



# Mental Health on Campus: What Barriers are there to Seeking Help?



Lindsay Thomas & Michael J. Bordieri



## MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to identify potential barriers preventing college students from taking advantage of on-campus counseling services as well as to determine college students' familiarity with on-campus mental health resources.

### INTRODUCTION

- Mental health problems among the college population are increasing.
- A national study from 2014 reported 52% of college students had significant psychological problems. 8% of those students had such severe psychological problems, they could not continue schooling (Gallagher, 2014).
- Another study had similar findings, suggesting that college students with mental health problems performed worse academically compared to those without these problems (Bruffaerts, et al., 2018).
- Anxiety, depression, and substance use are the highest reported mental health problems among the college population (Pedrelli, et al., 2015).
- Students do believe there are benefits of mental health treatment like improved mental health and reduced stress (Vidourek, King, Nabors, Merianos, 2014), but barriers such as perceived stigma and discrimination are reducing the number of college students getting the help they need for their mental health (D'Amico, Mechling, Keppainen, Ahem, Lee, 2016).

### METHOD

- Participants were recruited through SONA (Online survey pool at Murray State University)
- Participants completed the following measures online:
  - College Students' Perceived Benefits and Barriers to Help-Seeking for Mental Health Problems (Vidourek, King, Nabors, Merianos, 2014)- Examines students' perception of benefits and barriers to receiving mental health treatment.
  - Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)- Measures levels of psychological distress
  - "How likely is it that you would seek mental health help on-campus if you felt you needed it?" and "If you needed to seek help for your mental health, where would you go?"

### PARTICIPANTS (N = 95)

- Average age of participants was 19.26 (SD = 1.64)
- 75.8% Female, 23.2% Male, 1.1% Non-Binary/Third Gender
- 69.5% Freshmen, 30.5% Upper Classmen
- 80.75% Caucasian, 8.4% Black/African American, 2.1% Asian, 1% Hispanic/Latino/Spanish

