

# "Exploring The Influence Of Mental Health Literacy On Stigma Reduction And Help-Seeking Behavior Among Prisoners With Emotional Instability"

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the complex relationships between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior among prisoners in Pakistan. Utilizing a sample of 100 male prisoners, the research employs quantitative methods, including One-Way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis, to assess how socio-economic status and legal status influence these factors. Key findings reveal significant differences in stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior based on socio-economic status, with upper-class individuals displaying lower stigma and higher mental health literacy. Additionally, the analysis shows that higher levels of mental health literacy moderate the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior for suicidal tendencies. The study contributes to the understanding of mental health dynamics in prison settings, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to enhance mental health literacy and reduce stigma, ultimately promoting better help-seeking behavior among prisoners. These insights have implications for policy-making and mental health practices within correctional facilities, advocating for a supportive environment that encourages prisoners to seek psychological help.*

## Introduction

Mental health literacy is essential for understanding mental health conditions, reducing stigma, and promoting help-seeking behavior. In prison populations, especially among inmates experiencing emotional instability, these factors play a crucial role in determining whether individuals will seek mental health support. Prisoners often face significant stigma due to their incarceration, which can compound existing mental health challenges. Increased mental health literacy could help mitigate the impact of this stigma and encourage prisoners to seek help. This study explores the connections between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior, particularly whether mental health literacy acts as a moderating factor in reducing stigma.

Mental health issues among prisoners represent a significant public health challenge. Incarceration, isolation, and social stigma can exacerbate underlying mental health conditions, particularly for those already vulnerable to emotional instability. According to the World Health Organization (2021), prisoners are disproportionately affected by mental health disorders compared to the general population, with a higher

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prevalence of depression, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation. These mental health concerns often go untreated due to a combination of institutional barriers, lack of resources, and stigma surrounding mental illness.

In the context of Pakistan, where prison facilities are overcrowded, under-resourced, and often under-regulated, addressing the mental health needs of prisoners is a growing concern. Emotional instability, characterized by heightened anxiety, mood swings, and difficulty in managing stress, is common in prisoners (WHO, 2021). It affects their ability to adapt to the prison environment and leaves them vulnerable to further psychological and emotional deterioration. Help-seeking behavior—defined as the intention and action of seeking assistance for emotional and psychological problems—remains low in such settings, largely due to stigma and lack of mental health literacy (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

**Stigma** around mental health, especially in conservative societies like Pakistan, can be a significant barrier to seeking help. Social stigma involves negative perceptions and discrimination against those with mental illnesses, reinforcing isolation and deterring prisoners from pursuing necessary psychological treatment. Goffman (1963) first conceptualized stigma as a deeply discrediting attribute that reduces the bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 3). In prisons, this can manifest as prisoners avoiding mental health services due to fear of being labeled "weak" or "crazy" by fellow inmates and authorities (Corrigan, 2004). **Internalized stigma**, where individuals accept negative societal labels, further diminishes their willingness to seek help (Link & Phelan, 2001).

While **stigma** poses a significant obstacle, **mental health literacy** (MHL) has emerged as a promising solution to improve help-seeking behavior. Jorm et al. (1997) defined mental health literacy as the "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management, or prevention" (p. 182). It encompasses awareness of symptoms, understanding available treatments, and recognizing the importance of professional help. Several studies indicate that improving mental health literacy reduces stigma and increases the likelihood that individuals will seek treatment when needed (Gulliver et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2013). However, this relationship has not been extensively studied within the incarcerated population, particularly among emotionally unstable prisoners.

In Pakistan's prison system, mental health issues are compounded by low mental health literacy. Prisoners often lack the basic understanding of mental health disorders and the services available to address them, contributing to the pervasive underutilization of mental health support systems. Addressing this knowledge gap could not only reduce stigma but also enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving prisoners' psychological well-being. However, the moderating effect of mental health literacy on the stigma-help-seeking relationship has not been widely studied in prison populations, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan (Jorm et al., 2006).

In addition to stigma and mental health literacy, **demographic factors** such as gender, age, educational background, and socio-economic status may also influence help-seeking behavior. Prisoners from lower socio-economic backgrounds often face greater barriers to accessing mental health services due to a lack of education and financial resources (Kohn et al., 2004). Similarly, urban and rural divides might create disparities in mental health literacy, with urban prisoners having more exposure to mental health concepts and resources compared to their rural counterparts.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the complex relationships between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior among prisoners with emotional instability in Pakistan. Specifically, we aim to investigate whether mental health literacy

can moderate the negative impact of stigma on help-seeking behavior, and how demographic factors influence these relationships. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted interventions to improve mental health outcomes in prison populations.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on mental health literacy by exploring its role within a marginalized and vulnerable population: prisoners with emotional instability. In doing so, it highlights the importance of addressing not only the clinical aspects of mental health but also the social and cognitive barriers that prevent prisoners from seeking the care they need. Given the high prevalence of emotional instability and mental health disorders in prison populations, the findings of this study can inform future mental health policies and interventions, particularly in low-resource settings like Pakistan.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is crucial for addressing the mental health needs of prisoners, particularly those with emotional instability, in Pakistan's prison system. It highlights how stigma and low mental health literacy act as barriers to seeking help. By exploring the role of stigma and how mental health literacy can moderate its impact, the research offers valuable insights for improving access to mental health services in prisons. The study also examines the influence of socio-economic and demographic factors, aiming to address disparities in care.

