA believes that individual behavior is driven by individual attitudes, beliefs, and intentions where the intention is considered as a factor that is closest to the actual behavior (Ajzen, 2012) Research suggested the theory could predict the intention to seek psychological help of a population of students (Mesidor & Sly, 2014). This study hypothesizes that TPB predictors influence the intention to seek psychological help in emerging adult with divorced parents.

Method

Research Design

This research has been done through a quantitative approach, using a survey that was shared via online media.

Participants

The participants were emerging adults that have a history of divorced parents. Participation forms were shared online. A questionnaire was sent to the volunteers who had given their consent. As many as 118 people filled out the questionnaire.

Measurements

This research used the following four surveys. *Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help Scale* (ATSPH) consists of 10 items used to measure an individual's attitude towards finding psychological help from a professional context (Fischer & Farina, 1995). Likert's four-point scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) refers to an attitude in finding psychological help that becomes positive. This scale has validity as big as $\alpha = .83$ on the previous research and $\alpha = .69$ on this research.

Subjective norm was measured using the Likert's four-point scale *Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help* (SSRPH) amounting to 5 items (Komiya et al., 2000). This scale measures an individual's perception of social stigma as one of the forms of a subjective norm about the act of seeking psychological help. The validity of this scale goes as high as $\alpha = .72$ on the previous research and $\alpha = .78$ on this research.

The predictor *Perceived Behavioral Control* was measured using the scale of *Self Stigma of Seeking Help Scale* (SSOSH) that illustrates an individual's perception of self when seeking psychological help (Vogel et al., 2006). This scale of 10 items has 5 points of Likert's scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The higher the scale points towards their high self-stigma. High self-stigma shows an individual's low ability to control themselves. The alpha coefficient on the previous research was as high as $\alpha = .91$ and on this research, it is as high as $\alpha = .55$.

The *help-seeking intention* was measured using 3 items from *Mental Help-seeking Intention Scale* (MHSIS) that showed an individual's intention in seeking professional help when faced with mental problems (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). This scale with Likert's 6 points starts at 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree) reveals the intention of an individual to seek psychological help. The alpha coefficient scale on the previous research was $\alpha = .87$ and as high as $\alpha = .92$ on this research.

Data Analysis

The research data was analyzed using *Multiple Linear Regression* from IBM SPSS 24.0 for Windows to find the effect of the three predictors towards help-seeking intention.

Results

Sample Description

Participants who are involved in this research were mostly students (70.3%) and the rest were workers (29.7%). The majority of the participants had their parents divorced before they were 17 years old. As many as 35 people (29.7%) had their families divorced at the age of 0-5. Meanwhile, as many as 26 people (22.1%) have experienced this problem at the age of 6-12. Participants who had experienced divorced parents at the age of 13-17 were as many as 36 people (30.5%) with the highest percentage. Meanwhile, the other 21 people (17.7%) experienced their parents' divorce at the age of 18-25.

Regression Analysis

Table 1.

Predictor Parameter in Regression Model towards Intention to Seek Psychological Help, N = 118.

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
Attitude towards <i>help-seeking</i>	.590	.069	.656	8.550	.000
Subjective Norm	.000	.086	.000	.001	.999
<i>Perceived behavioral control</i>	.033	.054	.490	.616	.539

$R = .641$; $R^2 = .411$; $F(3.114) = 26.495$; $p < .001$

Summary of the regression analysis on Table 1 shows the TPB predictors for the intention to seek psychological help in young adults with divorced parents can be taken with regression coefficient as big as $R = .641$ ($F(3.114) = 26.495$; $p < .001$). The three predictors affected this model as big as 41.1% with variable attitude towards *help-seeking* as the biggest contributor ($\beta = .656$) followed by *Perceived behavioral control* ($\beta = .049$). On the other hand, subjective norms did not play a role in the TPB model.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2.

Correlation Between Variables.

Predictor	R2	Intention	Attitude	SN	PBC
Help-Seeking Intention	-	1.000	-	-	-
Attitude	.409	.639*	1.000	-	-
Subjective Norm	.001	.024	.057	1.000	-
Perceived Behavioral Control	.032	.179*	.348*	.282*	1.000

$p < .05$

The results indicated that the three predictors influence the intention to seek help in individuals (Table 2). The attitude towards help-seeking ($r(116) = .639, p < .05$) was the strong predictor to the intention to seek psychological help. This variable has a contribution of 40.9% to the variance in the intention to seek psychological help in early adult individuals with divorced parents.

Meanwhile, the relationship between subjective norms ($r(116) = .024, p > .05$) and the intention to seek psychological help was weak and insignificant because it exceeded the 5% error tolerance level. Subjective norm only contributed 0.1% to the variance in the intention. Furthermore, it was found that the relationship between perceived behavioral control variables ($r(116) = .179, p < .05$) and the intention to seek psychological help was significantly weak. This variable affects 3.2% of the variance in the variable of intention to seek psychological help.