### RESULTS

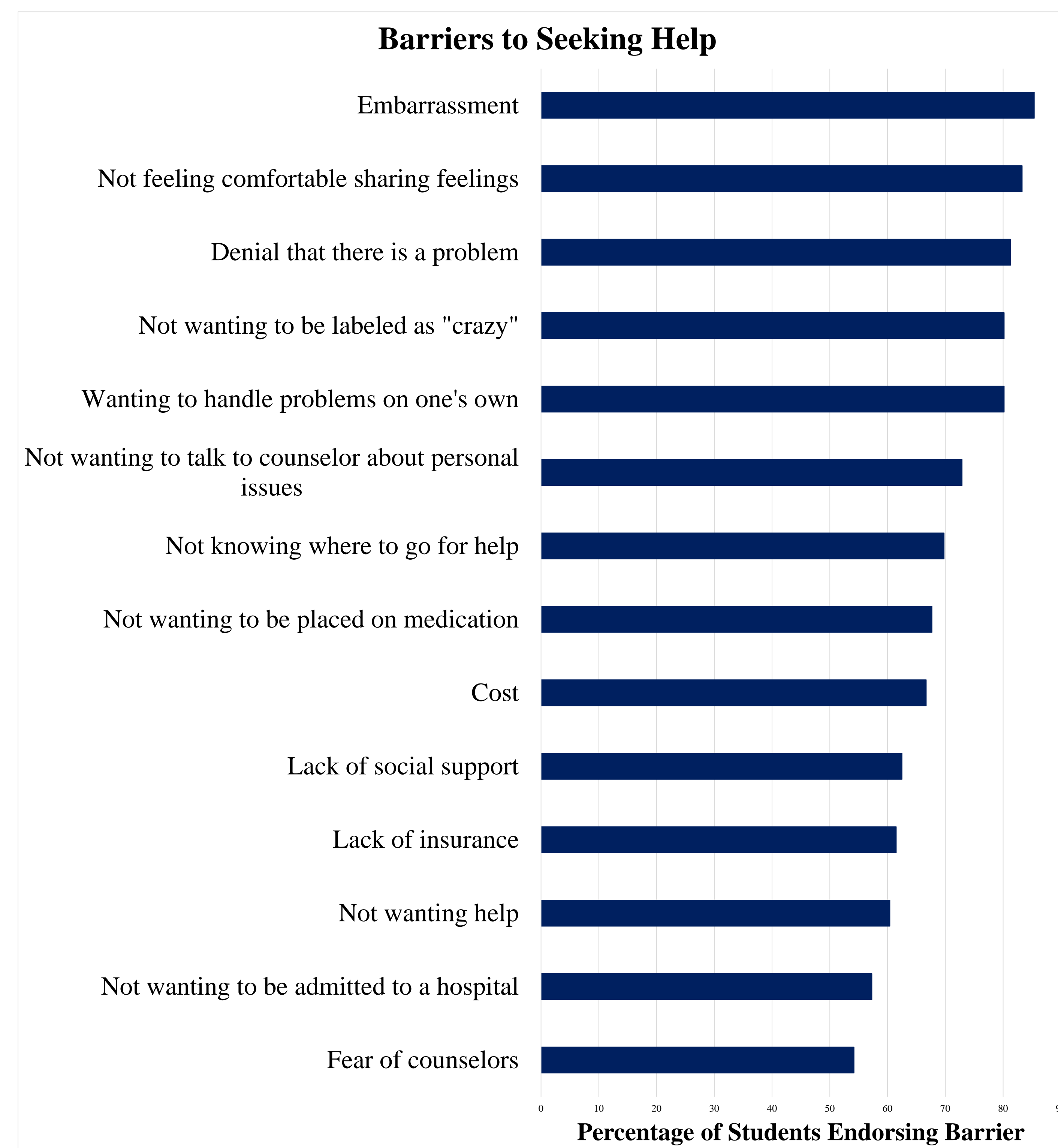


Figure 1 identifies the perceived barriers of seeking help for their mental health.

