

Mental Health Literacy and Attitudes Towards Seeking Psychological Help in Nursing Students

Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinde Ruh Sağlığı Okuryazarlığı ve Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutumları

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Mental Health Literacy is a subset of healthcare literacy that provides recognition of knowledge and beliefs regarding mental disorders, their prevention and management, and help-seeking behaviors for mental disorders. The present study was conducted to investigate the effects of Mental Health Literacy and independent variables on the attitudes of nursing students toward seeking psychological help.

Method: The study sample consisted of 361 students. The Student Descriptive Questionnaire, Mental Health Literacy Scale, and Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form were used to collect the study data.

Results: The mean score of the Mental Health Literacy Scale was 16.925 ± 3.122 , and the mean score of Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help was 66.044 ± 9.432 . Mental Health Literacy explained 20% of the Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help. It was detected that gender had a negative and significant impact on the Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help ($B = -2.774$, $\beta = -0.130$). The results showed that students who considered seeking psychological help had a more positive attitude on this issue.

Conclusion: It is possible to argue that as individuals' Mental Health Literacy increases, their attitudes toward seeking psychological help become more positive, men have a more negative attitude toward seeking psychological help than women, and individuals who consider seeking psychological help exhibit a more positive attitude in this respect. It is important to support students who do not think of seeking psychological help and male students in seeking psychological first aid and to raise awareness among students by organizing panels and symposiums on the problems created by gender roles.

Keywords: Mental health literacy, attitude toward seeking psychological help, nursing students

ÖZ

Amaç: Ruh Sağlığı Okuryazarlığı (RSO), ruhsal bozukluklarla ilgili bilgi ve inançları tanımayı, ruhsal bozuklukları önleme ve yönetmeyi, aynı zamanda ruhsal bozukluklarda yardım arama davranışını sağlayan, sağlık okuryazarlığının bir alt kümesidir. Bu çalışma hemşirelik öğrenimine devam eden öğrencilerinin ruh sağlığı okuryazarlığı ve bağımsız değişkenlerin psikolojik yardım almaya ilişkin tutumlarına olan etkisinin incelenmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Yöntem: Çalışmanın örneklemini 361 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Verilerin toplanmasında Öğrencileri Tanımlayıcı Soru formu, Ruh Sağlığı Okuryazarlığı Ölçeği, Profesyonel Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutum Ölçeği-Kısa Formu kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Ruh Sağlığı Okuryazarlığı Ölçeği puan ortalaması $16,925 \pm 3,122$, Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutum puan ortalaması $66,044 \pm 9,432$ 'dir. Ruh Sağlığı Okuryazarlığı Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutumun %20'sini açıklamaktadır. Cinsiyetin, Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutum üzerinde negatif ve anlamlı bir etkisi olduğu belirlenmiştir. ($B = -2,774$, $\beta = -0,130$, $p = 0,007$). Çalışma, psikolojik yardım almaya düşünen öğrencilerin, bu konuda daha olumlu bir tutum sergilediklerini göstermiştir.

Sonuç: Bireylerin ruh sağlığı okuryazarlığı arttıkça, psikolojik yardım almaya yönelik tutumlarının da daha olumlu olduğunu, erkeklerin kadınlara göre psikolojik yardım almaya yönelik daha olumsuz bir tutuma sahip olduğunu, psikolojik yardım almaya düşünen bireylerin, bu konuda daha olumlu bir tutum sergilediklerini söyleyebiliriz. Psikolojik yardım alma düşüncesi olmayan öğrenciler ile erkek öğrencilerinin psikolojik ilk yardım alma konusunda desteklenmeleri, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin oluşturduğu sorunlara yönelik panel ve sempozyumların düzenlenerek öğrencilere farkındalık kazandırılması önemlidir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Ruh sağlığı okuryazarlığı, psikolojik yardım alma tutumu, hemşirelik öğrencileri

Introduction

The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work, and contribute to society (WHO 2024). Based on the World Health Organization data, 970 million individuals have mental disorders, and anxiety and depressive disorders are detected mostly (WHO 2024). Mental disorders are increasing in society with each passing day (WHO 2024).

