

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS, PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT AND HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOR AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to evaluate the relationship between mental health problems, physical impairment and help-seeking behavior among pregnant women. Correlational research design was used in the research and total research sample was 120 pregnant women. Data was collected using the purposive sampling technique and data was gathered physically. The self-report instruments used in the present research were Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale (Overall & Gorham, 1962), Physical Impairment Index (Gerety et al., 1993) and Help-Seeking Behavior Scale (Naz et al., 2024). Findings revealed that mental health problems and physical impairment significantly predicted help seeking behavior among pregnant women. Pregnant women who have disease were higher on mental health problems, physical impairment and help seeking behavior as compared to those pregnant women who don't have any medical condition or disease. Moreover, it was found that pregnant women with nuclear family system were higher on mental health problems, physical impairment, and help seeking behavior as compared to pregnant women who belong to joint family system.

I. INTRODUCTION

The research focuses on exploring the relationship between mental health problems, physical impairment, and help-seeking behavior among pregnant women. This study delves into how mental health challenges and physical limitations interact to influence the likelihood of seeking help during pregnancy. By examining these connections, the research aims to shed light on the factors that impact pregnant women's well-being and their readiness to access necessary support and care. Mental health problems, also referred to as mental health disorders or mental illnesses, are conditions that affect an individual's emotional, psychological, and cognitive well-being. These problems can cause distress, impair daily functioning, and interfere with a person's ability to cope with life's challenges. Mental health problems can vary in severity and duration and may arise from a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychosocial factors (Belfiore et al., 2024). Mental health problems, also referred to as mental disorders or psychological disorders, are conditions that affect a person's thoughts, emotions, behavior, and overall well-being (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These conditions can significantly impact an individual's ability to function in daily life, maintain relationships, and manage stress. Mental health problems are recognized and classified by mental health professionals based on specific criteria outlined in diagnostic manuals

such as DSM-5. Mental health problems are a significant global concern, impacting individuals across various demographics and cultures.

Help-seeking behavior is the process by which individuals seek assistance for their mental health issues, is a critical aspect of addressing and managing these challenges. This literature review aims to provide an overview of recent research on the relationship between mental health problems and help-seeking behavior within the field of psychology. Understanding the factors that influence help-seeking behavior is essential for designing effective interventions and promoting positive mental health outcomes (Xu et al., 2018). Stigma surrounding mental health has been identified as a significant barrier to help-seeking behavior (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). Negative attitudes toward mental illness can deter individuals from seeking help due to fear of judgment and discrimination. The recognition of the need for professional assistance is a key driver of help-seeking behavior. The severity of symptoms and perceived impairment in daily functioning contribute to individuals' decision to seek help (Schnyder et al., 2017). The presence of a supportive social network can encourage individuals to seek help. Friends, family, and other social connections provide emotional validation and practical assistance in the help-seeking process (White et al., 2018). Cultural beliefs and norms play a crucial role in shaping help-seeking behavior. Different cultural groups may have unique attitudes toward mental health and professional assistance, influencing individuals' decisions (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

The accessibility and availability of mental health services impact help-seeking behavior. Barriers such as cost, distance, and long waiting times can discourage individuals from seeking professional help (Wang et al., 2007). This comprehensive literature review underscores the intricate relationship between mental health problems and help-seeking behavior within the scope of psychology. By delineating influential factors and addressing barriers, researchers and practitioners can develop targeted interventions that foster positive mental health outcomes and encourage individuals to seek the necessary support. Physical impairment, defined as any condition that limits an individual's physical functioning, poses multifaceted challenges that can significantly impact an individual's psychosocial well-being. One important aspect of dealing with physical impairment is help-seeking behavior – the process through which individuals seek assistance and support to cope with their condition (Boerema et al., 2016). Numerous factors play a pivotal role in determining an individual's willingness to seek help when facing physical impairment. Previous studies suggest that the severity of the impairment is a critical factor affecting help-seeking behavior (Morrison, 2016). Individuals with more severe impairments may be more likely to seek help due to the immediate and tangible impact of their condition on their daily lives. Additionally, social support systems, such as family and friends, significantly influence an individual's decision to seek help (Alaie et al., 2016). The perceived stigma attached to physical impairment can also act as a barrier to help-seeking, as individuals may fear negative judgments from others (Horsfield et al., 2020). Cultural and societal norms play a substantial role in shaping help-seeking behavior among individuals with physical impairment. Collectivist cultures may emphasize communal support, potentially fostering a more receptive environment for seeking help (Yu et al., 2015). Conversely, individualistic cultures might emphasize self-reliance, potentially hindering help-seeking behavior. Furthermore, the portrayal of physical impairment in media and public discourse can shape societal perceptions, influencing individuals' perceptions of the appropriateness of seeking help (Goggin & Newell, 2005).

