

Relationship between Parenting Styles, Assertiveness and Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help among University Students

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Abstract: Professional psychological help exists to assist a society in dealing with issues in daily life. However, the willingness of a society to accept these services is a concern that contributes to the effectiveness of the said services. The attitude of society towards these services reflects its personal values, and it is often based on personal experiences with its surroundings, such as family environments. The attitude mentioned also reflects assertiveness of people in interactions that may result in a different level of openness in accepting psychological help for handling personal issues. The purpose of this correlational study is to determine the relationships that may exist between parenting styles, assertiveness and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help among university students. A total number of 303 respondents were involved in this study. Instruments used in the study include the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), the Assertion Inventory, as well as the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS). The study has found that there is negligible relationship between parenting styles and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help; however, the authoritarian parenting style has a significant impact on attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. There is a significant relationship between assertiveness level and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. This study implies that counsellors may need to take into consideration parenting styles and the assertiveness of their clients in promoting counselling services to build more positive attitudes towards the services rendered.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Attitudes Towards Psychological Help, Parenting Styles

1. Introduction

Psychological service like counselling is a type of service focusing on helping people function well in society. However, every person has a different attitude towards such service, especially when they are young. According to Fonseca et al. (2018), women with clinically diagnosed psychopathological symptoms are associated with having negative attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help due to stigmas in society—seeking help threatens their self-esteem (Efstathiou et al., 2019). There is another study which showed that students had less intentions of seeking professional help compared to adults (Nesterova & Esipov, 2021). There are many students from educational institutions, such as schools, colleges and local universities, who suffer from mental health issues and are not able to resolve these issues by themselves. Nonetheless, they still do not consider professional psychological help as being beneficial to them. Professional help refers to professional counselling is a

helping relationship between counsellors with individuals, families and groups based on their different types of issues to attain better quality of living (ACA, 2020). This issue would be alleviated if perceptions towards seeking professional mental help shifted towards being seen as a legitimate solution to easing personal emotional problems.

In every family, parenting plays a role in shaping a person's perceptions and development. Specific parenting behaviours which parents are observed to do, report to do or say they would do when interacting with their children are referred to as parenting styles (Sabatine et al., 2017). Children build their cognition based on the awareness imparted onto them by their parents; and how they perceive the world may reflect the cultural practices of their family. Based on Yusuf et al. (2021) study, it can be said that parents play a fundamental role in providing security for their children and shape their growth in a significant way which influences their behaviours and attitudes.

Being assertive is a type of interactive pattern that a person has with other people. Assertiveness can be defined as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others', even when it is difficult (Erickson & Noonan, 2016). Assertive behaviour includes both positive and negative expressions, used to achieve personal and instrumental goals (Pfafman, 2017). Behaving assertively allows people to stand up for their own and other people's rights in a calm and positive way. Assertiveness also refers to the behaviour of a person towards an incident based on their habitual interactions in daily life. Another way of interacting with others is by being unassertive. Unassertive people would probably aggressively or passively accept another person's perspective on a subject. Aggressive behaviour basically focuses on the self's point of view, whereas passive behaviour focuses more on others' needs. Three different people, with three different sets of characteristics and methods of interaction, will have different levels of openness in accepting psychological help.

University students are the group of new generation that will step into society and they are the targeted age of group in mental health issues especially suicidal issues. Based on Maiuolo et al. (2019), although involvement of university students is high in mental health issues, they refuse to seek professional help. This situation actually shows high demands of people on this service. While there is no shortage of professional help to be found, it is still up to a society to choose whether to accept the help rendered or not. As such, attitude towards the service highlights the need for the study to be carried out. A family's parenting style affects how the people within that family perceive the world around them, whereas assertiveness refers to how a person interacts with others in their daily life. Is society's acceptance of psychological services related to the parenting styles practised within that society and an individual's level of assertiveness? This study aims to answer that question by examining the relationships that may exist between parenting styles, assertiveness and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help among university students.

1.1 Parenting Styles - Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles

Parenting styles have been proven to influence children and the way they resolve issues such as emotional dysregulation (Norona & Baker, 2016; Pinquart, 2017). The parents' involvement in the development of their young adolescents include their support of learning at home, in school and in the community (Jaiswal, 2017). This process is commonly referred to as socialisation and involves how parenting happens to teach children skills, behavioural patterns and values and provides them with the motivation needed to function in their cultural circumstances.