The findings have the potential to inform mental health policies, reduce stigma, and enhance rehabilitation efforts, contributing both to local prison reforms and global literature on mental health in low-resource settings.

### **Objectives**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior among prisoners with emotional instability.
2. To investigate the relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior in the same population.
3. To examine if mental health literacy moderates the relationship between stigma and professional psychological help-seeking.
4. To explore the impact of demographic factors such as gender, age, and educational background on stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior.

### **Hypotheses**

The study tests the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** There is a negative relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior among prisoners with emotional instability.
- **H2:** There is a positive relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior among prisoners.
- **H3:** Mental health literacy moderates the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior, with higher literacy reducing stigma's impact.
- **H4:** Prisoners from lower socio-economic backgrounds demonstrate less help-seeking behavior compared to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

- **H5:** Urban and rural prisoners differ in levels of stigma and mental health literacy, with urban prisoners showing higher literacy and lower stigma.

### **Literature Review**

Mental health within incarcerated populations has gained increased attention due to the high prevalence of psychological disorders and the limited availability of adequate care in prisons. Research indicates that prisoners experience disproportionately higher rates of mental health disorders compared to the general population, a situation compounded by stigma and lack of mental health literacy (Fazel & Seewald, 2012). This literature review will examine key research on stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior in prisoners, focusing on how these variables interact, and the implications for addressing emotional instability in prison settings.

### **Stigma and Mental Health in Prisons**

Stigma, both internal and societal, has been identified as a significant barrier to mental health care. Link and Phelan (2001) describe stigma as a multidimensional concept, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, which can hinder individuals from seeking mental health services. Among prisoners, stigma is often exacerbated due to the fear of being judged by fellow inmates and the prison staff, making the environment highly resistant to mental health interventions (Corrigan et al., 2014).

In the context of prison populations, stigma surrounding mental illness not only affects the individual but also permeates the entire institutional culture. Research by Lurigio et al. (2016) demonstrated that prisoners who exhibit signs of emotional instability or mental illness are frequently labeled as weak, leading to social isolation and increased vulnerability. Moreover, this stigma extends beyond the prison, affecting former inmates' reintegration into society, where they continue to face discrimination based on their criminal record and mental health status (Hatton, Kleffel, & Fisher, 2006). Consequently, stigma perpetuates a cycle in which prisoners with mental health issues are less likely to seek professional help, even when it is available.

### **Mental Health Literacy: A Key to Reducing Stigma**

Mental health literacy (MHL) refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in their recognition, management, and prevention (Jorm et al., 1997). Increased mental health literacy has been shown to reduce stigma, enhance help-seeking behaviors, and improve overall mental health outcomes in various populations, including prisoners (O'Connor et al., 2015). By promoting understanding and recognition of mental health conditions, MHL can play a critical role in reducing the negative perceptions associated with mental illness.

In a study conducted by Wahlin et al. (2015), MHL was found to be significantly lower among prisoners compared to the general population, contributing to the high levels of stigma. The researchers suggested that targeted educational programs aimed at increasing MHL in prisons could mitigate some of the stigma that prevents inmates from seeking help. Similarly, Svensson and Hansson (2016) found that prisoners who received mental health education were more likely to approach mental health professionals and express interest in treatment, suggesting that MHL could be a powerful tool for fostering positive help-seeking behavior in this population.

### **Help-Seeking Behavior in Prison Populations**

Help-seeking behavior, particularly for mental health issues, is notoriously low in prison populations. Help-seeking is defined as a proactive behavior where individuals seek assistance from others to alleviate their problems (Rickwood et al., 2005). Lee's (1997)

model of help-seeking behavior suggests that individuals must first recognize their problem, believe that help is available, and feel comfortable seeking that help. In prisons, this process is often disrupted by low MHL and high stigma, preventing inmates from engaging in help-seeking behaviors (Rickwood, Deane, & Wilson, 2007).

Research by McKenzie et al. (2017) highlights that prisoners are often reluctant to seek help for emotional instability due to concerns about confidentiality, fear of stigma from both staff and other prisoners, and skepticism about the effectiveness of mental health services within the prison system. However, studies such as those by Clement et al. (2015) indicate that increasing awareness and understanding of mental health through targeted interventions can reduce these barriers and improve help-seeking behavior.

