



The Effect of Educational Intervention Based on Contact Theory on Help-Seeking Intention in Iranian Adolescent Girls

Zahra Saboohi¹, *Mahnaz Solhi²

1. *Department of Health Services, School of Public Health, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran*

2. *Health Promotion Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran*

***Corresponding Author:** Email: solhi.m@iums.ac.ir

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

Psychiatric disorders are considered one of the most critical public health challenges worldwide. According to global statistics, 1 in 3 to 4 adolescents will experience mental disorders during their lifetime. In Iran, psychiatric disorders are the second leading cause of illness after unintentional injuries. Despite the high prevalence of these disorders, a large percentage of people with these diseases do not seek treatment or do not adhere to treatment programs (1). About 70% to 80% of people with mental disorders refuse to receive professional help, which prevents them from receiving effective treatment (2). One of the key factors that can facilitate access to psychotherapy services is help-seeking intentions, which refers to the intention to engage in help-seeking behaviors (such as seeking help from formal or informal sources) when faced with psychological symptoms (3). Therefore, increasing help-seeking intentions can help reduce the burden of psychiatric disorders and facilitate access to mental health services.

The theory of intergroup contact, proposed by Guru Allport, is one of the fundamental theoretical foundations for studying intergroup relations and reducing prejudice. This theory determines the conditions under which contact between

groups can reduce conflicts and improve intergroup relations. These conditions include equality in-group status, common goals, institutional support, and dispute cooperation (4). Intergroup contact can take two forms: direct contact (such as face-to-face interaction) and indirect contact (such as observing interactions or hearing about others' experiences through the media) (5). Direct contact can reduce prejudices by providing opportunities for mutual understanding (6), but indirect contact can also effectively change attitudes and behaviors (7). Therefore, due to the contradictions in the findings and different effects of direct and indirect contact (8, 9), there is a need for more studies to more accurately examine the impact of this type of contact in reducing stigma and increasing help-seeking intention. This study aimed to investigate the effect of an educational intervention based on contact theory on help-seeking intention in Iranian adolescent girls. In this study, 100 teenage girls (15-18 yr old) diagnosed with anxiety disorder who were identified through the Beck Anxiety Inventory in the Namad Student System were selected as the sample (Table 1).

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Iran University of Medical Sciences with



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the code IR.IUMS.REC.1401.713. Participants completed the help-seeking intention questionnaire, and the data were analyzed using multivariate

analysis of variance (MANCOVA) in SPSS 21 software.

Table 1: Results of the analysis of the mean difference in help-seeking intention based on different groups

Groups	Variables	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Sig	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control Group	Help-seeking Intention	1.59	0.26	0.16	1.08	2.10
Direct Contact Intervention	Help-seeking Intention	4.32	2.58	0.07	-0.74	9.38
Indirect Contact Intervention	Help-seeking Intention	6.39	2.96	0.001	3.78	15.00
Direct and Indirect Contact Intervention	Help-seeking Intention	12.84	4.27	0.001	6.43	19.25

This study showed that educational interventions based on indirect contact theory and a combination of direct and indirect contact positively and significantly increased help-seeking intention in adolescents ($P < 0.001$). In other words, indirect contact, such as observing or hearing the experiences of people with anxiety who have overcome their challenges, reduces the stigma associated with mental disorders and increases the willingness to seek professional help. However, direct contact alone could not significantly affect the intention to seek help in this study. This may be due to social pressures or resistance to face-to-face interactions in this age group. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of using multimodal and combined interventions to improve help-seeking behaviors in adolescents. These interventions can effectively increase adolescents' acceptance of professional help. Future studies examine in more detail the mechanisms of the effects of these interventions in different cultural contexts, as well as the role of mediating variables such as social attitudes, environmental support, and individual factors. In addition, such research could help design more effective educational programs to increase access to mental health services in vulnerable populations. The present study suggests that interventions based on contact theory can be effective in increasing help-seeking intentions in adolescents

with anxiety, especially when indirect contact or a combination of direct and indirect contact is used. The results of this study can help design educational interventions to increase access to psychotherapy services.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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