According to the Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles (1971), there are four important dimensions of parenting: disciplinary strategies; caring and nurturance; communication styles; and expectations of maturity and control. These four dimensions of parenting can be examined through two important perspectives on parenting, which are the responsiveness and demandingness of parenting. Based on this theory, responsiveness in parenting includes the support and care provided to children from their parents. Parents who are responsive will consider their children's unique needs or demands in building a supportive and attentive relationship with their children. Demandingness in parenting includes how parents pursue or even confront their children to follow instructions, without giving them any choice or reason to do so, and will take control of their children's behaviours.

The Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles (Baumrind, 1991) further explains that there are three classic types of parenting styles, which are authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. Authoritative parents are democratic parents. They show high levels of warmth, positive control and expectations in

interacting with their children (Taheri, 2015). Children of authoritative parents tend to have a happier disposition and good emotional control and regulation. They develop good levels of self-confidence about their ability to learn new skills. Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, are basically autocratic parents. Authoritarian parents show low levels of warmth and high levels of conflict and coerciveness, as well as punitive attempts to control their children (Taheri, 2015). The effects of this type of parenting are that it tends to produce children who are not sure of themselves and have difficulty completing tasks. Their stands and beliefs are according to their parents' instructions because they are not encouraged to voice their opinions and are consistently conscious of making mistakes. Finally, permissive parents are laissez-faire parents. They show high levels of warmth with low levels of control (Taheri, 2015). The children of these parents might be impulsive, lack self-control and have difficulty adapting to adult life, where they have to be respectful and negotiable with others during communication. Aw et al. (2020) states that a child will learn about the realities of life through two ways: learning through consequences or learning through imitation. While interacting with parents, children will be influenced by other factors and may discover the types of parenting styles they have been exposed to.

Findings from a study by Mahsoon et al. (2020) show that there is a positive relationship between parenting and youths who seek help for their mental health disorders. Parents were found to have a strong influence in encouraging their children to seek professional help and to find appropriate ways of dealing with their psychological issues, due to their children being comfortable with seeking advice from their parents when faced with issues in their daily life. Support from parents in choosing psychological help may enhance the levels of confidence and initiative within the children. Parents who have stable marriages and shared intimacy were found to have better attitudes towards mental health disorders.

According to Khamen and Ahmadi Gatab (2011), there are significant differences between the self-assertiveness of students from families of different parenting styles. The greatest difference was found in children who come from families that practised 'little control and lots of love', which has been categorised as an authoritative parenting style. Children from this parenting style are given circumstantial freedom to deliver their opinions and receive their parents' instructions during interactions. Children are taught, and therefore able, to be assertive during conversation with other people, such as in counselling sessions. On the other hand, children accustomed to other parenting style(s) may have low levels of assertiveness during interaction, because they are not used to interacting assertively with people. Another study by Seyrdowleh et al. (2014) shows that there are significant differences between the levels of social skills and assertiveness fostered by different parenting styles. Children who come from authoritative parenting styles behave assertively and show high levels of social skills compared to the other styles of parenting. This is because this type of parenting is rooted in a more democratic system of conveying and receiving opinions during interactions. Thus, these children are more sociable because they can express and respect other opinions with appropriate manners.

1.2 Assertiveness

There is a type of communication style or personality trait called assertiveness (Pfafman, 2017). Gladding (1988) states that the psychological concept of assertiveness has been widely discussed in the social and counselling fields of psychology, mainly because of its multidimensional definitions which cover the expanse of human expression: behaviour, cognition and affectation. A previous study by Anggrani et al. (2019) explained that parenting styles are a factor that affects children's behaviours and emotions. Assertive behaviour can be learned naturally from one's environment. The environment referred to here is the family, as it is the first social environment children are exposed to. In addition to that, there are also other factors that affect one's level of assertiveness, such as culture, age and gender (Anggraini et al., 2019). In this study, three types of communication styles—passive, aggressive and assertive—will be examined.

Aggressive communication is a style in which individuals advocate for their needs and express their feelings and opinions in a way that violates the rights of others (Pfafman, 2017). Aggressive people try to dominate others into accepting their opinions. Their way of communication involves criticising, blaming and attacking others. During counselling sessions, such clients are asked to make decisions on what interventions they would like to be involved in. If they are excluded from this process, these clients

may exclude themselves from the treatment (Davison et al., 2017; Persson et al., 2017). They may also take control of the entire conversation during sessions.