Mental Health Literacy (MHL) refers to the knowledge and skills to recognize, manage, and prevent mental health disorders (Kesgin 2025). It not only provides information about mental health disorders but can also support individuals in acquiring real behaviors for mental health awareness for themselves and others (Mahardika 2021). University life prepares the environment for students to find their identities, and acquire independence and new roles (Temiz et al. 2021). However, students also face challenging experiences such as separation from family, adapting to a new environment, and economic difficulties during this period (Temiz et al. 2021). Students who study nursing in healthcare departments of universities work face-to-face with sick individuals who are struggling with their youth problems and experiencing crises. Nursing students receiving practical courses from the first year, meeting sick individuals early, and facing risky patient groups can be risky for mental health (Temiz et al. 2021). According to previous studies, the risk of experiencing mental problems such as anxiety and depression in nursing students during the undergraduate period might be high (Softa and Kaya 2013, Stanton et al. 2021). In a previous study examining the mental problems experienced by university students over one year, it was reported that 65% of the students experienced anxiety, and 45% or more experienced functional problems because of depressive symptoms (ACHA 2019). In another study that was conducted with university students, it was reported that depression and anxiety levels were moderate and that age, department, and income status variables were effective in this context (Şimşek et al. 2024). Nursing students face many challenging conditions throughout their lives as well as their academic lives. When they face challenging conditions, some students can cope with these conditions, while others might need support (Temiz et al. 2021). When individuals cannot develop coping mechanisms for challenging situations, the need to seek psychological help emerges (Temiz et al. 2021).

For individuals to cope with mental problems and challenging experiences, the factors affecting these attitudes are as important as their attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Based on the literature data, the attitude toward seeking psychological help is affected by gender roles, level of education, having a psychiatric disease, having relatives with mental diseases, having received psychological help previously, economic status, self-esteem, personal coping strategies, social support, self-stigmatization, and cultural and social characteristics (Marwood and Hear, 2019, Ulken and Odacı 2021, Cormier et al. 2022, Özer and Altun 2024, Masara and Zirima 2024). For this reason, it is important to know the variables affecting the behaviors of nursing students to seek psychological help in conditions where they have difficulty and cannot cope (Fischer and Turner 1970, Ozdemir 2012). In this concept, the variables associated with the level of Mental Health Literacy of nursing students, their attitude toward seeking psychological help, and their recognition and protection of mental disease symptoms must be known (Smith and Shochet 2011). The level of mental resilience of nursing students will increase during their education and their awareness of mental problems will increase when they take on patient responsibility in the future with the development of Mental Health Literacy. When previous studies were reviewed, it was reported that nursing students have high healthcare literacy, contribute more to their profession after graduation, and play active roles in providing quality nursing care (Kacgin et al. 2021). Studies also indicated that nursing students have high Mental Health Literacy and show positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Stanton et al. 2021, Zhang et al. 2024). Providing supportive training to increase students' Mental Health Literacy during nursing education is important for students and for the individuals they care for. Students must also have information about protecting, developing, and treating mental health to ensure that they can request psychological help in line with their needs. By doing so, as well as stopping the increase in mental disorders, individuals and society are made aware of mental disorders before they occur and information is provided about recognizing and protecting against mental diseases (Reis et al. 2021, Abuhammad and Hamaideh 2022).

In the present study, the purpose was to examine the effects of Mental Health Literacy and independent variables of nursing students on the attitudes of nursing students toward seeking psychological help and to contribute to taking necessary precautions by determining the factors that affect the attitude toward seeking psychological help negatively. The following hypotheses were created to achieve this target. (H1) There is a Relationship Between Nursing Students' Mental Health Literacy and Their Attitudes Toward Seeking

Psychological Help. (H2) Mental Health Literacy of Nursing Students is a Variable that Affects the Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The study had a descriptive-cross-sectional and correlational design from quantitative research designs. The study was conducted with students who were studying in the Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences of Kastamonu University in the 2024-2025 academic year. The data were collected face-to-face between September 15 and November 30, 2024. In order to collect the research data, the course instructors were contacted. An appointment time was set. Information about the study was provided before the data was collected. Informed consent was obtained from those who agreed to participate in the study and 20 minutes were given. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time they wanted.