Research consistently highlights the elevated prevalence of mental health problems among individuals with physical impairments. Studies suggest that individuals with physical impairments, such as spinal cord injuries or amputations, face a higher risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders (McGiffin, 2020; Stevelink et al., 2015). The risk factors contributing to these mental health challenges include the distress associated with the impairment itself, perceived loss of identity, changes in self-esteem, and altered social roles (Rotarou & Sakellariou, 2018). Additionally, factors like social isolation, limited access to appropriate healthcare, and stigma can exacerbate mental health issues in this population (Kellam & Barclay, 2020). The intersection of mental health problems and physical impairment can have profound consequences on an individual's psychological well-being. Chronic pain, functional limitations, and altered body image are frequently linked to emotional distress and poor mental health outcomes (Trompetter et al., 2019). The intricate interplay between physical and psychological challenges can create a cycle of negative reinforcement, where mental health issues hinder engagement in physical activities, further impacting physical health and exacerbating mental distress (Stuifbergen et al., 2018). Psychological interventions have demonstrated promise in addressing mental health

challenges among individuals with physical impairments. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness-based interventions have shown effectiveness in managing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (Jones et al., 2017). Collaborative models of care that integrate physical rehabilitation and mental health support have also shown promise in promoting holistic well-being (Krause et al., 2019). Moreover, peer support groups and online communities offer valuable platforms for sharing experiences and coping strategies, reducing feelings of isolation (Kellam & Barclay, 2020).

The Current Study

The study recognizes mental health problems as conditions that significantly affect emotional, psychological, and cognitive well-being. These problems can vary in severity and duration, potentially arising from genetic, biological, environmental, and psychosocial factors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Pregnant women may face unique challenges, including perinatal depression and anxiety, which can impact maternal well-being during a critical period (Gavin et al., 2005). The research also acknowledges physical impairment as a condition restricting an individual's physical functioning, caused by various factors such as injuries, illnesses, congenital conditions, or age-related issues (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This is particularly relevant as physical impairment can exacerbate mental health challenges and create a cycle of negative reinforcement. A lot of research has been done on relationship between mental health problem physical impairments and help seeking behavior among pregnant women, but after reviewing the studies it is found that very little work has been done in Pakistan context. However, research was conducted on the relationship between mental health problem physical impairment and help seeking behavior among pregnant women in Gujranwala city which is 5th biggest city of Pakistan in which 120 women were taken as a sample which revealed that relationship between mental health problem physical impairment and help seeking behavior among pregnant women.

II. METHOD

Participants

To assess the relationship between mental health problem, physical impairments and help seeking behavior among pregnant women it is considered that correlational design was appropriate for the current research. Correlational design measures nature and strength of the relationship between two or more variables. About 120 pregnant women were selected for this research with age range was between 20 to 45 years. Purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. The participants of the study selected from Social Security Hospital, Gujranwala. Women with any major psychological, physical or mental disorder/disease were excluded.

Measures

Following measurement scales used for data collection. [1] The Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale (Overall & Gorham, 1962), is a widely-used assessment tool designed to measure various aspects of mental health and psychiatric symptomatology. Is to provide researchers with a standardized and reliable tool to evaluate mental health status across different populations. This scale is intended to be administered by trained professionals in a clinical or research setting. The scale is rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from "1" (not present) to "7" (extremely severe). Participants' responses recorded accurately and consistently to maintain the scale's reliability (Ahmer et al., 2007). [2] The Physical Impairment Index (Gerety et al., 1993) is a comprehensive assessment tool designed to evaluate the degree of physical impairment in individuals across various research settings. This scale aims to provide researchers with a standardized and reliable instrument to measure the impact of physical conditions on an individual's functioning and mobility. The scale can be administered by trained professionals with expertise in physical therapy, rehabilitation, or related fields. It often features a 7-point scoring system, where scores range from 18 (total assistance required) to 126 (complete independence). This scale is crucial in research contexts for evaluating physical activity and impairment levels. By utilizing this scale, researchers can gather valuable data on physical impairments, monitor changes over time, and assess the effectiveness of interventions and treatments (Fritz & Piva, 2003). Participants' responses recorded accurately and consistently to maintain the scale's reliability. [3] The Help-Seeking Behavior Scale (Naz et al., 2024) is a research instrument designed to assess the propensity of individuals to seek help or support for various personal, emotional, or psychological challenges they may encounter. This scale aims to provide researchers with valuable data on help-seeking tendencies, barriers to