Passive communication, on the other hand, is a style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoidance in expressing their opinions or feelings, and in identifying and meeting their needs, thus protecting their rights (Pfafman, 2017). Passive communicators always listen to others' opinions and are not able to voice their own. During a counselling session, clients are requested to demand for a counsellor with sufficient mental health knowledge, who is able to guide them towards overcoming their issues. This shows that passive clients may rely more on counsellors for guidance. They may feel anxious to express themselves, lack initiative and lack the confidence to say 'no', even though they are feeling uncomfortable about certain circumstances.

Assertive communication is a style where individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others (Pfafman, 2017). Young adults who have good assertive behaviour show the ability to make decisions; express their feelings honestly and comfortably; and defend themselves and express their opinions, while not ignoring the rights of others. Consequently, their level of control and tolerance result in higher effectiveness in communication. Assertive skills encourage students to have a more positive attitude towards their teachers and assessments of learning outcomes. Reflectively, those who have an assertive behavioural type may display positive attitudes towards counselling services among university students.

Based on the study of Iro-Idoro, Edun and Alaba-Adenuga (2017), it can be seen that assertiveness and emotional intelligence skill training programmes influence the attitudes, feelings and behaviours of an individual. This may indicate that there is a positive relationship between assertiveness and attitudes of university students towards seeking professional psychological help. Skotnik and Samochawiec (2018) states that caregivers of schizophrenic patients were characterised by an average level of assertiveness. The level of assertiveness of a counsellor during counselling sessions with clients was shown in the way a counsellor interacts with a client to deliver and accept opinions. Conversation during the sessions may build perception of clients towards the service, thus showing that assertiveness may impact the client's attitude towards seeking professional help.

1.3 Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

Mental health difficulties are among the most highlighted issues among young people. Suicide has now become the second highest global leading causes of death among young people aged between 15 to 29 years. (WHO, 2020); and has become one of the largest issues faced by Malaysians, second only to heart disease. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey in the year 2020, three in every ten Malaysians aged 16 years and above suffer from at least one mental health disorder (UM Specialist Centre, 2020). Judging by these statistics, mental health issues among young people should be emphasised, and professional psychological help should play a vital role in serving the appropriate guidance and prevention of harmful coping mechanisms in Malaysia. However, the willingness to seek help is considered low among young people. Stigma and cultural influences are cited factors that stop young people from seeking help (Goodwin et al., 2016).

There is another view on the same perspective, in which students hold negative perceptions of psychological help because of the stigma surrounding it (Salim, 2010). The developing autonomy and self-reliance of young people lead to lowered beliefs in their need to seek external help. Due to these factors, it can be concluded that adolescents struggle to seek help due to self-stigmatisation and the perceived loss of self-management when they disclose their issues to counsellors. To increase confidence in these services, it is essential to investigate whether perception is related to the type of parenting style received by the client, as well as a client's assertiveness level. Actual help-seeking is significantly depending on the attitudes of an individual. Positive, negative and unsureness are three types of attitudes found towards seeking professional psychological help. Fostering a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help would increase the willingness of young people to attend counselling and build trust between the client and their therapist. Accordingly, the effectiveness of counselling services would be improved and accessibility increased to those in need.

1.4 Related Theory - Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) is used as a guide in exploring the two variables involved in this study, which are attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help and assertiveness levels. According to Mcleod (2019), CBT is rooted in the fundamental principle that how we think (cognition), how we feel (emotion) and how we act (behaviour) are intertwined. Specifically, our cognitions determine our feelings and behaviours. CBT uses two approaches to bring out change in clients during therapy, which are restructuring and the training of interpersonal skills.

In this study, the attitudes of respondents towards professional psychological help are related to CBT as a sort of cognitive response to an event. Their attitudes are built through long-term underlying core beliefs that are associated with therapy. Their beliefs are based on the interactions they have had in their social environment between family, schools and friends. Their stigmas, in terms of positivity and negativity, may affect their act of seeking professional psychological help. From this view on assertion, many cognitive-approach counsellors make use of assertiveness training in the cognitive techniques they employ. They found that one of the reasons people may be unassertive is because of cognitive distortion that leads to them making irrational conclusions.

Assertive behaviour is complex, as it integrates behavioural, emotional and cognitive components. Lazarus (1971) defined assertive behaviour as, “social competence”. There are four groups of assertive behaviours: (1) the ability to openly express one’s needs; (2) the rejection of situations that go against one’s opinions; (3) the ability to express feelings in terms of positives and negatives; and (4) the management of interactions with others, in terms of whether to start, maintain or stop a conversation. Insufficiency in any of those social competences may be due to a lack of behavioural practise in mastering such interactions with other people. The CBT acts as a suitable guide for the researchers of this study to justify the relationships between the variables explored.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted quantitatively, using a correlational design to identify the relationships between parenting styles, assertiveness and attitudes towards professional psychological help among university students.