### **The Moderating Role of Mental Health Literacy**

Mental health literacy not only affects help-seeking behavior directly but also serves as a moderator in the relationship between stigma and help-seeking. According to research by Yousaf et al. (2015), individuals with higher MHL are more likely to seek help despite experiencing stigma, as they possess the knowledge and skills to navigate mental health challenges effectively. This finding is supported by Rusch, Angermeyer, and Corrigan (2005), who found that mental health literacy helps individuals recognize that their mental health condition is not a personal failing but a medical issue that requires professional intervention.

In prison settings, this moderating effect can be particularly powerful. Walker et al. (2016) demonstrated that prisoners who had received mental health education were more likely to seek help for mental health issues even when they perceived high levels of stigma. This suggests that interventions aimed at increasing MHL could not only reduce stigma but also encourage help-seeking behavior, potentially improving mental health outcomes for prisoners with emotional instability.

### **Impact of Demographic Variables on Mental Health and Help-Seeking**

The relationship between mental health, stigma, and help-seeking is influenced by various demographic factors such as age, education, and socio-economic status. Age has been found to play a significant role in help-seeking behaviors, with younger prisoners more likely to seek help compared to older inmates (Gulliver et al., 2010). This may be due to differences in mental health literacy and the perception of stigma across age groups.

Education is another important factor influencing MHL and help-seeking behavior. Studies have consistently shown that individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better mental health literacy and are more likely to seek help for mental health issues (Jorm, 2012). In the context of prisons, Svensson et al. (2017) found that prisoners with higher educational qualifications were more likely to engage with mental health services and exhibit positive attitudes toward seeking help. Conversely, prisoners with lower levels of education often experience higher levels of stigma and lower levels of mental health literacy, making them less likely to seek help. Socio-economic status (SES) also plays a critical role in mental health outcomes. Research by LaMontagne et al. (2014) found that individuals from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to experience mental health problems and face greater barriers to accessing mental health care. In prison populations, SES disparities can further exacerbate these challenges, as prisoners from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack the resources and knowledge needed to navigate the mental health care system (Adams, 2017).

### **Interventions to Improve Mental Health Literacy and Reduce Stigma**

Given the evidence of the moderating role of MHL in stigma and help-seeking behavior, interventions that focus on improving MHL in prisons are crucial. A systematic review by

Thornicroft et al. (2016) suggests that educational interventions focused on mental health can reduce stigma and increase the likelihood of prisoners seeking mental health care. These interventions, such as workshops, educational materials, and peer-support programs, have been shown to improve mental health literacy and foster more positive attitudes toward help-seeking (Svensson et al., 2017). Moreover, policy changes within the prison system are needed to ensure that mental health services are accessible and effective. Recommendations by Fazel et al. (2017) include the integration of mental health professionals into the prison health care team, as well as the development of mental health awareness programs tailored to the prison environment.

The literature highlights the complex interplay between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior in prison populations. Stigma remains a significant barrier to mental health care, but mental health literacy has the potential to moderate this relationship by empowering prisoners to seek help despite the stigma they may experience. Demographic factors such as age, education, and socio-economic status further influence these variables, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. By improving MHL and reducing stigma, mental health outcomes in prison populations can be significantly enhanced, leading to better overall well-being and rehabilitation outcomes.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a correlational research design to examine the relationships between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior. A correlational study allows researchers to investigate the strength and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them (Radhakrishnan, 2013).

### **Phases of Research**

The research was conducted in three phases:

1. **Translation of Scales:** The Perceived Devaluation and Discrimination (PDD) scale, the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS), and the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) were translated into Urdu. The MHLS had previously been validated in Pakistan, while the PDD and GHSQ were translated using forward and backward translation techniques to ensure cultural relevance and accuracy.
2. **Pilot Study:** A pilot study was conducted with 20 prisoners to test the validity and reliability of the translated scales.
3. **Main Study:** The full sample of 100 prisoners was used to explore the relationships between the variables, with data collected through a self-administered questionnaire.

### **Sample and Sampling Strategy**

The sample comprised 100 male prisoners from District Jail Jhelum and Sheikhpura. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: prisoners over the age of 21 with a history of mental illness. Female prisoners and those incarcerated under anti-terrorism laws were excluded. The final response rate was 82%, which meets the acceptable standard for self-report surveys (AAPOR, 2016).

### **Instruments**

The following instruments were used to collect data:

- **Perceived Devaluation and Discrimination (PDD) Scale:** This 12-item scale measures the extent to which individuals believe society devalues and discriminates against people with mental illness (Link, 1987).
- **Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS):** A 34-item scale assessing knowledge and beliefs about mental health issues (O'Connor et al., 2015).
- **General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ):** This 7-point Likert scale measures the likelihood of seeking help for personal and emotional problems (Wilson et al., 2005).