Discussion

The result of the research shows the TPB model gave a contribution as high as 41.1% towards intention in seeking psychological help on emerging adults who came from a divorced family. The same model on university students showed a contribution as high as 17.7% (Mesidor & Sly, 2014), whereas two studies towards depression symptoms stated predictions as high as 42% and 51% (Schomerus et al., 2009). Other research on Chinese citizens found contributions as high as 56.4% (Mak & Davis, 2014). This indicates the equality or consistency of the result of other researches on a different population. Predictably, the prediction of the intention to seek professional help involving mental problems sits at around 40% on risk group and less than half of it on the general population.

Results also showed the attitude towards help-seeking behavior as one of the significant variables in this population. The role of attitude toward TPB was also reported by other research (Bohon et al., 2016; Skogstad et al., 2006; Vanheusden et al., 2008). Negative attitudes were also presented as a factor that stops young adults from seeking help (Rickwood et al., 2005). With these findings, positive attitudes towards seeking help and the openness to maintain emotional problems could encourage individuals to seek psychological help (Pumpuang et al., 2018). The experience of seeking psychological help brings strong confidence to further seek help on the following days when needed (Rickwood et al., 2005).

The influence caused by the attitude predictor showed the importance of having a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help. The negative attitude toward seeking psychological



help in young adults, came from two things: bad experiences related to seeking help and negative beliefs (Rickwood et al., 2005). Lack of knowledge about the location, availability of services, and lack of information about how to seek psychological help are some of the attitudes that can inhibit individual intentions. For this reason, it is crucial for individuals, especially emerging adults, to have good knowledge of available psychological services and to know the results that will be obtained to avoid disappointment after psychological treatment.

The role of predictor *perceived behavioral control* that has no significance in this research contradicted previous research where this variable becomes the strongest predictor in affecting the intention to seek psychological help (Mesidor & Sly, 2014). On the other hand, this research's result follows the previous findings where *perceived behavioral control* becomes the weakest predictor (Mo & Mak, 2009). Previous study also speculated the weakest role is affected by the reliability of the measurement tool used (Schomerus et al., 2009) This research also showed the reliability of the PBC scale that is not quite high, as high as $\alpha = .55$.

Other factors affect one's perceived behavioral control, such as trend, promotion, and knowledge of mental health care, as well as the cost of psychological treatments, that are certain to affect the low effect of this variable (Mak & Davis, 2014). The predictor *perceived behavioral control* would be more effective on the intention of seeking psychological help when research on areas with a strict mental health system is done (Schomerus et al., 2009). Other than that, fear of the result of the diagnosis received and reassurance that the problem faced could be solved by itself will also affect individuals' intention to seek psychological help (Wilson et al., 2005).

In the growing culture in Indonesia, seeing a psychologist for professional help is still rare. However, the idea that psychological problems can be solved only with the help of the family or solved independently becomes a big obstacle for individuals seeking help. Emerging adults with divorced parents often feel lonely and avoided in daily life. If this continues, it will hinder the process of assistance needed (Schaan et al., 2019). For this reason, it is essential to change individual beliefs about the process of seeking psychological help.

Next, this research showed subjective norms are rarely related to searching for psychological help. The study's findings are in line with previous studies in which culture is speculated to be one of the causes (Bohon et al., 2016; Mesidor & Sly, 2014). The difference in culture and

ethnicity played a role in predicting the intention to seek psychological help (Pheko & Kgathi, 2014). Negative stigma in society towards individuals who seeks professional in mental health becomes a barrier to the intent to seek help (Mak & Davis, 2014). Second, the height of *social desirability* causes the participant to tend toward giving normative answers (Neuman, 2004). Third, using a unidimensional scale to measure subjective norms is alleged to be the other cause. Predictor subjective norms will be more reliable when using multidimensional scales (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

Limitations

The aim of this research was to find out more about the factors that affect people`s intention to seek psychological help. The inclusion criterion was emerging adults with divorced parents. Several limitations such as the small number of the subject population make it difficult to find a representative sample from emerging adults with divorced parents. The future studies should try to extend the sample within the same population. It would be beneficial if further researches can specify certain mental disorders and seek more to their relationship with seeking psychological help among the emerging adult with divorced parents. The use of a unidimensional scale with moderate reliability also affects the results of the data analysis.

Conclusion

It could be concluded that three predictors of the *Theory of Planned Behavior* affect the intention to seek psychological help in emerging adults with divorced parents. Attitude towards behavior is known to have the highest effect, followed by *perceived behavioral control* and subjective norm. Knowing the cause and contribution of each factor shown would help mental health professionals develop an effective intervention to increase the intention of seeking psychological help in emerging adults with divorced parents. Also, there is a need to provide a positive and confidential counseling environment to create a positive experience for individuals seeking psychological help. Professionals and the government must also improve mental health literacy in the community for a better understanding of the importance of seeking psychological help.

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Competing Interests

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