2.1 Samples

The population of this study is postgraduate students from a public university in Malaysia. Total number of all students registered are 1178 in this faculty. The samples are selected randomly from the population. Random sampling is the way where every member in the population has equal opportunity to participate in the study (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The questionnaire used in the study was distributed to all the students in the population through email. Based on the response from the students, there are 303 respondents involved in this study. The respondents were 84 males (27.7%) and 219 females (72.3%).

2.2 Instruments

Three instruments were utilised in this study: the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), the Assertion Inventory and the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS). Three of them were available in the English version.

2.2.1 Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)

There are 30 items in the PAQ (Buri, 1991). The PAQ is used to measure dimensions of parenting such as parental authority, or disciplinary practices based on the perception of the child (of any age). There are 30 items in PAQ and three subscales such as permissive, authoritarian and authoritative. Items 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24 and 28 indicate permissive parenting, items 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 25, 26 and 29 indicate authoritarian parenting and items 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, and 30 indicate authoritative parenting. Scoring of the instrument is conducted by summing the individual items to comprise the subscale scores. Scores on each subscale range from 10 to 50.

In a study by Boniran (2015) on the PAQ, the reliability of the instrument was found to be .77. In another study of the revised version of this questionnaire by Reitman et al. (2002), modest convergent validity was demonstrated for the PAQ-R subscales. Authoritativeness is associated with effective parent-child communication, authoritarianism is associated with overreaction in parent-child interactions and permissiveness is correlated with lax and non-restrictive disciplinary practices.

2.2.2 Assertion Inventory

There are 40 items in the Assertion Inventory (Gambrill & Richey, 1975). Assertion Inventory assesses response and feeling of individuals on assertive situations in two perspectives including their degree of discomfort and response latency. Scores characterise respondents as “unassertive,” “assertive,” “anxious performer,” or “doesn’t care.” Respondents have to indicate the degree of discomfort and response probability of each situation of items. All scores are added on each dimension. There are four classification levels of assertiveness. First, the category of above 104 in response probabilities and above 95 in discomfort is unassertive. Category of below 105 in response probabilities and above 95 in discomfort is anxious-performer. Category of above 104 in response probabilities and below 96 in discomfort is doesn’t care. Category of below 105 in response probabilities and below 96 in discomfort is assertive.

Gambrill and Richey (1975) states that there is high test-retest reliability ($r = .81$ to $.87$) for this instrument among college students. The study also found that the application of assertiveness training for 19 women in counselling services led to an increase in the number of people able to be classified as being assertive. This study proves that the Assertion Inventory has a high criterion validity to be achieved.

2.2.3 Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Scale (ATSPPHS)

There are 29 items in the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS) (Fischer & Turner, 1970). The purpose of the instrument is to identify the attitude towards seeking professional psychological scale. There are 29 Likert-items on 4-point scale which are disagreement, probable disagreement, probable agreement and agreement. There are 11 positive items and 18 negative items.

The results of a past study on the scale show that the internal reliability computed for a standardisation sample of $n=212$ is .86 and, on a larger sample size of 406, .83 (Fischer & Turner, 1970). This instrument has strong validity to be a test for known-group validity (Fischer & Turner, 1970). Based on Chian and Loius (2009), there was a strong correlation of $r=.741$ in a test-retest reliability test which was conducted with a Malaysian sample.

2.3 Procedure and Analysis

Data was collected through questionnaires in a type of Google Form from the participated respondents. The respondents answered voluntarily and were given approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires. The consent of the respondents was obtained, and the objective of research, the security of the respondents’ privacy and confidentiality, as well as their other rights, were stated in the questionnaires. There were three scores able to be obtained from the questionnaires. The scores were distributed in a descriptive statistical analysis. The scoring was analysed using Spearman’s Rank Order to investigate the relationships between parenting styles, assertiveness and respondents’ attitudes towards seeking professional help, based on the objectives of the research. The findings of this study are reported in an inferential analysis.

3. Findings

Table 1 shows the scores of respondents in instruments such as the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), the Assertion Inventory and the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS).

