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Perceived Stigma, Help Seeking Behavior and Psychological Well-being among Substance Abuse Patients

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Abstract

This research was intended to examine the interrelationship of perceived stigma, help-seeking behavior, and psychological well-being among Substance abuse patients. A correlational research design was employed and 80 substance abuse patients between the age range 18-45 ($M = 31.46$, $SD = 4.77$) were recruited in the study. The Perceived Stigma of Addiction Scale, Psychological Wellbeing Scale, and general Help-seeking Questionnaire was used as assessment measures. The results showed that perceived stigma of substance abuse was negatively correlated with psychological well-being while no significant correlation was found between help-seeking behavior and psychological well-being. Perceived stigma came out to be a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being among substance abuse patients. Help-seeking behavior did not mediate the relationship between perceived stigma and psychological well-being. The results of this study will be used in designing and modifying future assessment measures, treatment practices, and fitness strategies.

Keywords: help-seeking behavior, perceived stigma, psychological well-being, substance abuse

Introduction

Drug or Substance use is called substance use disorder. It is an illness or disorder that influences an individual's brain and behavior that leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal substance or medication (Yang et al., 2017). World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) explains a drug as a chemical essence of natural, artificial, or derived substance. Substance use is now common everywhere in the workplace, In-house, parks, markets, slums, and also in educational institutes both in urban and rural areas. Almost twenty-five hundred thousand individuals are substance users in Bangladesh almost 80% of substance users fall between the category of young male adults and adolescents which are of 15 to 30 years

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(Shahzad et al., [2013](#)). Pakistan's Home Minister in a public interview stated that more than 50% of students in federal colleges and universities in Islamabad abused substances or drugs and called for cracking down on the drug mafia (Sabri & Ariffin, [2018](#)). The state mentally armed the entire nation and some concerns or associations also challenged the figures as exaggerated (Yusuf, [2021](#)). The current World Drug Report of 2021 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) additionally demonstrates the fast increase of illicit drug use in Pakistan. Pakistan is the 6th most populated country in the world with a population of almost 208 million (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, [2017](#)). It is also one of the most youthful countries in the world where 64 percent of residents are under the age of 29 (United Nations [UN, [2021](#)]). Youth especially is more helpless against chronic drug use as a result of interest to try different things with new things, peer pressure, addict friends, company, and lifestyles (Hamidullah et al., [2020](#)).

People with dangerous and harmful chemical use who have not grown addicted must be found out, and interventions must be commenced to address their substance-related threats (Nutt et al., [2010](#)). Hiding substance use from others can be distressing and let the users to get detached from friends and family (O'Shay-Wallace, [2019](#)). The dread of stigma remains a barrier to substance management (Luoma et al., [2013](#)). Most studies (Livingston et al., [2012](#); Yang et al., [2017](#)) have shown that the stigma related to prohibited substance use has been evaluated in samples of socially underprivileged participants. Specifically, other researchers have tended to focus on participants who were on the streets, and substance users who had psychological disorders or have been in rehabilitation (Luoma et al., [2013](#)). Several studies (Adlaf et al., [2009](#); Lavingston et al., [2012](#); Lloyd , [2013](#)) have been conducted to evaluate how young adults in the general population stigmatize themselves for substance use and investigate whether the real focus was on stigma connected with addicts, not with the public.

The help-seeking behavior is highly got impacted due to awareness about mental health (Munawar et al., [2019](#)). Research about help-seeking behavior among Substance users is not available in Pakistani literature. According to a research, due to a lack of awareness people don't take their mental health seriously. Consequently, delayed help from professionals affects their psychological well-being (Golberstein et al., [2008](#)). This might be due to lack of knowledge, attitude towards mental health facilities, and

economic issues. The most important factor that impact the attitudes and belief system of people toward seeking help regarding mental health issues is perceived stigma. The people report social perceived stigma and concern about the view of people towards them, that why they mostly try to avoid seeking mental health-related help

The substance abuse treatment got impacted due to stigma towards own self or due to stigma from society. The help-seeking behavior and willingness for treatment also influence the effectiveness of treatment. The research highlights that consoler can play their role by identifying factors associated with stigma and substance use treatment (Carmona-Gutierrez et al., [2020](#)). The role of society is very important in this regard as stigmatization from society reduces the chances of treatment. The fear of getting the label of addict highly reduces the help-seeking behavior in drug users (Dschaak & Juntunen, [2018](#)).