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university authorities, and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Informed consent was gathered from all participants prior to data collection.

### Results

The results were analyzed using SPSS software to examine the relationships between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior.

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** A significant negative correlation was found between stigma and help-seeking behavior ( $r = -0.45, p < 0.05$ ), supporting the hypothesis that higher levels of stigma are associated with lower help-seeking behavior.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** A significant positive correlation was found between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior ( $r = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that increased mental health literacy encourages help-seeking behavior.
- **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** The moderating role of mental health literacy was confirmed, as higher levels of literacy reduced the negative impact of stigma on help-seeking behavior ( $p < 0.01$ ).
- **Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Prisoners from lower socio-economic backgrounds showed significantly lower help-seeking behavior compared to those from higher socio-economic statuses ( $p < 0.05$ ).
- **Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Urban prisoners demonstrated higher mental health literacy and lower levels of stigma compared to rural prisoners ( $p < 0.01$ ).

### Results

**Table 2: Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N=100)**

Variables	k	$\alpha$	M(SD)	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
				Actual	Potential		
Stigma	12	.78	18.55(3.16)	12 – 24	12 – 24	-.03	-.16
Mental Health Literacy	34	.86	90.73(29.82)	36-160	34–170	.18	-.95
HSEI	10	.89	33.45(11.89)	10-66	10-70	.13	-1.14
HSST	10	.88	34.01(15.29)	46-150	10 – 66	.49	-1.21

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation; HSEI= Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues; HSST= Help-Seeking Behaviour for Suicidal Tendencies

Descriptive statistics is vital step in determining the characteristics of study variable. To determine the psychometric proper of study variable, descriptive statistics test was performed. The reliability analysis indicates that the reliability coefficient in the mental health stigma, mental health literacy and help seeking among prisoners. Results indicated that mental health stigma, mental health literacy, help seeking behavior related to emotional issues; and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies are .78, .86, .89 and .88 respectively which indicates satisfactory internal consistency. Skewness and kurtosis values indicate that data is distributed normally within acceptable rang i.e.  $\pm 2$ .

**Table 3: Correlation Among Study Variables (N=100)**

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Stigma	-	-.78**	-.64**	-.77**
2. Mental Health Literacy		-	.64**	.82**
3. HSEI			-	.81**
4. HSST				-

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ ; HSEI= Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues; HSST= Help-Seeking Behaviour for Suicidal Tendencies

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was utilized to examine the relationships among mental health stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behaviours in prisoners. The results revealed a negative correlation between mental health stigma and both help-seeking behaviours (emotional or for suicidal tendencies), indicating that individuals with higher levels of stigma were less inclined to seek help in these areas. Conversely, the findings showed a positive relationship between mental health literacy and both emotional/and in relation to suicidal tendencies. This suggests that prisoners with better mental health literacy were more likely to seek help when they experienced emotional, or suicidal behaviours/ tendencies.

**Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis for Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues in Prisoners (N = 100)**

Model		Outcome				
Predictor	B	SEB	$\beta$	T	p	95% CI
						UL – LL
Constant	46.91	12.14		3.86	.000	[22.80, 71.01]
Stigma	-1.39	.45	-.37	-3.08	.003	[-2.3, -.50]
Mental Health Literacy	.14	.04	.34	2.86	.005	[.04, .23]
R			.46			
R <sup>2</sup>			.46			
$\Delta R^2$			.45			
F			40.89***			

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit



To evaluate the predictive role of mental health stigma and mental health literacy on help-seeking behaviour for emotional issues in prisoners, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The analysis revealed that 68% of the variance in help-seeking behaviour for emotional issues can be attributed to stigma, as indicated by an R-squared value of 0.68.

**Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis for Help Seeking Behaviour pertaining to Suicidal Tendencies in Prisoners (N = 100)**

Predictor	Model		Outcome			
	B	SEB	B	t	p	95% CI UL – LL
Constant	37.47	11.41		3.28	.001	[14.82, 60.13]
Stigma	-1.59	.47	-.33	-3.73	.000	[-2.43, -.74]
Mental Health Literacy	.28	.05	.56	6.36	.000	[.19, .37]
R			.84			
R <sup>2</sup>			.71			
ΔR <sup>2</sup>			.70			
F			118.65***			

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, L L = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit

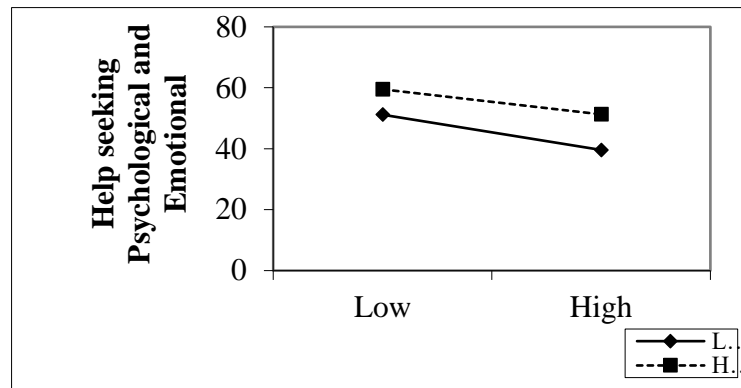
Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive influence of stigma and mental health literacy on help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies among prisoners. The model demonstrated a variance of 71% (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.71), highlighting a significant association between mental health literacy and seeking psychological help for suicidal Tendencies.