The population of the study consisted of students studying in the Nursing Department of the Faculty of Health Sciences of Kastamonu University. The total number of students enrolled in the Nursing Department in 2024-2025 was 480, and the sample size was calculated as $n = 480 (1.96)^2 (0.5) (0.5) / (0.5)^2 (480-1) + (1.96)^2 (0.5) (0.5) = 214$ with the known sample calculation and the study was completed with 361 students. There were no losses in the study. The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1- Being over 18 years of age, 2-Being a nursing student, 3-Willingness to participate in the study. Nursing students studying at another university and those who did not agree to participate in the research were excluded.

Kastamonu University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Board permission was taken (2024/30). The necessary institutional permission for the study to be conducted was obtained from the faculty dean's office and the university. Permission was obtained from the authors who conducted the validity and reliability study for the scales used in the study. Consent was obtained from the participants and information was provided about the study.

Measures

The Nursing Students Descriptive Questionnaire, Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS), and Attitude Scale Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form were used to collect the study data.

Nursing Students Descriptive Questionnaire

The form had 16 questions on demographic characteristics, psychiatric medication use, presence of mental and chronic diseases, family disease history, traumatic life experience, and whether or not they have received training in Mental Health Literacy.

Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS)

The scale was developed by Jung et al. in 2016. The Turkish validity and reliability of the scale was conducted by Goktas et al. in 2018 with university students and the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was detected to be 0.71. The MHLS consisted of 3 sub-dimensions and 22 items. There are 11 items in the Knowledge-Focused MHLS sub-dimension, 8 items in the Belief-Focused MHLS sub-dimension, and 4 items in the Resource-Focused MHLS sub-dimension. The score that can be obtained from the scale varies between 0-22.

Attitude Scale Toward Receiving Professional Psychological Help-Short Form (ASRPPH-SF)

This scale, which aims to measure attitudes toward receiving psychological help, is the revised version of the Attitude Scale toward Receiving Psychological Help developed by Türküm (2004). The psychometric characteristics of the first version show that the scale is a valid and reliable tool. The results of the factor analysis applied to the data that were collected from 481 university students in the revision study of the scale showed that 18 items explaining 52.6% of the total variance were collected in two factors. The first factor consisted of 12 items including positive opinions toward receiving psychological help and had an internal consistency coefficient of .92, and an average of item-total relationships of .67. The second factor included negative opinions toward receiving psychological help and had an internal consistency coefficient of .77, and an average of item-total relationships of .54. The internal consistency coefficient calculated for the whole scale was detected to be .90. When female and male genders were compared in terms of the scale as a whole and the scores they received from two subscales, it was detected that there were significant differences in favor of female

participants in all three comparisons and that their attitude scores were higher than those of male participants. Similar to other studies conducted on developing attitude scales toward receiving psychological help, to examine the discriminant validity of the scale, the scores of students who had and did not have experience of receiving psychological help were compared with the t-test, and a significant difference was detected in favor of those who had experience of receiving help. Similarly, when students who received help and were pleased with this help were compared with those who were not, a significant difference was detected in favor of those who were pleased. These results were interpreted as supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement tool. The relationship coefficient obtained by applying the scale to 50 students twice, 10 weeks apart, was .77. ASRPPH-SF consisted of 18 items in total, allowing a 5-point Likert-type rating. The respondents were asked to read the statements in each item and mark 1 if they did not agree at all, 2 if they somewhat agreed, 3 if they were undecided, 4 if they somewhat agreed, and 5 if they completely agreed. The answers were scored from 1 to 5. The lowest score a respondent can receive on the scale was 18, and the highest score was 90. A high score on the scale indicates a high and positive attitude toward psychological help.