seeking help, and factors influencing help-seeking behavior. The HSBS is intended to be administered in a non-judgmental and confidential setting to encourage honest and accurate responses from participants. Researchers can use the HSBS to gain insights into the help-seeking patterns of different populations and to design targeted interventions to promote positive help-seeking behaviors/ Participants' responses recorded accurately and consistently to maintain the scale's reliability.

Procedure

The participants were approached at hospital. Each participant was being provided with the information sheet for detailed information regarding the research and a consent form to make sure that they are willing to participate in the research. In the present study, data collection was conducted by administering the questionnaire. After receiving consent from the administration of the hospital, the participants were requested to attempt a questionnaire consisting of three sections. Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher explained the whole procedure in detail to avoid confusion. Furthermore, the questionnaire was presented in an envelope and the participants were requested to return the solved questionnaire in an envelope. This help to ensure confidentiality. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version-26 was used to compute, analyze, interpret and represent data in tabular form. The study was also test the reliability of the data using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. To examine the differences among demographic groups, the study used t-tests and ANOVA. Correlational analyses were used to explore correlation among variables. Results were regarded as significant for p value below 0.05.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Psychometric Properties and Pearson Correlation among Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	1	2	3
1. Mental Health Problems	54.76	5.95	48-64	.80	--	.45**	-.97**
2. Physical Impairment	31.10	.87	30-32	.77		--	-.65**
3. Help Seeking Behavior	23.03	3.09	19-27	.85			--

* $p < .01$

Table 1 shows psychometric properties and Pearson correlation among variables. Results show that all scales have satisfactory alpha reliability coefficients (range from 0.77 to 0.85). Pearson correlation showed that mental health problems has significant positive relationship with physical impairment $r(118) = .45, p < .01$, and significant negative relationship with help seeking behavior $r(118) = -.97, p < .01$. Physical impairment has significant negative relationship with help seeking behavior $r(118) = -.65, p < .01$.

Table 2: Mental Health Problems and Physical Impairment as a Predictors of Help Seeking Behavior among Pregnant Women

Predictors	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
(Constant)	30.92*		.21
Mental Health Problems	.44*	.84*	.31
Physical Impairment	.96*	.27*	.45
R^2	.456		

* $p < .01$

Table 2 shows mental health problem, physical impairment as a predictors of help seeking behavior among pregnant women. The R^2 values show 45.6% variance in the outcome variable by the predictors including mental health problems and physical impairment. Mental health problem and physical impairment significantly negatively predicted help seeking behavior among pregnant women $F(2, 117) = 19.52, p < .01$.

Table 3: Differences on the Basis of Having a Disease or Not in Mental Health Problems, Physical Impairment and Help Seeking Behavior among Pregnant Women

Variables	No Disease		Disease		<i>t</i> (118)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Mental Health Problems	48.23	3.39	58.15	4.31	14.82	.00	1.23
Physical Impairment	30.12	.65	31.65	.47	21.69	.00	.85
Health Seeking Behavior	19.45	2.14	25.05	1.43	26.52	.00	.81

Table 3 shows differences on the basis of having a disease or not in mental health problems, physical impairment and help seeking behavior among pregnant women. Results show that pregnant women who have disease were higher on mental health problems $t(118) = 14.82, p < .01$, physical impairment $t(118) = 21.69, p < .01$, and help seeking behavior $t(118) = 26.52, p < .01$.