Table 1. Scores of Respondents

Parenting Styles	N = 303	Assertiveness	N = 303	Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help	N = 303
Authoritative	133 (43.9%)	Anxious-performer	39 (12.9%)	Negative	140 (46.2%)
Authoritarian	102 (33.7%)	Assertive	31 (10.2%)	Positive	43 (14.2%)
Permissive	68 (22.4%)	Doesn't care	11 (3.6%)	Unsure about their willingness	120 (39.6%)
		Unassertive	222 (73.3%)		

There are 68 (22.4%) respondents who were raised under a permissive parenting style, 102 (33.7%) under an authoritarian parenting style and 133 (43.9%) under an authoritative parenting style. The highest number of respondents are from an authoritative parenting style family. There were 39 (12.9%) anxious-performer respondents who took the questionnaire, 31 (10.2%) assertive respondents, 11 (3.6%) respondents who did not care and 222 (73.3%) unassertive respondents—as based on the categories stated above. The highest number of respondents were found to be unassertive. There were 140 (46.2%) respondents who had negative attitudes, 43 (14.2%) who had positive attitudes and 120 (39.6%) who were unsure of their attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. The highest number of respondents had negative attitudes.

Table 2 shows finding of relationship between parenting styles, assertiveness and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help in this study.

Table 2. Relationship Between Parenting Styles, Assertiveness and Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

Respondents	Correlation	R	Sig. p	Strength	Results of hypotheses
1. Parenting styles and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help		.078**	.178	Negligible	Hypothesis is rejected.
2. Assertiveness and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help		.129**	.025	Very Weak	Hypothesis is accepted.
3. Parenting styles and assertiveness among university students		-.045**	.434	Negligible	Hypothesis is rejected.
4. Authoritarian parenting style and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help		-.418**	.000	Moderate	Hypothesis is accepted.
5. Authoritative parenting style and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help		-.037**	.525	Negligible	Hypothesis is rejected.
6. Permissive parenting style and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help		-.164**	.004	Very weak	Hypothesis is accepted.

In the present study, hypotheses indicate that there is a significant relationship between the variables tested. A Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to determine the relationship between variables tested. Based on these findings, there is a negligible correlation, which is not statistically significant ($r(303) = .078, p = .178$), between parenting styles and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. There is a very weak correlation, which is statistically significant ($r(303) = .129, p = .025$), between assertiveness and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. The hypothesis is accepted. There is a negligible correlation, which is not statistically significant ($r(303) = -.045, p = .434$), between parenting styles and assertiveness; and the hypothesis is, as such, rejected. There is a moderate correlation, which was statistically significant ($r(303) = -.418, p = .000$), between the authoritarian parenting style and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help; and the hypothesis is, therefore, accepted. There is a negligible correlation, which is not statistically significant ($r(303) = -.037, p = .525$), between the authoritative parenting style and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help; and the hypothesis is rejected. There is a very weak correlation, which is statistically significant ($r(303) = -.164, p = .004$), between the permissive parenting style and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help; and the hypothesis is accepted.

4. Discussion and Implications

The finding of a negligible relationship between parenting styles and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help indicates that the parenting style a child is subjected to may not affect their attitude towards seeking professional psychological help in the future. Attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help are probably affected by the stigmas of society and a lack of awareness within the community. However, there are three types of parenting styles, and this result does not necessarily indicate that all parenting styles result in the same relationship existing between parenting style and one's attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. This is because there does exist a relationship between the authoritarian parenting style and the respondent's attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. The strength of this relationship is the strongest among all hypotheses of the study. Results obtained from the study by Morawska and Sultan (2015) state that parents with higher education levels and income have more positive attitudes towards the utilisation of psychological services. Children from this parenting style tend to follow their parents' behaviours later in life. If their parents impart their tendency and/or agreeableness to seek help, this may lead to a similar attitude towards professional psychological help in their children. There is another perspective in which children from authoritarian parenting style families perceive their families to have more arguments and less democratic practices. They are not likely to depend on their family as a source of help, and this situation encourages them to seek other sources, such as professional psychological help.

Another study, conducted by Maiuolo et al. (2019), showed that parenting authoritativeness does not significantly predict actual help-seeking ($ps > .05$). This result can be explained in terms of the child's developmental period. Changes happen in parent-child relationships, along with their development, and the same goes to the influence parents have over their child's early, middle and later adolescence stages. This finding indicates that, as those university students grow, the less influence a parental authority has over their life. This study also shows that respondents who are raised in permissive parenting style families may be influenced in their attitudes towards professional psychological help. However, the strength of the relationship is not the strongest among the three parenting styles. This parenting style is non-demanding of their children (Checa & Abundis-Gutierrez, 2018), which may explain the intermediate relationship found.