Although the literature about perceived stigma and psychological well-being is limited with reference to substance abuse of ICE. Substance use is one of the disturbing societal issues in Pakistan which is quickly affecting massive people. In Pakistan, substance use makes wrecking issues, and above all the issue is, gathered by the progression of time (Ghazal, [2019](#); Qasem & Zayid, [2019](#); Somani & Meghani, [2016](#)). Around 6% of the Pakistani population was involving drugs as revealed by UNODC drug use in Pakistan, the outcomes might incorporate well-being concerns, thriving misfortune, disregard, intense subject matters, and disgrace (United Nation Office Drug Control, [2013](#)). Moreover, research about help-seeking behavior among Substance users is not available in Pakistani literature which is why current research fills the gap of knowledge by studying the inter-relationship of perceived stigma, psychological well-being, and help-seeking behavior among drug users (Substance abuse patients). This research will help us to find ways for engaging help-seeking behavior in Substance abuse patients. We can find new management and therapeutic approach for ice addicts by using this study as a baseline.

Objective

To explore the relationship between perceived stigma, psychological well-being, and help-seeking behavior in substance abuse patients.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a negative relationship between perceived stigma and psychological well-being.

H2: There is a negative relationship between perceived stigma and help-seeking behavior.

H3: Perceived stigma and Help-seeking behavior significantly predicts psychological well-being

H4: Help-seeking behavior is likely to mediate the relationship between perceived stigma and psychological well-being among substance abuse patients.

Method

Research Design

In this research correlational research design was used to study the relationship between help-seeking behavior, perceived stigma, and psychological well-being in substance abuse patients.

Sample of the Study

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. A total of $N = 80$ young adults with the use of Ice were recruited in this study from different government and private hospitals in Lahore. Participants were selected within the age range of 18-45 years ($M = 31.46$, $SD = 4.77$) For substance use disorder, all the participants fulfilling the DSM-V diagnostic criteria for Substance abuse patients were included in the study regardless of their duration of illness.

Sample Characteristics

Only the patients having an addiction to Ice were included in this study and patients from both indoor and outdoor departments were included. Patients with chronic illness and any psychotic illness were not included. All other types of drug users were excluded (Alcohol, Hash, Opium, etc). The average age of participants was 31.46 ($SD = 4.77$), with an average mean income of 27595 ($SD = 13837.64$). The majority of the participants belonged to the age range 22-29 years which is 38.8% of the samples. 36 (45%) participants had intermediate education. The majority of them i.e. 28 participants (35%) used ice for more than one year of about 1-gram ice per day. A large number of participants (48.8%) said they were using ice twice

a day. 13 participants (16.3%) were using ice thrice a day, and 3 participants (3.8%) were using ice more than three times a day.

Measures

The Perceived Stigma of Addiction Scale

The Perceived Stigma of Addiction Scale is an 8-item questionnaire measuring perceptions of the prevalence of stigmatizing beliefs toward substance use. Higher scores indicate perceptions of more frequent negative attitudes toward addiction. A previous study suggested the scale has good face validity, construct validity, and adequate internal consistency (Luoma et al., [2013](#)). In the present study PSAS showed satisfactory reliability of .71.

Psychological Wellbeing Scale

Well-being is assessed with a modified 42 items version of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being. The scale includes 3 items for each of the 6 aspects of well-being: self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations with others, and growth. Participants were asked to rate how each item applies to themselves using a 7-point Likert rating scale. The total score is the mean of the ratings, with a higher score relating to greater well-being. The present study result showed that the psychological well-being scale has excellent reliability of .81.

General Help-seeking Questionnaire

General Help-seeking behavior was measured using GHQ English version. It is a 20-item scale designed to measure one's subjective feelings of loneliness as well as feelings of social isolation. Participants rate each item as either O (*I often feel this way*), S (*I sometimes feel this way*), R (*I rarely feel this way*), or N (*I never feel this way*). The measure has been revised twice and has been found to have good reliability in the previous study. In the present research, the GHQ depicts excellent reliability of .70 (Quek et al. [2001](#)).

Procedure

The data were collected with the permission of hospital authorities, after taking formal prior permission from authors of all scales. Scales with informed consent were administered to respondents. All concerned information was provided to the participants. The researcher explained the

test items to participants so that language did not impact the quality of collected data.

Ethical Consideration

Present study was protected from all of the possible harms to the person, society, and the participants of this study. It was assured to them that their information would be kept confidential. They also filled in consent information for this purpose. They were debriefed about the instrument use and research purpose.

Results

The present study intended to explore the relationship between perceived stigma, help-seeking behavior, and psychological well-being among substance abuse people. Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Hierarchical Regression, and mediation by using PROCESS were done to analyze the results.