Table 4: Differences on the Basis of Family System in Mental Health Problems, Physical Impairment and Help Seeking Behavior among Pregnant Women

Variables	Joint Family		Nuclear Family		<i>t</i> (118)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Mental Health Problems	44.23	3.67	56.34	4.12	13.23	.00	.82
Physical Impairment	29.48	2.12	30.45	1.22	19.30	.00	.67
Health Seeking Behavior	17.17	1.44	24.99	1.56	24.22	.00	.71

Table 4 shows differences on the basis of family system in mental health problems, physical impairment and help seeking behavior among pregnant women. Results show that pregnant women with nuclear family system were higher on mental health problems $t(118) = 13.23, p < .01$, physical impairment $t(118) = 19.30, p < .01$, and help seeking behavior $t(118) = 24.22, p < .01$.

IV.DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the relationships between mental health problems, physical impairment, help-seeking behavior, and various demographic factors among pregnant women. The study employs a set of psychometric scales to measure these constructs and analyzes their interrelationships. According to the psychometric properties of the scales the psychometric properties of the scales used in the study, including mental health problem, physical impairment, and help seeking behavior, indicates satisfactory reliability. The alpha coefficients (α) ranging from 0.77 to 0.85 suggest internal consistency and reliability of the measurements (i.e., Table 1). These reliability coefficients suggest that the scales are consistent and stable in measuring the intended constructs. The correlations reported indicate significant associations between these variables. Mental health problems were positively correlated with physical impairment and negatively correlated with help seeking behavior. Furthermore, physical impairment exhibits a negative correlation with help seeking behavior. These findings reveal how mental health issues and physical impairment are interconnected and influence help-seeking tendencies among pregnant women. Previous studies also highlight the importance of mental health problems and physical impairment in understanding and predicting help-seeking tendencies in pregnant women (Smallwood, 2017; Tol et al., 2018).

The data indicate that pregnant women from nuclear family systems have higher levels of mental health problem physical impairment and help seeking behavior compared to those from joint family systems. This highlights how family dynamics can play a role in influencing mental health, physical well-being, and help-seeking behaviors among pregnant women. The findings presented in the research provide valuable insights into the impact of family system on mental health problems, physical impairment, and help-seeking behavior among pregnant women. The nuclear family system, which consists of two parents and their children, plays a significant role in the mental health of pregnant women. Adequate family support within this structure can positively impact mental well-being, particularly during challenging times such as pregnancy. Research indicates that high-quality relationships and

strong familial support are associated with reduced depression and improved mental health among pregnant women (Al-Mutawtah et al., 2023; Biaggi et al., 2015).

Differences based on disease status examines differences in mental health problems, physical impairment, and help seeking behavior show that pregnant women with a disease reported higher levels of mental health problems, physical impairment and help seeking behavior compared to those without a disease. This finding underscores the influence of health status on mental health, physical well-being, and the willingness to seek help (Melnik et al., 2020). Furthermore, the differences observed based on disease status and family system underscore the importance of considering contextual factors when addressing pregnant women's mental health and well-being. Understanding the factors that influence help-seeking behavior is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems that cater to the unique needs of individuals with physical impairment. By addressing the psychological implications and barriers associated with help-seeking, researchers and practitioners can contribute to enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life for this population (Goodwin et al., 2017). The higher levels of mental health problems, physical impairment, and help-seeking behavior among pregnant women with diseases and those from nuclear family systems suggest that these groups might require targeted interventions and support. The study sheds light on the intricate interplay between mental health, physical well-being, and help-seeking behavior among pregnant women. The results emphasize the need for comprehensive healthcare programs that not only address medical concerns but also attend to mental health and social support, particularly for pregnant women facing health challenges or belonging to specific family systems.

V. CONCLUSION

The study reveals significant relationships between mental health problems, physical impairment, and help-seeking behavior among pregnant women. It also highlights the impact of disease status and family system on these variables. The findings underscore the need for holistic approaches to maternal well-being that consider both physical and mental health aspects, as well as socio demographic factors. The study provides valuable insights for healthcare professionals and policymakers to better understand and address the challenges faced by pregnant women in seeking appropriate care. Their research was conducted on the population of these pregnant women. Sample size was most significant restriction of the exploration. The study's limitations, such as its cross-sectional design and potential self-report biases, should be acknowledged. Future research could explore causal relationships and investigate potential mediating factors that contribute to the observed patterns.

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