Next is the relationship between assertiveness and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. The findings indicate that assertiveness levels may affect the attitudes of respondents towards seeking help. From the results of this relationship, it can be seen that most of the respondents are unassertive and have negative or unsure attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. This outcome shows that assertiveness may be one of the factors needed to be taken into consideration in future research into attitudes towards seeking professional counselling to further investigate how the assertiveness of clients, especially university students may affect their attitude towards seeking psychological help. Mostly, assertiveness is used as a technique to train clients during a counselling session. This is proven in the study of Ardi and Sisin (2018), which claims that

assertiveness training, when used in behavioural counselling, could minimise juvenile delinquency in students, as assertive people have their perceptions altered by how they perceive situations based on their personal experience.

There is a negligible relationship between parenting style and assertiveness. This result is supported by Dagnew and Asrat (2017). There was no statistical mean difference in the assertiveness scores across the four parenting styles. However, this result is not similar to that of the study of Seyrdowleh et al. (2014), which found that the democratic parenting style created a much more assertive character compared to the authoritarian parenting style. This result may be explained by parenting styles being the way by which parents build their children's perceptions of the world at a young age; while assertiveness is a way of communication used to convey messages and accept others' opinions. Assertiveness can be built differently depending on one's development in life, regardless of age, based on who one interacts with and one's training in communication. As ages increase until young adults like those university students, perceived parenting styles may have fewer effects on an individual's perceptions.

There are some common issues among university students such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, relationship difficulties, family issues, trauma or gender identity (Alderson Broaddus University, 2022). The scenario of more cases among them must not be underestimated. Their needs in counselling service include to improve their competence in handling changes of their life, to form a healthy relationship with others and realign negative behaviours or thinking for a better and healthier growth (Erlina Yaumas et al., 2018). When there is a huge amount of needs from the society, attitude towards the service has to be emphasised.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The researchers have identified some limitations on this study. One of them is regarding the number of items in all the instruments used in this study. The Parental Authority Questionnaire consists of 30 items; the Assertion Inventory consists of 40 items, with two different views to be answered, which resulted in 80 items; and the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale consists of 29 items. The total number of items to be answered are 139 items. Respondents were given 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Although the items are easily understood, some respondents commented that they needed more time to complete the questionnaire. Too many items in an instrument may challenge the respondent's attention span in answering and completing the tasks, which may affect the findings of the study.

Another limitation would be conflicts arising from cultural bias and personal issues. The issues found in the study had arisen from the researchers' personal experience in counselling services. However, this limitation was dealt with by bringing up strong and valid results from the study. For this issue, the researchers also found limitations in selection of the variables in this study. The researchers came to the conclusion that the selection of variables in a study focusing on parenting styles and assertiveness could be more specific than what was eventually used, because there are several types of parenting styles and levels of assertiveness that can be assessed. To identify the relationships between the variables, specific variables can be chosen to attain better findings for the purpose of future study.

There are some recommendations for future research from this study. First, the selection of instruments should consider the cultural background of the respondents. The researchers should identify whether every item in the instruments can be understood by the respondents, perhaps due to similarities in the population's backgrounds, to increase the instruments' validity. This may provide different correlational results. In addition to that, the selection of variables could be more specific. In this study, one of the variables examined was parenting style, of which three types were chosen to be focused on. Researchers have identified that each type of parenting style has a different correlational result with the variable of attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Despite there being many studies that look at the ability of children to seek professional help that mention the factor of parenting styles, there is scarcely any research on the role that parenting styles play in facilitating children's attitudes towards professional psychological help, which could be significant to the help-seeking process.

6. Conclusion

Jailani et al. (2020) states that most of the issues university students face include career and educational issues; personal, psychological relations; social relations; and self-development. Their study proves that there is a high need among university students to seek professional psychological help and highlights the importance of counselling services to assist students with their issues. To catch up and cope with these needs, it is important to impart positive attitudes towards counselling services among them. From this study, it can be seen that parenting styles play an important role in building positive perceptions and assertiveness. Positive attitudes towards professional services may contribute to the effectiveness of the services rendered by the counsellors.

7. Co-author contribution

Author 1 and author 2 worked together closely in this research. Author 1 carried out the research and author 2 provided guidance along the process. Author 1 was involved in the writeup of the study whereas author 2 overlooked and improved the writeup of the study.

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