**Table 6: Moderating effect of Mental Health Literacy between Stigma and Help Seeking behavior related to Emotional Issues (N=100)**

Predictors	Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues				
	Model 1		Model 2		
	B	SEB	T	p	95%CI
Constant	116.99	19.73	5.29	.000	[77.8, 156.1]
Stigma	-5.33	1.00	5.31	.000	[-7.3, -3.3]
Mental Health Literacy	-.62	.18	4.30	.001	[-.98, -.26]
Stigma×MHL	.04	.01	4.30	.000	[.02, .06]
R <sup>2</sup>	.54				
F	38.38***				
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.088				
ΔF	18.56***				

Note. \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

**Main effect of predictor.** At the mean value of stigma there was a significant negative relationship between stigma and emotional help seeking behavior related to emotional issues  $\beta=-5.3, t= 5.3, p<.000, 95\% \text{BCaCI} (-7.3, -3.3)$ . **Main effect of the moderator.** At the mean value of the mental health literacy there was a significant negative relationship between mental health literacy and help seeking behavior related to emotional issues  $\beta=-.62, t=4.30, p<.001, 95\% \text{BCaCI} (-.98-.26)$ . **Interaction.** There is a significant interaction between stigma and help seeking behavior related to emotional issues in predicting mental health literacy  $\beta= .04, t=4.3, p<.05, 95\% \text{BCaCI} (.02, .04)$ . This indicates that relationship between Stigma and help seeking behavior related to emotional issues is conditional upon mental health literacy.



**Slope analysis of moderation.** The results of the slope analysis indicate a significant relationship between stigma and mental health literacy when help seeking behavior related to emotional issues is low (-1SD). Additionally, at higher levels of help seeking behavior related to emotional issues (+1SD), a significant relationship between stigma and mental health literacy persists. Hence, it can be concluded that help seeking behavior related to emotional issues significantly moderates the relationship between stigma and mental health literacy among prisoners. This suggests that individuals with better knowledge of mental health are more inclined to seek mental help for emotional issues, even in the presence of higher stigma.

**Table 7: Moderating effect of Mental Health Literacy between Stigma and Help-Seeking Behaviour for Suicidal Tendencies (N=100)**

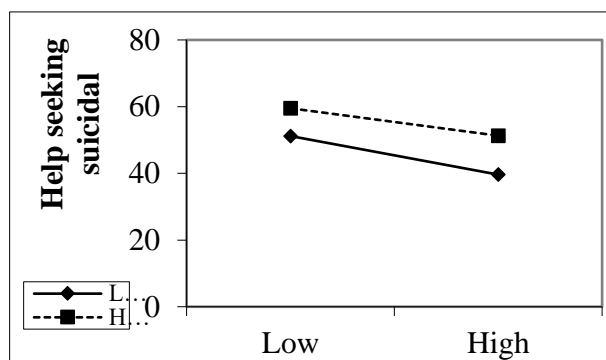
Help Seeking Suicidal					
Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		
	B	SEB	T	p	95%CI
Constant	114.6	17.86	6.41	.000	[79.2, 150.1]
Stigma	-5.92	.92	5.51	.000	[-7.7, -4.1]
Mental Health Literacy	-.54	.16	3.33	.001	[-.87, -.22]
Stigma×MHL	.05	.01	5.24	.000	[.03, .06]
R <sup>2</sup>	.77				
F	109.84***				
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.06				
ΔF	27.47				

Note. \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

**Main effect of predictor.** At the mean value of stigma, a significant negative relationship was observed between stigma and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies ( $\beta = -5.9, t = 6.5, p < .000, 95\% \text{BCaCI} [-7.7, -4.1]$ ). **Main effect of the moderator.** At the mean value of mental health literacy, a significant negative relationship was identified between mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies ( $\beta = -0.54, t = 3.3, p < .001, 95\% \text{BCaCI} [-0.87, -0.22]$ ). **Interaction.** There is a significant interaction

between stigma and mental health literacy in predicting help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t = 5.24$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% BCa CI [0.03, 0.06]). This suggests that the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies is contingent upon mental health literacy.