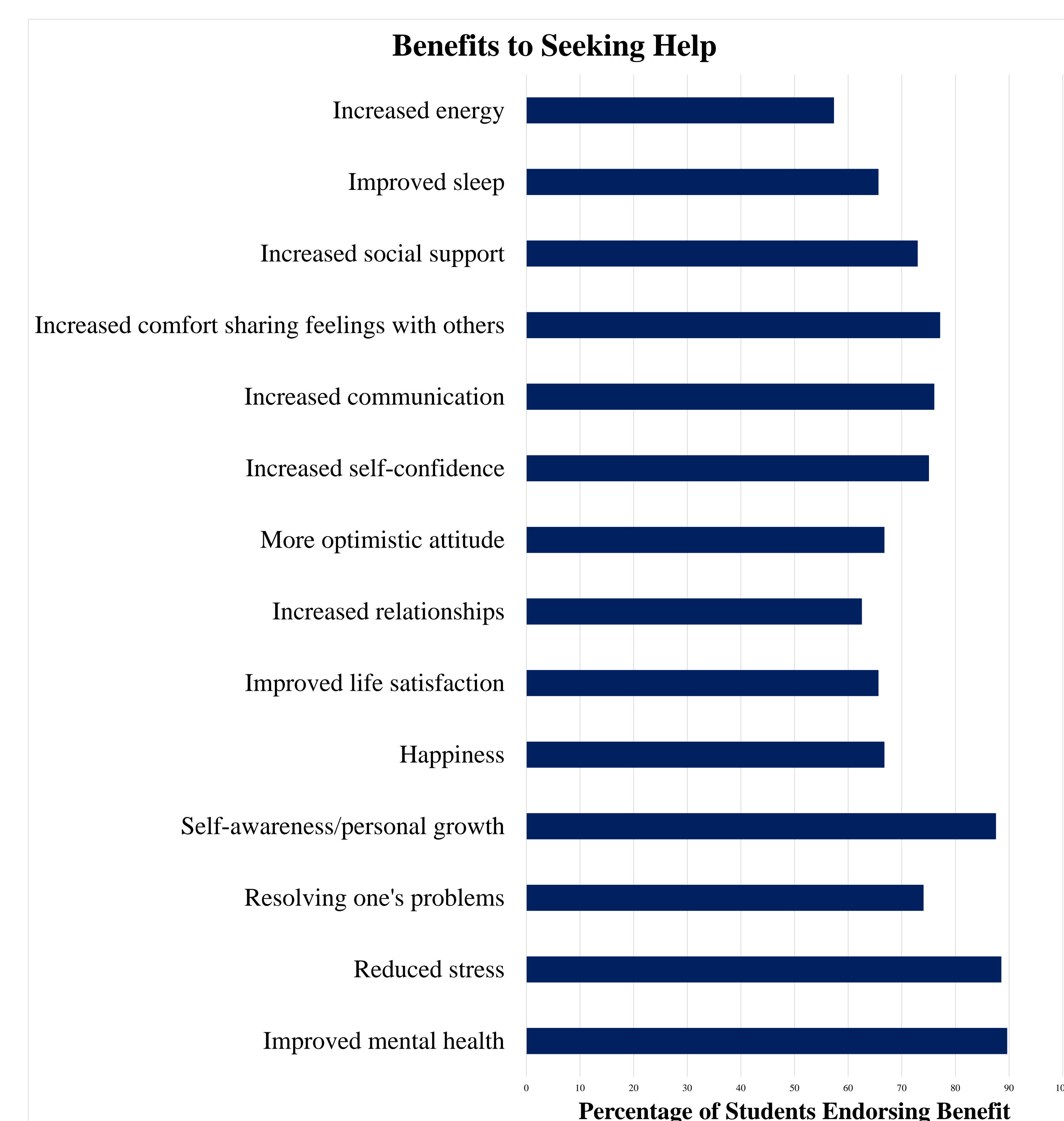


Figure 2 identifies the perceived benefits of seeking help for their mental health.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Benefits of seeking treatment	10.25 (3.60)	-					
2. Barriers to seeking treatment	9.83 (3.60)	.429**	-				
3. Mental Illness Stigma	8.53 (3.13)	-.365**	-.354**	-			
4. Psychological Distress (DASS-21)	20.13 (14.90)	-.213*	-.040	.082	-		
5. Likelihood of seeking help (1-5 scale)	2.91 (1.22)	.091	.035	-.218	.118	-	
6. Knowledge of Services (Yes = 1)	55.2% Yes	.039	-.024	-.095	.106	.258*	-

Figure 3 illustrates correlations between study variables.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
 \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### DISCUSSION

- Embarrassment, not being comfortable sharing feelings, and denial of the problem were the most commonly endorsed barriers. While fear of counselors was among the least reported barrier, it was still seen as a barrier by over half of the sample.
- Approximately half of the sample knew at least one mental health resource the campus offers.
- There is a significant negative correlation between the stigma one holds and their likelihood to seek help. This means that the more stigma one has towards seeking help, the less likely they are to proactively seek treatment for their mental health.
- Limitations of this study include a small sample size, as well as only obtaining data from one school.
- Results of this study could help mental health professionals on campus address barriers in order to provide more effective care that will benefit students.
- Results of this study also suggest that if campuses designed programs to decrease stigma about mental health treatment, the likelihood for one to seek help would increase.

### REFERENCES

- Bruffaerts, R., Mortier, P., Kiekens, G., Auerbach, R. P., Cuijpers, P., Demyttenaere, K., ... Kessler, R. C. (2018). Mental health problems in college freshmen: Prevalence and academic functioning. *Journal of affective disorders*, 225, 97–103. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2017.07.044
- D'Amico, N., Mechling, B., Kempainen, J., Ahem, N. R., Lee, J. (2016). American college students' views of depression and utilization of on-campus counseling services. *Sage Journals*, 22(4), 302-311. doi:10.1177/1078390316648777.
- Gallagher, R. P. (2014). National Survey of College Counseling Services 2014. Retrieved from [http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/28178/1/survey\\_2014.pdf](http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/28178/1/survey_2014.pdf).
- Lovibond, S. H., & Lovibond, P. F. (1995). *Manual for the depression anxiety stress scales*. Sydney: Psychology Foundation.
- Pedrelli, P., Nyer, M., Yeung, A., Zulauf, C., & Wilens, T. (2015). College Students: Mental Health Problems and Treatment Considerations. *Academic psychiatry : the journal of the American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training and the Association for Academic Psychiatry*, 39(5), 503–511. doi:10.1007/s40596-014-0205-9
- Vidourek, R. A., King, K. A., Nabors, L. A., Merianos, A. L. (2014). Students' benefits and barriers to mental health help-seeking. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 2(1), 1009-1022.