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Children and Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology
in Clinical Psychology in the School of Arts and Sciences

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Abstract

While a relatively high number of children and adolescents experience mental health problems, only a small minority receive professional psychological help. The attitudes of children and adolescents toward seeking professional psychological help may be one barrier to seeking this help. This study used focus groups to examine children's and adolescents' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Constant comparison analysis revealed several themes. Children lacked knowledge while adolescents demonstrated adequate knowledge of mental illness and therapy. Children and adolescents reported they would not seek help from psychologists, but had no concerns with others seeking such help. Adolescents, however, stated they would seek help if they were to experience a "serious mental illness." Numerous barriers to seeking professional psychological help were reported: youth cited confidentiality concerns and difficulty with interpersonal openness; adolescents additionally cited stigma and a preference for self-reliance; and female adolescents additionally cited judgment concerns. Lastly, children preferred receiving help from parents, teachers and guidance counselors; whereas, adolescents preferred friends or parents depending on the problem. Implications focus on enhancing children and adolescents' willingness to seek professional psychological help.