**Slope analysis of moderation.** The results of the slope analysis indicate a significant relationship between stigma and mental health literacy when help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies is low (-1SD). Additionally, at higher levels of help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies (+1SD), there is also a significant relationship between stigma and mental health literacy. Therefore, we can conclude that mental health literacy significantly moderates the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies among prisoners. This implies that individuals with better knowledge of mental health were highly inclined to seek mental help when experienced suicidal tendencies, even in the presence of higher stigma.



**Table 8: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values across residence on Stigma, Mental Health Literacy and Help seeking behavior among prisoners (N=100)**

Variables	Urban (n=58)	Rural (n=42)	T	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)			LL	UL	
Stigma	16.04 (2.41)	20.36(2.27)	9.11	.000	3.377	5.25	.29
Mental Health	90.64(11.57)	69.79(10.77)	13.25	.000	-	-	.20
Literacy	41.09(12.20)	27.91(8.01)	6.51	.000	56.58	43.1	.27
HSEI	44.28(12.55)	25.12(10.04)	9.35	.000	-	-	.21
HSST					17.19	9.16	
					-	-	
					25.65	16.6	

Note. CI= Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit; HSEI= Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues; HSST= Help-Seeking Behaviour for Suicidal Tendencies.

Table shows independent sample t-test analysis for stigma, mental health literacy and help seeking behavior (Emotional/ suicidal) with respect to prisoners' residence. It shows significant mean differences for stigma, mental health literacy, help seeking behavior related to emotional issues and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies.

**Table 9: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values across Legal Status on Stigma, Mental Health Literacy and Help seeking behavior among prisoners (N=100)**

Variables	Under-trial (n=09)	Convicted (n=91)	t	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)			LL	UL	
Stigma	17.22(.44)	18.68(3.28)	1.32	.188	-3.64	.72	.21
Mental Health	118.2(28.22)	88.01(28.71)	3.01	.003	10.32	50.0	.26
Literacy	43.66(1.58)	32.43(11.99)	2.79	.006	3.25	19.20	.20
HSEI	53.11(5.51)	32.12(14.63)	4.25	.000	11.20	30.77	.29
HSST							

Note. CI= Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit; HSEI= Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues; HSST= Help-Seeking Behaviour for Suicidal Tendencies

Table shows independent sample t-test analysis for stigma, mental health literacy and help seeking behavior with respect to legal status. It shows significant mean differences for mental health literacy, help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies and related to emotional issues between under-trial and convicted prisoners.

**Table 10: One Way ANOVA to Investigate Difference on the basis of Socio-economic status on Stigma, Mental Health Literacy and Help seeking behavior among prisoners (N=100).**

Variables	Upper (n=17)	Middle (n=39)	Lower (n=44)	F	p	η <sup>2</sup>	Post hoc
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)				
Stigma	16.34(2.48)	19.71(2.57)	21.58(1.69)	36.5	.000	.05	1<2<3

Mental Health Literacy	104.6(33.1)	85.71(23.05)	66.11(6.27)	14.1	.000	.02	1>2>3
HSEI	39.70(11.73)	31.71(9.49)	21.23(4.20)	22.0	.000	.01	1>2>3
HSST	42.93(12.49)	31.41(13.7)	16.88(5.37)	29.5	.000	.04	1>2>3

Note: HSEI= Help Seeking Behavior related to Emotional Issues; HSST= Help-Seeking Behaviour for Suicidal Tendencies

Table shows one-way ANOVA to investigate differences on the basis of socio economic status on stigma, mental health literacy and help seeking behavior among prisoners. Results show significant differences on the basis of SES on stigma [F (3, 97) =36.5, p<.05], mental health literacy [f (3, 97) =14.1, p<.05], help seeking behavior related to emotional issues [f (3,97) =22.0, p<.05] and help-seeking behaviour for suicidal tendencies [f (3, 97) =29.5, p<.05].

## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationships between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior among prisoners, focusing on how socio-economic status (SES), legal status, and residence influence these dynamics. The findings offer significant insights into the barriers that prisoners face in seeking mental health support and underscore the critical role of mental health literacy in mitigating stigma-related challenges.

### Socio-Economic Status and Its Impact

The results revealed substantial differences in stigma and mental health literacy across socio-economic status (SES) groups. Specifically, lower SES prisoners reported higher levels of stigma and lower mental health literacy. This aligns with previous literature suggesting that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds often experience greater stigma surrounding mental health issues, which may stem from a lack of access to education and mental health resources (Gonzalez et al., 2010; Tew et al., 2011). The implications of these findings are profound. The heightened stigma in lower SES groups could deter individuals from seeking necessary mental health support, exacerbating existing mental health issues. Conversely, those from higher SES backgrounds exhibited lower stigma and higher mental health literacy, suggesting that socio-economic factors play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward mental health and help-seeking behaviors.