Table 1

Relationship between Perceived Stigma of Substance Abuse, Help-Seeking Behavior, Psychological well-being among Substance abuse patients (N=80)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD
1. Perceived Stigma of Substance Abuse		-.13	-.17	-.21	-.09	-.12	-.33**	-.33**	-.38**	22.40	2.61
2. General Help Seeking Behavior			.05	-.06	.11	-.07	.17	.01	-.02	67.18	10.65
3. Autonomy				.49**	.42**	.46**	.53**	.41**	.66**	27.04	4.60
4. Environmental Mastery					.20	.47**	.37**	.46**	.66**	27.60	4.44
5. Personal Growth						.28*	.36**	.24*	.41**	24.99	4.55
6. Positive Relations							.39**	.63**	.64**	26.58	4.04
7. Purpose in Life								.49**	.57**	26.91	4.41
8. Self-Acceptance									.60**	25.84	4.84
9. Psychological Wellbeing										161.6	18.50

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 1 shows the relationship between the perceived stigma of Substance abuse patients, help-seeking behavior, and psychological well-being. Results found that perceived stigma of substance abuse was

negatively correlated with psychological well-being among Substance abuse patients. This showed that individual patients who experience discrimination and prejudiced treatment in a form of mistreatment, violence, or discerning behavior due to their addiction, will be more psychologically unwell.

The above table also shows that the subscale of psychological wellbeings such as purpose in life and self-acceptance also had a significant negative correlation with the perceived stigma of substance abuse. This reflects that individuals who perceived higher levels of internalized shame or humiliation due to the use of drugs had held a negative attitude toward themselves i.e. they have heightened negative thoughts regarding their past recognition and acceptance of numerous parts of their self, including good and poor attributes. Similarly, the perceived negative stigma of individuals is also linked with purposeless life. They sense that their past and present had no value and hold a pessimistic view about their existence of goals and a sense of direction.

Contrary, study results didn't find a significant correlation between help-seeking behavior with psychological well-being. This shows that there is no relation between stigma perception on help-seeking behavior among Substance Abuse Patients. Individual attempts to obtain external assistance to deal with a mental health concern formally or informally is not related to their level of perception and has no link with person's psychological well-being.

Table 2

Linear Regression analysis for Perceived Stigma on Psychological well-being and its subscales among Substance abuse patients (N=80)

Variable	B	SE	T	P	95%CI
Constant	208.63	15.95	13.07	.00	[176.85, 240.40]
PSAS	-1.13	.53	-2.12	.03	[-2.19, -.07]
GHSQ	-.20	.15	-1.30	.19	[-.50-, .10]

Note: PSAS= Perceived Stigma of Substance Abuse, B=Unstandardized Coefficient, SEB = Standardized Coefficient,

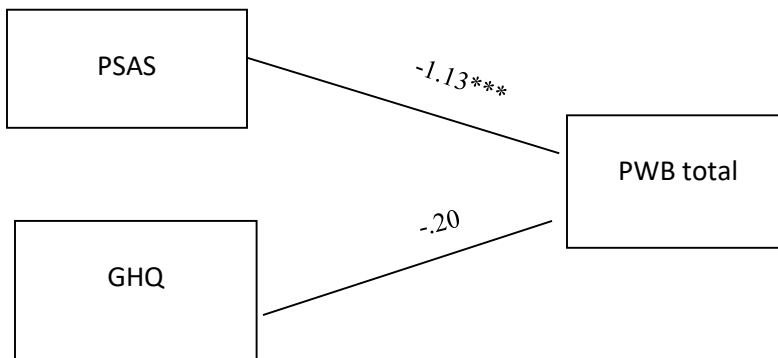
Table 2 shows that Perceived Stigma became a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being among substance abuse patients.

Perceived stigma $F(2, 76) = 2.39, p = .00$, and the explained variance of the model was 26%. It means that substance abuse individuals internalized and perceived stigma about the self-concept related to society's negative views and tend to hold negative attitudes toward themselves and hold negative ideas about the meaning of life and goals and aspirations for their life.

Emerged Regression Model

Figure 1

Emerged regression model showing perceived stigma and health seeking behavior as predictors of PWB



In order to test the mediation effect of help-seeking behavior between stigma, and PWB. Mediational analysis was done using PROCESS Hayes by fulfilling the assumption of mediation.

