

Mental disorders are responsible for more disability-adjusted life years than any other class of conditions among young adults in the United States (Michaud et al., 1996). Yet, young adults are not getting treated in part due to a lack of help seeking behaviors (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2012). Two key stages of helping seeking have been proposed: (1) perceiving a need for care, and (2) acting on that perception by accessing mental health services (Mechanic, 1966 as cited in Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007).

Work experiences have been found to have an effect on mental health (Iannelli & Wilding, 2007; Osipow, 1979). Indeed, a broader understanding of mental health service may include vocational psychology, which is “an area of counseling psychology that has continually focused on human strengths and has helped people live well” (Robitschek & Woodson, 2006, p. 260). Therefore, exploring the effects on mental health outcome when individuals who admit they are in need of mental health help and actually do engage in help seeking (versus those who do not seek help), in addition to work/school status may provide support to bolster the education and promotion of help seeking and work/school engagement. Furthermore, counseling psychologists may be best positioned to understand how career and mental health issues interact by potentially focusing on career-related interventions and addressing the concerns of occupational mental health (Blustein, 1992). The current study examined the effects of actual mental health help seeking (versus perceiving a need for mental health help and not seeking it out) and work/school status on current mental health outcome using a national dataset.

The representative sample consisted of 3,168 U.S. residents (1,061 male and 2,107 females), with the majority of European American (73.9%), and mainly ages between 18-25 years (55.1%). Regarding the educational background, 14% of the sample had less than high school education while 25% were high school graduates. Almost 60% had some college (32%) or an earned college degree (29%).

To examine the effects of actual mental health help seeking and work status on current impairment level, a 2X2 ANOVA was employed on current impairment level. A .05 criterion of statistical significance was applied for all tests. Outpatient visit of mental health services and work/school status served as the independent variables, while respondents' current impairment level, measured by the WHODAS, was the dependent variable.

The results indicated that current impairment level varied significantly with actual mental health seeking, with $F(1, 3,164) = 46.38, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Another significant main effect for work/school status was also found, $F(1, 3,164) = 6.76, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. The adjusted marginal means with outpatient ($M=9.47, SD=0.21$) was significantly different from no treatment ($M=11.43, SD=0.20$). Respondents who either work or study also had a significantly lower impairment level ($M=10.07, SD=0.12$) than those without job ($M=10.82, SD=0.26$). Interaction effect was not found in this sample ($p > .05$).

The discussion of the results and the implications of research and practice will be presented.