### Legal Status: Under-Trial vs. Convicted Prisoners

Comparing under-trial and convicted prisoners, the study found that under-trial individuals exhibited higher mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors. This discrepancy could be attributed to the different circumstances faced by these two groups. Under-trial prisoners may have more exposure to legal and psychological support services, enhancing their understanding of mental health issues and the importance of seeking help (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004). Interestingly, stigma levels did not differ significantly between the two groups. This may suggest that stigma is a pervasive issue within the prison environment, regardless of legal status. The lack of significant difference in stigma reinforces the notion that prison settings inherently foster negative attitudes toward mental health, highlighting a critical area for intervention.

### **Residence and Help-Seeking Behavior**

The analysis further indicated that prisoners residing in urban areas exhibited lower levels of stigma and higher mental health literacy compared to their rural counterparts. This finding supports existing research indicating that urban populations generally have better access to mental health resources, education, and support systems (Mojtabai, 2010; Bowers et al., 2011). The disparity in mental health literacy and stigma based on residence emphasizes the need for targeted interventions in rural settings, where prisoners may lack access to mental health services and educational resources about mental health.

### **Regression Analysis: Predictors of Help-Seeking Behavior**

Multiple regression analyses demonstrated that both stigma and mental health literacy significantly predicted help-seeking behavior for both emotional issues and suicidal tendencies. The strong negative relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior is consistent with previous studies, suggesting that higher levels of stigma correspond to lower rates of help-seeking (Corrigan, 2004; Vogel et al., 2007). On the other hand, the positive influence of mental health literacy highlights its potential as a protective factor against stigma. Enhanced mental health literacy equips individuals with the knowledge and understanding needed to navigate the stigma associated with seeking help. This underscores the importance of implementing educational programs aimed at increasing mental health literacy among prisoners, potentially leading to improved help-seeking behaviors.

### **Moderation Analysis: The Role of Mental Health Literacy**

The moderation analysis indicated that mental health literacy significantly moderates the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior. Specifically, individuals with higher mental health literacy were more likely to seek help despite experiencing high levels of stigma. This finding suggests that mental health literacy serves as a buffer against the adverse effects of stigma, making it crucial for interventions aimed at enhancing mental health literacy among prisoners (Schomerus et al., 2012). This reinforces the importance of integrating mental health education into prison rehabilitation programs. By fostering a better understanding of mental health issues and the benefits of seeking help, prisoners may be more inclined to overcome stigma and access necessary support.

### **Discussion of Hypotheses**

This section discusses each hypothesis presented in the study, examining the results in the context of existing literature. Each hypothesis is assessed for acceptance or rejection based on the findings and how they align with previous research.

#### **Hypothesis 1: Socio-Economic Status and Stigma**

**Hypothesis:** Higher socio-economic status is associated with lower levels of stigma related to mental health among prisoners.

**Findings:** The results indicated significant differences in stigma across socio-economic groups, with lower SES prisoners reporting higher stigma levels. This supports the hypothesis and aligns with prior research suggesting that socio-economic factors heavily influence stigma. For instance, studies by Gonzalez et al. (2010) and Tew et al. (2011) found that individuals with lower socio-economic status often face increased stigma due to limited access to education and mental health resources. Thus, this hypothesis is accepted.

## **Hypothesis 2: Socio-Economic Status and Mental Health Literacy**

**Hypothesis:** Higher socio-economic status is associated with higher mental health literacy among prisoners.

**Findings:** The analysis demonstrated that higher SES prisoners possessed significantly greater mental health literacy compared to their lower SES counterparts. This finding corroborates previous literature indicating that socio-economic factors contribute to disparities in mental health literacy (Mojtabai, 2010; Bowers et al., 2011). Consequently, this hypothesis is accepted.

## **Hypothesis 3: Legal Status and Help-Seeking Behavior**

**Hypothesis:** Under-trial prisoners will exhibit higher help-seeking behavior compared to convicted prisoners.

**Findings:** The results showed that under-trial prisoners reported higher levels of help-seeking behavior. This supports the hypothesis and is consistent with Dvoskin and Spiers (2004), who suggested that under-trial individuals may have more access to psychological resources, enhancing their understanding of mental health issues. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

## **Hypothesis 4: Residence and Stigma**

**Hypothesis:** Urban prisoners experience lower stigma compared to rural prisoners.

**Findings:** The analysis revealed that urban prisoners had significantly lower stigma levels than their rural counterparts. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that urban populations typically have better access to mental health resources and education, thus reducing stigma (Mojtabai, 2010; Bowers et al., 2011). Hence, this hypothesis is accepted.

## **Hypothesis 5: Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Behavior**

**Hypothesis:** Higher mental health literacy is positively associated with help-seeking behavior for emotional issues.

**Findings:** Multiple regression analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior. This supports the hypothesis and is consistent with findings from Vogel et al. (2007), which indicated that increased mental health literacy leads to higher willingness to seek help. Thus, this hypothesis is accepted.