Table 3

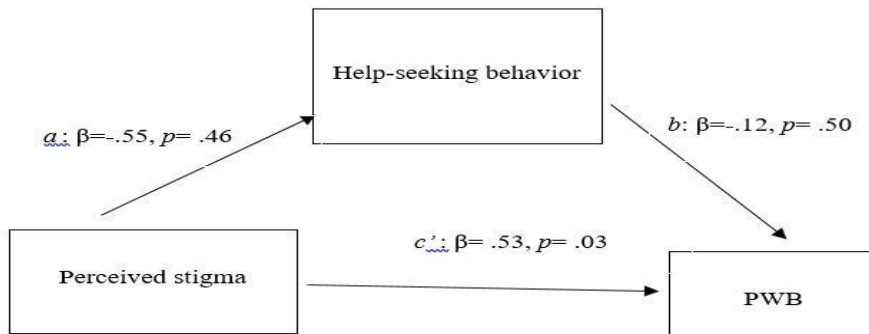
Mediational analysis of help-seeking behavior between perceived stigma, and psychological well-being

Predictors	Outcomes							
	Help Seeking Behavior			Psychological Well-Being				
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p		
Perceived Stigma	a	-.55	.46	.23	c'	-2.71	.76	.00
Help Seeking Behavior	-	-	-	b	-.12	.18	.50	
		$R^2 = .00$ $F(1,77) = .22, p = .23$				$R^2 = .14$ $F(2,76) = 6.27, p = .00$		

Table 3 indicates that perceived stigma did not predict mediator help-seeking behavior ($\beta = -.55, p = .46$). This model accounts for only 0% variances in help-seeking behavior. On the other hand, a significant negative prediction of perceived stigma was found for psychological well-being ($\beta = -2.71, p = .00$) but help-seeking behavior did not predict psychological well-being ($\beta = -.12, p = .50$). This model accounts for only a 14 % variance. This infers that help-seeking behavior has not mediated the relationship between perceived stigma and psychological well-being as the total indirect effect was not significant (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Emerged Mediation Model with PWB as outcome variable.



The direct effect of X on Y = $c' = -2.71, p = .00$. Indirect effect of help-seeking behavior on PWB, $\beta = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.19, .38]$.

Discussion

The people with drug addiction report high levels of stigma from others in the form of negative labeling, bias, and prejudice (Crapanzano et al., 2019). Individual, interpersonal, and institutional prejudice against individuals with drug addiction disorders is ordinary and ubiquitous (Barry et al., 2014). A large portion of the public still believes that persons who use illegal substances must simply accept responsibility for their actions (Barry et al., 2014). As a result, people with substance use disorders report encountering public judgment, decision, improper comments, restrictive, and enmity (Esmaealzadeh et al., 2018). Patients who use substances are viewed negatively by health professionals, who believe they are hazardous, violent, manipulative, reckless, hostile, offensive, and lethargic (Ford, 2011). The research has shown that stigma among substance users leads to poor mental

health ultimately a low level of psychological well-being (Birtel et al., [2017](#)).

Thus, there was a strong need to look for protecting factors and effective resources that can act as a buffer against the well-being of substance abuse patients and help them seek aid. Keeping in mind the importance of this issue, the significance of this problem, the recent study was aimed to assess the association and prediction between help seeking behavior, psychological wellbeing and perceived stigma.

Results exposed that perceived stigma of drug abuse negatively correlated with psychological well-being total score and its subscales among Substance abuse patients. This showed that patients, who experienced discrimination and prejudiced treatment in the form of mistreatment, violence, or discerning behavior due to their addiction, will be more psychologically unwell. The modified labeling theory stated that beginning treatment with a label can have a detrimental impact on health due to the stigma linked with the label (Link & Phelan, [2013](#)). A stigmatized individual is thought to be undervalued, unimportant, and faulty in significant ways. For those who identify with a stigmatized group, knowledge of or experiences with stigma can lead to the internalization of these ideas (Ritsher et al., [2003](#)). Past research has constantly found a negative relationship between stigma and well-being (Thoits, [2011](#)), i.e., If persons with drug use perceive or internalize the stigmatized public views and higher internalized embarrassment, it is connected with lower overall well-being. Luoma et al. ([2007](#)) also found that perceived stigma is associated to personalized stigma and embarrassment in drug misuse and that perceived personalized stigma is associated with inferior health and well-being (Schomerus et al., [2011](#)).

The study results also found that subscales of psychological well-being such as purpose in life and self-acceptance had a significant negative correlation with the perceived stigma of substance abuse. Stigma is defined as the brutalization of a person based on their social identification or membership in a negative or unwanted social category (Goffman, [1963](#)). This reflects that individuals who perceived higher levels of internalized shame or humiliation due to drug use had a negative attitude toward one's self i.e. they have heightened negative thoughts regarding their past recognition and acceptance of numerous parts of themselves, including good and poor attributes. Similarly, the perceived negative stigma of the

individuals is also linked with purposeless life. They sense that their past and present had no value and hold pessimistic views about their goals and a sense of direction. According to Belete et al. (2021), stigma has a powerful and long-lasting impact on mental health, regardless of when treatment for problematic substance use begins. Even while treatment improves the stigmatized individuals' symptoms and functioning, stigma continues to impair their lives.