Statistical analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 22.0 software. Number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistical methods in the evaluation of the data. Mental Health Literacy and Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help scores and scale sub-scores were obtained, and Kurtosis and Skewness tests were used to determine whether they showed a normal distribution.

In the relevant literature, when the results of the kurtosis and skewness values of the variables are between +1.5 and -1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013), +2.0 and -2.0 (George and Mallery 2010), it is accepted as a normal distribution. The relationship between Mental Health Literacy and Attitudes Towards Seeking Psychological Help was tested with Pearson Correlation Analysis. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the effects of Mental Health Literacy and some independent variables on attitudes toward seeking psychological Help. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was calculated in the internal consistency analysis of the total score of the scale and its subscales. The findings were evaluated at a 95% Confidence Interval and a 5% significance level.

Results

When the distribution of the results regarding the descriptive characteristics of the students was evaluated, 73.4% of the nursing students were female, 55.4% had equal income to expenses, 26.9% were in their second year, 4.2% had been diagnosed with a mental disease, 9.4% had a chronic disease, 20.5% had experienced traumatic events in their lives, and 70.4% would consider seeking psychological help if needed (Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of students according to descriptive characteristics		
Groups	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Female	265	73.4
Male	96	26.6
Income Status		
Income < Expense	111	30.7
Income = Expense	200	55.4
Income > Expense	50	13.9
Grade		
1	90	24.9
2	97	26.9
3	77	21.3
4	97	26.9
Presence of Diagnosed Mental Health Disease		
No	346	95.8
Yes	15	4.2
Presence of Chronic Disease		
No	327	90.6
Yes	34	9.4
Presence of Psychiatric Diagnosis in the Family		
No	321	88.9
Yes	40	11.1

Table 1 Distribution of students according to descriptive characteristics		
Groups	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
Psychiatric Drug Use in the Family		
No	337	93.4
Yes	24	6.6
Mother's Education Status		
Primary School Graduate	181	50.1
Secondary School Graduate	73	20.2
High School Graduate	69	19.1
University Graduate	38	10.5
Father's Education Status		
Primary School Graduate	97	26.9
Secondary School Graduate	78	21.6
High School Graduate	108	29.9
University Graduate	78	21.6
Presence of Traumatic Experience		
No	287	79.5
Yes	74	20.5
Thoughts on Receiving Psychological Help		
No	107	29.6
Yes	254	70.4
Previously Received Psychological Help Status		
No	307	85.0
Yes	54	15.0

Table 2 shows the means and distributions of the Mental Health Literacy and Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help scores. The Mental Health Literacy MHLS mean score was found to be 16.925±3.122 and was at a high level.

Table 2 Mean scores for mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help									
	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Scale Min-Max	Kurtosis	Skewness	Alpha
MHLS Scale Total Score	361	16.925	3.122	7.000	22.000	0-22	0.365	-0.717	0.886
Knowledge Oriented MHLS	361	8.125	2.303	0.000	10.000	0-10	0.845	-0.854	0.880
Belief-Focused MHLS	361	6.266	1.831	0.000	8.000	0-8	0.456	-0.478	0.845
Resource Oriented MHLS	361	2.535	1.441	0.000	4.000	0-4	-1.168	-0.475	0.839
ASRPPH-SF Scale Total Score	361	66.044	9.432	42.000	90.000	18-90	-0.287	-0.010	0.903
Positive Attitude toward Seeking Psychological Help	361	44.740	7.683	12.000	60.000	12-60	0.542	-1.001	0.899
Negative Attitude toward Seeking Psychological Help	361	14.695	4.394	6.000	30.000	6-30	-0.197	0.110	0.882

A positive and statistically significant relationship was detected between the total score of MHLS and the total score of Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help ($r = 0.449$, $p < 0.01$), which shows that as individuals' Mental Health Literacy increases, their attitudes toward seeking psychological help also become more positive. A negative and statistically significant relationship was detected between MHLS total score and negative attitudes ($r = -0.160$, $p < 0.01$). In this context, as Mental Health Literacy increases, negative attitudes decrease.