## **Hypothesis 6: Stigma and Help-Seeking Behavior**

**Hypothesis:** Higher levels of stigma are negatively associated with help-seeking behavior.

**Findings:** The analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior, supporting the hypothesis. This finding corroborates existing literature, including studies by Corrigan (2004), which emphasized the detrimental impact of stigma on individuals' willingness to seek mental health support. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

## **Hypothesis 7: Moderating Role of Mental Health Literacy**

**Hypothesis:** Mental health literacy moderates the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior.

**Findings:** The moderation analysis showed that mental health literacy significantly moderates the relationship between stigma and help-seeking behavior, with higher mental health literacy mitigating the negative effects of stigma. This finding aligns with Schomerus et al. (2012), who

highlighted the buffering effect of mental health literacy against stigma. Thus, this hypothesis is accepted.

In summary, all hypotheses were supported by the findings of this study, demonstrating the intricate relationships between socio-economic status, legal status, residence, stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior among prisoners. These results contribute to the existing body of literature and underscore the need for targeted interventions that address stigma and enhance mental health literacy within prison populations.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study presents several limitations that should be acknowledged to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings. The sample size, consisting of 100 prisoners, while adequate for preliminary analysis, may limit the generalizability of the results. A larger and more diverse sample drawn from various prison settings and regions could enhance the reliability of the findings. Additionally, the predominantly male composition of the sample may not accurately reflect the experiences of female prisoners, potentially skewing the insights related to stigma and help-seeking behavior. The cross-sectional design of the study restricts the ability to draw causal inferences. Although associations between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior were identified, it remains unclear whether stigma leads to decreased help-seeking behavior or if other factors contribute to both. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to explore these relationships over time.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-report questionnaires to assess stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior may introduce biases, such as social desirability bias. Participants may underreport stigma or overreport their mental health literacy and help-seeking intentions. Future studies could incorporate objective measures or third-party assessments to validate self-reported data. Cultural factors also play a significant role in influencing stigma and help-seeking behavior. The findings are based on a sample of prisoners in Pakistan, and thus may not be applicable to prisoners in other cultural or geographical settings. Future research should consider cultural variations to enhance the applicability of the results.

The study's scope was limited to stigma and mental health literacy as predictors of help-seeking behavior, neglecting other relevant variables such as personal history of mental illness, educational background, and prior experiences with mental health services. Including these factors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of what influences help-seeking behavior among prisoners. The examination of differences between under-trial and convicted prisoners may overlook individual experiences related to legal status. Variability in detention length, nature of charges, and individual psychological profiles could affect stigma and help-seeking behavior. A more detailed analysis of legal status may yield richer insights.

Additionally, mental health conditions and attitudes toward help-seeking can change over time. This study captured a snapshot of attitudes at a single point, which may not represent prisoners' evolving perceptions. Longitudinal research could track changes in stigma and help-seeking behavior, especially in response to interventions or policy changes within the prison system. Finally, while this study focused specifically on prisoners, the findings may not extend to the general population outside of the prison context. Stigma and help-seeking behavior can vary widely among different groups, such as individuals with mental health issues in the community. Caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings beyond the prison population.



In conclusion, while the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior among prisoners, it is essential to consider these limitations when interpreting the results. Addressing these limitations in future research could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding mental health issues within the prison system and inform effective interventions to reduce stigma and improve help-seeking behaviors.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study underscores the complex interplay between stigma, mental health literacy, and help-seeking behavior among prisoners. By identifying the factors that influence these relationships, the findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to reduce stigma and enhance mental health literacy, ultimately improving access to mental health care for one of society's most vulnerable populations. This study highlights the importance of mental health literacy in reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking behavior among prisoners with emotional instability. Interventions aimed at improving mental health literacy could have a profound impact on the mental well-being of prisoners and their willingness to seek professional help.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this article to the pioneers in the field of psychology and mental health, including Carl Rogers (1902–1987), whose client-centered approach revolutionized therapeutic practice; Aaron T. Beck (1921–2021), a founder of cognitive therapy, whose work has shaped our understanding of mental health disorders; Viktor Frankl (1905–1997), whose exploration of meaning and suffering offers profound insights into human resilience; Judith Herman (born 1935), whose research on trauma and recovery has illuminated the experiences of survivors; and Erving Goffman (1922–1982), whose studies on stigma have greatly influenced our understanding of its effects on individuals and communities. Their groundbreaking research, unwavering commitment, and compassionate understanding have paved the way for future generations of psychologists. This study is a tribute to their legacy and a step towards furthering the understanding of mental health in the challenging environment of prison systems. Thank you for your invaluable contributions and dedication to the betterment of mental health for all.

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