On the contrary, study results didn't find a significant correlation between help-seeking behavior with psychological well-being. This showed that there is no relationship between stigma perception on help-seeking behavior among Substance Abuse Patients. A person who endeavors to acquire outer help to manage a psychological wellness concern officially or casually is not related to their level of perception and is not linked with their psychological well-being. Attitudes are a strong predictor of future objectives and actions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). According to Corrigan (2011), person may not search for psychological health services to escape a negative label (i.e., label avoidance), which is the most important mode stigma influences mental health service utilization. Researchers have established the impact of social stigma on looking for obtaining psychological help for drug addiction management (Birtel et al., 2017), except the impact of unfavorable judgments is less well recognized (Smith et al., 2016).

Another study found non-significant difference in self-stigma or attitudes toward psychological help-seeking (Dschaak & Dschaak, 2018). According to Adlaf et al. (2009), keeping stigmatizing views might be challenging for someone currently using drugs. In other words, it would be adaptive for the individual to repress or avoid stigmatizing ideas about substance use. It's also possible that stigma fades as people gain a greater understanding of addiction via personal experience.

Perceived stigma came out to be a significant predictor of psychological well-being and its subscales; self-acceptance and purpose in life among substance abuse patients. This showed that substance abuse individuals internalized and perceived stigma about the self-concept related to society's negative views tend to hold a negative attitude toward themselves and hold negative ideas about their meaning of life and goals and aspirations for their life. Internalized self-extensive stigma's consequences on individual well-being across several areas among persons facing mental distress have also

been noted in research (Thornicroft & Tansella, [2013](#)). Previous studies have also shown that perceived support is a better predictor of mental health (Wogen& Restrepo, [2020](#)). Self-stigma and label avoidance may prevent people with substance use disorders from getting the health treatment they need to be healthy physically, mentally, and socially.

Furthermore, results found that help-seeking behavior has no mediating relationship between perceived stigma and psychological well-being as the total indirect effect was not significant. Another study done by Carmona-Gutierrez et al. ([2020](#)) also found in their path analysis to self-stigma of psychological disorder doesn't have an indirect effect on substance abuse through attitudes toward help-seeking behavior. There is indeed a social stigma attached to slavery that may prevent non-clients from investigating the various approaches to drug use; however, dramatic improvements continue to be made. Furthermore, while the traditional stigma associated with mental retardation is acknowledged as a problem, the stigma associated with people who rely heavily on it is debatable. People with SUDs are frequently mistaken for those who have the condition. When cultural shame is perceived to be hidden (i.e., self-loathing), it can result in a failure of self-esteem, a loss of self-esteem, and a loss of livelihood for those who experience it. These feelings can make it more difficult for a person to recover from a correctional institution.

Conclusion

It is concluded that it is true that there is a social stigma attached to drug abuse that may prevent non-clients from investigating the various approaches to drug use; however, dramatic improvements continue to be made once a person has entered the substance regimen and may put off admission to treatment regimens. But still, the stigma associated with individuals who rely heavily on this stigma is debatable, and people with SUDs are frequently mistaken for those who have the condition. When cultural shame is perceived to be hidden (i.e., self-loathing), it can result in a loss of self-esteem, and a loss of livelihood for those who experience it. These feelings can make it more difficult for a person to recover from a correctional institution.

Limitations and suggestions

This study was conducted to better understand the impact of public perception and self-deprecation on the normal course of recovery from drug

abuse. The study was conducted with substance (Substance abuse patients) only which limited the generalizability of the sample to other substance users. The sample was collected from one city only. Furthermore, self-reported questionnaires were used which was measured using quantitative analysis. Thus, study results were not able to give in-depth opinions and experiences of participants. However, the results of this survey will be used to inform future testing, treatment practices, and fitness strategies. The tests performed here were combined to demonstrate that people suffering from SUDs are stigmatized by various sources, including themselves. This study also provides evidence that multiple symptoms of embarrassment have an impact on factors that may impair a person's ability to complete treatment or recover from an illness. Keeping in mind that they require additional treatment, medical commitment (counting testing as an appropriate component of methadone), and self-efficacy, keep in mind that they are not a guarantee. It is, however, difficult to predict the immediate impact of the various forms of embarrassment that a person may experience on their ability to recover quickly with the assistance of treatment programs.

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