Table 3Correlation between mental health literacy and attitude scores toward seeking psychological help					
		Mental Health Literacy Total	Information-Based Mental Health Literacy	Belief-Based Mental Health Literacy	Resource-Based Mental Health Literacy
Attitude toward Seeking Psychological Help Total	r	0.449**	0.411**	0.186**	0.079
	P	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.134
Positive Attitude toward Seeking Psychological Help	R	0.460**	0.412**	0.159**	0.136**
	P	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.010
Negative Attitude toward Seeking Psychological Help	R	-0.160**	-0.162**	-0.123*	0.068
	P	0.002	0.002	0.020	0.195

* <0.05 ; ** <0.01 ; Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 4 Differentiation of attitudes toward seeking psychological help and mental health literacy scores according to descriptive characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	n	%	Attitude toward Seeking Psychological Help Total	Mental Health Literacy Total
Sex	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
Female	265	73.4	67.264±9.204	17.121±2.931
Male	96	26.6	62.677±9.281	16.385±3.558
t=			4.175	1.985
p=			0.000	0.072
Income Status	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
Income < Expense	111	30.7	64.387±9.360	16.369±3.133
Income = Expense	200	55.4	66.665±9.574	17.270±3.141
Income > Expense	50	13.9	67.240±8.689	16.780±2.881
F=			2.570	3.068
p=			0.078	0.048
Grade	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
1	90	24.9	65.800±8.652	16.333±3.006
2	97	26.9	66.505±9.632	16.351±2.803
3	77	21.3	64.299±9.175	16.922±3.421
4	97	26.9	67.196±10.038	18.052±3.019
F=			1.464	6.684
p=			0.224	0.000
Presence of Diagnosed Mental Health Disease	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
No	346	95.8	65.971±9.174	16.945±3.134
Yes	15	4.2	67.733±14.508	16.467±2.900
t=			-0.708	0.580
p=			0.648	0.562
Presence of Chronic Disease	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
No	327	90.6	66.291±9.516	16.914±3.105
Yes	34	9.4	63.677±8.344	17.029±3.326
t=			1.541	-0.204
p=			0.124	0.838
Presence of Psychiatric Diagnosis in the Family	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
No	321	88.9	65.919±9.348	16.875±3.130
Yes	40	11.1	67.050±10.155	17.325±3.067
t=			-0.715	-0.859
p=			0.475	0.391
Psychiatric Medication Use Status	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
No	337	93.4	65.917±9.234	16.950±3.150
Yes	24	6.6	67.833±11.973	16.583±2.733
t=			-0.962	0.555
p=			0.450	0.579
Mother's Education Status	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
Primary School Graduate	181	50.1	66.249±8.613	16.983±3.110
Secondary School Graduate	73	20.2	65.836±9.469	16.986±3.129
High School Graduate	69	19.1	66.029±9.994	16.986±3.099
University Graduate	38	10.5	65.500±12.087	16.421±3.285
F=			0.082	0.367
p=			0.970	0.777
Father's Education Status	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
Primary School Graduate	97	26.9	66.175±8.947	16.969±2.960
Secondary School Graduate	78	21.6	64.615±8.657	17.039±3.451
High School Graduate	108	29.9	67.019±9.440	17.065±3.027
University Graduate	78	21.6	65.962±10.675	16.564±3.136
F=			0.989	0.458
p=			0.398	0.712
Presence of Traumatic Experience	n	%	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD
No	287	79.5	65.965±9.280	16.916±3.208

