

BACKGROUND

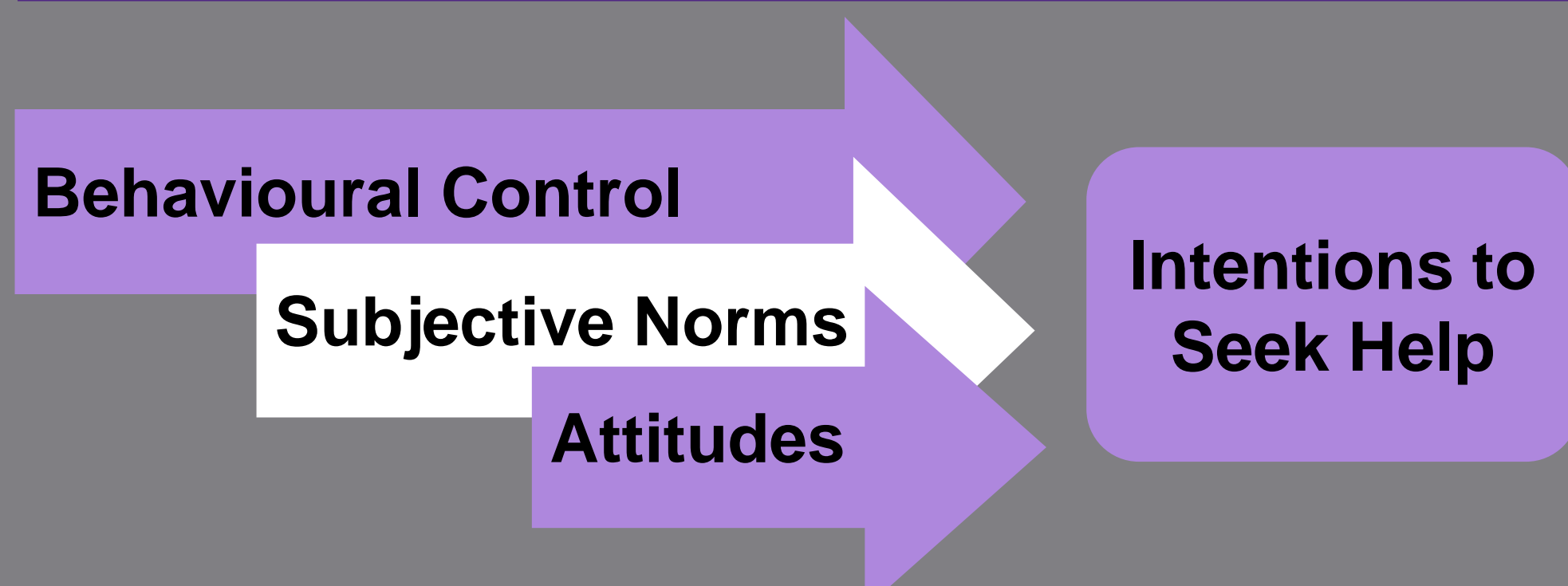
Youth help-seeking behaviour has been associated with a reduction in long term effects of bullying, dating violence and substance misuse, like low academic achievement and life satisfaction (Leach & Rickwood, 2009; Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010; Ballon, Kirst & Smith, 2004; Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Waddell et al., 2005). Unfortunately, many youth struggle in accessing help resources when they are required (Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010). Creating cost-effective strategies to predict help-seeking intentions can assist educators in understanding the need and/or impact of help-seeking promotion initiatives in their classrooms.

THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991; see Figure 1) postulates that attitudes towards a behaviour, society's beliefs about a behaviour and perceived ability to control a behaviour can be used to predict behavioural intentions. In help-seeking, this can mean that norms, like gendered stereotypes and factors that influence our control over our behaviour, like finances, can be used to predict intentions to seek help.

**Hypothesis:** perceived behavioural control, attitudes and beliefs regarding help-seeking behavior would predict help-seeking intentions of youth in circumstances as they relate to social, emotional or mental health issues.

FIGURE 1



METHOD

School districts across Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario participated in a help-seeking questionnaire as part of a larger study on the evaluation of a healthy relationships program. Students had the option of accessing the survey online or in paper format.

PARTICIPANTS

- N = 142 students, age: 11 - 17 (M = 13.24, SD = 1.26).
- Ethnic background: Caucasian (71.1%), First Nations, Inuit or Metis (9.9%); the remainder identified as Asian (2.8%), African (2.1%), Arab (1.4%), or other (7.0%).
- Gender: 44.4% identified as male (N = 63), 47.2% identified as female (N = 67), and 8.4% did not disclose their gender or reported as "other" (N = 12).

MEASURES AND DESIGN

**Independent variable:** Behavioural control, attitudes and beliefs (13 items).

- The Barriers to Adolescents Seeking Help Questionnaire (BASH; Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick & Morrissey, 1997; modified) was used to evaluate two components of the TPB: *attitudes and subjective norms* towards help-seeking. Example: "Even if I wanted to, I wouldn't have time to seek professional help for my mental health" and "I can work out my own problems" (Kuhl et al., 1997).
- Items intended to measure *perceived behavioural control* were developed by the researchers. Example: "I am unlikely to visit a mental health professional because of how much money it costs".

**Dependent variable:**

- The General Help Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi & Rickwood, 2005; modified) was utilized to measure reflections of participants' intentions to seek help from formal or informal sources when experiencing personal, emotional or social problems. 7 options were listed: parent/guardian, school support, community support, mental health professional, medical professional, other, or no intention to seek help, in a yes/no format. Responses were grouped and dichotomized: a "yes" response to any question that listed a source of help was coded as 1, while no intention to seek help was coded as 0.

\*For further information, please request a copy of the survey items.

RESULTS

**Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA)** were conducted to investigate the structure of a 12-item help-seeking measure (one item was dropped due to cross loading) consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework. A three-factor solution emerged and explained 53% of the observed variance. The first component contained items consistent with *lack of behavioural control* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ). The second component reflected *attitudes and beliefs regarding help-seeking behavior* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .60$ ). The third factor had two items load and due to low reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .39$ ), it was removed from further analyses.

**Binary logistic regression analyses** were conducted to investigate if the factors that emerged from the EFA could predict self-reported intentions to seek help (yes vs. no). See Table 1 for results of logistic regression analyses.

TABLE 1

Variable	B	Wald Chi-Square	p
Age	-.097	.277	.599
Gender (female)	.937	4.81	.028
Behavioural Control	.074	.176	.672
Attitudes & Beliefs	.761	9.936	.002

DISCUSSION

- As part of the model, *gender* predicts intentions to seek help whereby girls are more likely than boys to seek help. This may be due in part to gendered stereotypes regarding help-seeking behaviour (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).
- After adjustment for age, gender and lack of behavioural control, *societal norms* congruent with help-seeking and *positive attitudes towards help-seeking* behaviour predicted intentions to seek help.
- As part of the model, *lack of behavioural control* (e.g., lack of finances) is not associated with intentions to seek help in this sample.
- Therefore, attitudes and beliefs appear as a stronger predictor of intentions to seek help compared to lack of behavioural control.

IMPLICATIONS

- Societal norms and attitudes towards help-seeking behaviour can be used to predict adolescent intentions to seek help.
- The results suggest that help-seeking promotion initiatives should target the societal norms and beliefs that youth have regarding help-seeking behaviour, such as stigmatization and gender role socialization.

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