

ROTC Cadets' Help-Seeking Attitudes: Examining the Role of Leadership Style

Kristyn Waldron, Haley Sherman, and Mallory Lucier-Greer

In 2016, approximately 20% of U.S. active-duty military members met the criteria for a mental health disorder (Deployment Health Clinical Center, 2017). However, less than half of military members with a mental health disorder seek support services (Cuyler & Guerrero, 2019). Some correlates of help-seeking have been identified, such as fear of being viewed as weak and fear of experiencing rejection within one's military unit. This study investigated how a person's approach to leadership is associated with dimensions of help-seeking among a sample of emerging military leaders who are college/university students enrolled in Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs (i.e., ROTC cadets). Specifically, this study sought to answer two research questions:

Research question 1: *What is the factor structure of the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (Fisher & Farina, 1995) measure among ROTC cadets?*

Research question 2: *How is leadership style associated with help-seeking?*

Data were collected from 69 ROTC cadets via an online survey; 42% were women, 37% were men, and 21% did not disclose their gender. The average age was 20.68 years old. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the factor structure of the *Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help* measure. The EFA revealed two factors: *openness to seeking treatment and value in seeking treatment*, both of which align with the original construct of the scale (Fisher & Farina, 1995; Table 1). Mean scores suggest that this sample of ROTC cadets are relatively *open to seeking treatment* ($M= 2.62, SD= 0.89$, range 0-3) and they see *value in seeking treatment* ($M= 2.78, SD= 0.78$, range 0-3).

The relationship between leadership style and help-seeking was examined through linear regression analyses, accounting for age. Leadership style was assessed with two measures: the Northouse's Leadership Scale (2001), which consisted of the *task-oriented leadership* and *relationship-oriented leadership* subscales, and the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale, which included the *socio-cultural conversations with peers* and *commitment to responsibilities* subscales (SRLS; Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Higher scores on relationship-oriented leadership and the ability to have socio-cultural conversations with peers were significantly related to more openness to seeking treatment. In other words, leaders who are invested in their relationships with their team and are able to have meaningful, sometimes difficult, conversations were more likely to be open to seeking mental health services. None of the leadership measures were related to value in seeking treatment.

Implications of this work are meaningful across several disciplines. First, multiple dimensions of help-seeking have been identified in other work and confirmed in this sample of ROTC cadets. It appears that help-seeking is both a mindset (e.g., do you see value in seeking services?) and a potential for behavior (e.g., would you be willing to see a professional?). Along with other variables identified as salient predictors of help-seeking in prior research, some dimensions of leadership may also be of importance. Military leadership trainings may benefit from promoting relationship-oriented leadership and emphasizing the importance of having socio-cultural conversations with peers. These aspects of leadership may promote positive mental health within leaders and, in turn, the units they lead.

Statement of Research Advisor

Kristyn's research is an important step in addressing mental health in the military. By examining a sample of ROTC cadets, she is getting a pulse of what military leadership will look like in the next 5-10 years. These results are encouraging as this sample of emerging military leaders appear to value and be open to seeking mental health services, which is vital for their own success as a service member and for the unit's they lead.

-Mallory Lucier-Greer, Human Development and Family Science

Table 1. Results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the 10 items from the help-seeking scale among a sample of ROTC cadets.

Note. The blue and orange highlight indicates that the item loaded onto either factor 1 or 2.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree of each statement.	Factor 1: <i>Openness to seeking treatment</i>	Factor 2: <i>Value in seeking treatment</i>
Item 1. If I thought I was having a mental breakdown, my first thought would be to get professional attention.	.664	
Item 2. Talking about problems with a counselor/therapist seems to me as a poor way to get rid of emotional problems.		.569
Item 3. If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis, I would be sure that counseling/therapy would be useful.	.870	
Item 4. I admire people who are willing to cope with their problems and fears without seeking professional help.		.575
Item 5. I would want to get professional help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time.	.864	
Item 6. I might want to have counseling/therapy in the future.	.716	
Item 7. A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is more likely to solve it with professional help.	.694	
Item 8. Given the amount of time and money involved in counseling/therapy, I am not sure that it would benefit someone like me.		.686
Item 9. People should solve their own problems, therefore, getting counseling/therapy would be their last resort.		.830
Item 10. Personal and emotional troubles, like most things in life, tend to work out by themselves.		.785

References

- Cuyler, M., & Guerrero, L. (2019). Mental health help-seeking intentions and organizational climate among military members. *Military Psychology, 31*(4), 315-325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2019.1630229>
- Deployment Health Clinical Center. (2017). *Mental Health Disorder Prevalence among Active Duty Service Members in the Military Health System, Fiscal Years 2005-2016*. 20.
- Dugan, J.P., & Komives, S. R. (2010). Influences on college students' capacities for socially responsible leadership. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*(5), 525-549. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2010.0009>
- Fisher, E.H., Farina, A. (1995). Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help: A shortened form and consideration for research. *Journal of College Student Development, 36*(4), 368-373. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00547>
- Northouse, P. G. (2001). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.