Table 5 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis made to examine the effects of Mental Health Literacy and some independent variables on attitudes toward seeking psychological help, which was conducted in two stages and revealed how independent variables affected attitudes toward seeking psychological help. In the first model, only the total score of Mental Health Literacy was included as the independent variable. Based on the analysis results, the total score of Mental Health Literacy had a positive and significant effect on attitude toward seeking psychological help ($B = 1.357$, $\beta = 0.449$, $p < 0.001$), which shows that increasing Mental Health Literacy positively affected individuals' attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The explanatory power (R^2) of the model was 20%, which shows that Mental Health Literacy explained 20% of the Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help. The F value ($F = 90.801$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed that the model was significant. In the second model, as well as Mental Health Literacy, gender, thought of seeking psychological help, and previous status of seeking psychological help were also included in the model. The effects of Mental Health Literacy continued in this model ($B = 1.248$, $\beta = 0.413$, $p < 0.001$); however, the effects of the other added variables also emerged. Gender: Gender had a negative and significant effect on Attitude Toward Seeking Psychological Help ($B = -2.774$, $\beta = -0.130$, $p = 0.007$), which shows that men have a more negative attitude toward seeking psychological help than women. Thought of Seeking Psychological Help: Thought of seeking psychological help had a positive and significant effect on attitude ($B = 2.529$, $\beta = 0.123$, $p = 0.014$), which shows that individuals who consider seeking psychological help have a more positive attitude toward this issue. Previously Seeking Psychological Help: This variable had no significant effect on attitude ($B = 1.754$, $\beta = 0.066$, $p = 0.161$). The explanatory power (R^2) of this second model was 24.3% and the explanatory power of the model increased by 4.3% with the added variables ($\Delta R^2 = 0.043$). The F value ($F = 29.941$, $p < 0.001$) showed that the model was significant in general. Durbin-Watson Values were around 1.77-1.78 in both models, which shows that there is no autocorrelation and that the regression model is reliable (Table 5).

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between nursing students' Mental Health Literacy and their attitudes toward seeking psychological help and the affecting variables. Mental Health Literacy might be affected by sociodemographic characteristics such as education level, being diagnosed with a mental disease, and being a woman, and can differentiate an individual's attitude toward seeking psychological help (Cormier et al. 2022). The variables that affect the attitude toward seeking psychological help of the students who participated in the present study were determined as being a woman, the idea of seeking psychological help, and Mental Health Literacy. Considering that nursing students are in young adulthood during their university education, this is the same period as the onset of psychological disorders (De Girolamo 2012). The attitude toward seeking psychological help and Mental Health Literacy levels might be effective in coping with the challenging conditions faced in young adulthood. In a previous study that was conducted with university students, it was reported that the Mental Health Literacy level of the students was high (Masara and Zirima 2024). However, it was reported in other studies conducted with undergraduate nursing students that the Mental Health Literacy of the students was moderate and low (Saito and Creedy 2021; Özer and Altun 2024). When other studies were examined, it was found that the attitudes of the students toward seeking psychological help were positive (Cheng 2018, Conceição et al. 2022, El-Hachem et al. 2023).

The results of the present study are consistent with the literature data. The Mental Health Literacy of nursing students was high and they had positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. When Mental Health Literacy was evaluated in terms of gender, it was found in the literature that women had higher Mental Health Literacy than men (Lee et al. 2020, Singh et al. 2022, Abo-Rass et al. 2023). Also, according to a systematic review that was conducted with university students, the Mental Health Literacy knowledge levels of female students were found to be higher than those of male students (Sinduja 2024). In studies examining Mental Health Literacy in nursing students, it was reported that being a woman affected the level of Mental Health Literacy (Stanton et al. 2021, Zhang et al. 2024). The results in the literature are consistent with the results of the present study, but there are also some studies with different results. For example, in a study conducted with undergraduate students, it was reported that gender did not affect the level of Mental Health Literacy (Masara and Zirima 2024). Similarly, in a previous study that was conducted with healthcare staff, it was reported that gender did not affect the level of Mental Health Literacy (Öztaş and Aydoğan 2021). However, when the attitude toward seeking psychological help was evaluated in terms of differences according to gender, it was reported that being a woman was significantly and positively correlated with having a positive attitude toward seeking psychological help (Cheng et al. 2018). The results of the present study are similar to the literature data. It is considered that the low Mental Health Literacy and psychological help-seeking attitudes of male participants might be associated with gender roles. The expectation of men to be stronger, tougher, and less emotional than

women, and the fact that women seek more information and attach more importance to mental healthcare might have affected this (Good et al. 1989, Wong 2016, Fitri et al. 2019). The perception of “solving problems” caused by gender roles in men might also affect men’s negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Wong 2016, Fitri et al. 2019). It is also considered that men’s lower emotion regulation, emotional awareness, and tendency to suppress their emotions compared to women may negatively affect their attitudes toward seeking psychological help when they encounter a mental problem (Kwon et al. 2013).

Based on studies in the literature, characteristics such as having a family history of mental disease, having a chronic disease, having a traumatic life experience, using psychiatric medication, having the idea of seeking psychological help, and having previously received psychological help positively affect Mental Health Literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Cheng et al. 2018, Marwood and Hearn 2019, Conceição et al. 2022, Özer and Altun 2024, Masara and Zirima 2024). These independent variables were not found to be effective in the present study, but it was found that having the idea of seeking psychological help positively affected students’ attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Studies in the literature support our results (Mojtabai 2016, Conceição et al. 2022, Masara and Zirima 2024). It was also detected in the present study that there were significant relationships between Mental Health Literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. As the Mental Health Literacy of nursing students increased, they showed a positive attitude toward seeking psychological help. Beliefs and attitudes toward mental health problems can be decisive in individuals’ psychological help-seeking behaviors, and negative beliefs delay early diagnosis (Goktas and Buldukoglu 2022). In fact, in a study conducted with Malaysian students, it was reported that the reason for the students’ negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help was their negative beliefs about seeking psychological help (Arifin et al. 2022). In our study, there was a significant relationship between belief-based Mental Health Literacy and the attitude toward seeking psychological help, and it was detected that individuals’ belief systems affected their positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Students with high Mental Health Literacy can identify mental problems and disorders and determine appropriate support and treatment resources. Mental Health Literacy training may be needed to improve students’ mental health and have a positive attitude toward seeking psychological help (Sobhanifar et al. 2025). In another study that was conducted with university students, Mental Health Literacy supported positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help, individuals’ seeking help, and mental healthcare (Kim and Kim 2020). In this study, the fact that information-oriented Mental Health Literacy increased positive psychological help-seeking attitudes suggested that nursing students’ knowledge about mental health would make them more likely to seek psychological help. It is considered that the weaker relationship between belief-oriented Mental Health Literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help might be because of cultural and individual characteristics. The weaker relationship between resource-oriented Mental Health Literacy and positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help suggests that the individual’s lack of knowledge about the sources from which he/she can receive help cannot change the positive attitude.

Since participation was expected to be voluntary in the study, it was not possible to obtain full feedback from all classes and departments at the desired level. However, the minimum number of students was reached, as planned. Responses to the scales are based on students’ self-reports.

Conclusion

The results support the hypotheses of the present study. The hypothesis that “There is a Relationship Between Nursing Students’ Mental Health Literacy and Their Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help” and the variables affecting nursing students’ mental health literacy attitudes toward seeking psychological help were tested. A relationship was detected between the Mental Health Literacy of nurses and their attitudes toward seeking psychological help, and Mental Health Literacy was found to be one of the variables affecting the attitude toward seeking psychological help. Mental Health Literacy is a strong determinant of positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help, and gender and the idea of seeking psychological help are important independent variables affecting these attitudes. Mental Health Literacy and the behavior of seeking help are important factors that will increase social welfare. It is important to support students who do not think of seeking psychological help and male students in seeking psychological first aid and to raise awareness among students by organizing panels and symposiums on the problems created by gender roles. Indeed, organizing educational programs to increase the emotional awareness of male students, which can affect their Mental Health Literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help, can contribute to this situation. It is also recommended that all students include courses aimed at increasing Mental Health Literacy in their curriculum throughout their education, and digital Mental Health Literacy psychoeducation (Yeo et al. 2024), which was found to be effective in studies, will increase students’ positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The findings of the present study might guide future studies and interventions to support students’ positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help.

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