

## Help-Seeking Behavior in Nursing: A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Patient Support and Professional Collaboration

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### ABSTRACT

Help-seeking behavior is a multifaceted concept that plays a significant role in nursing practice, patient care, and health outcomes. This concept analysis aims to clarify the meaning, defining attributes, antecedents, and consequences of help-seeking behavior using Walker and Avant's eight-step method. Help-seeking behavior refers to recognizing a problem, deciding to seek help, and taking action to obtain support or care. It involves personal willingness, availability of support sources, and interpersonal communication. This analysis draws on evidence from 28 relevant studies, examining help-seeking in physical and mental health, cultural and social contexts, and emerging digital health platforms. Key defining attributes include recognition of a problem, willingness to seek help, access to resources, and interpersonal interaction. Antecedents are categorized into individual (e.g., mental health literacy, self-efficacy), interpersonal (e.g., social support, stigma), and contextual (e.g., cultural beliefs, healthcare access) factors. Consequences can be both positive (e.g., improved outcomes, patient satisfaction, better nurse performance) and negative (e.g., stigma, financial burden). Empirical referents include measures such as frequency of help-seeking, satisfaction levels, and the type and timing of support. Constructed model, borderline, and contrary cases help clarify the application of this concept in real-life settings. Understanding help-seeking behavior allows nurses to better support patients and each other, ultimately enhancing care quality, reducing complications, and promoting timely interventions. This concept analysis provides a framework for nursing practice, education and research to normalize and facilitate effective help-seeking behavior in various healthcare environments.

**Keywords:** Help-Seeking Behavior, Nursing Practice, Concept Analysis, Patient Care, Health Outcomes.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction of Concept

A concept is constructed by phrases that explain the phenomena experienced by individuals. They can be complex and interfere with one another. Concept analysis seeks to clarify concepts and theoretical foundations to provide contextual knowledge of nursing theory, practice, and research. (Berenskoetter, 2017). The concept of help-seeking behavior is broad and complicated, encompassing the identification of a need for help, the choice to ask for help, and the steps taken to obtain support or care (Momeni et al., 2020). Help-seeking behavior has been examined in many types of research across various populations and settings. In nursing, help-seeking behavior is essential to fostering favorable health outcomes and improving the standard of patient care. Nurses should be able to identify when patients need support and encourage them to ask for it, which can help them obtain immediate care and avoid problems. Several studies have emphasized the significance of seeking help in nursing. For instance, research by Tavakol et al. (2021) found that patients with chronic conditions who actively sought help had much higher patient satisfaction and better health outcomes. Different research by Liu et al. (2021) showed that people with depression who sought care had better mental health results. Nurses must also be able to identify when they need support and ask their coworkers or managers for it. According to a study by Elmore et al., (2021), the conduct of nurses who ask for help is positively correlated with job performance and job satisfaction. Nursing managers should normalize help-seeking behaviors by removing barriers and adopting facilitators to reduce self-stigmatization.

Help-seeking behavior is an important idea in healthcare, as it can have a big influence on health outcomes. Healthcare providers must provide prompt and efficient help-seeking behavior to prevent death, health problems, and lower quality of life. Help-seeking behavior has been examined in many types of research across various populations and settings. For example, research carried out in the United States it is a process in which people seek out resources and support either formally or informally to help diagnose and prevent colorectal cancer (Zimmerman & Adams, 2021). Research carried out in Eastern India described help-seeking behavior as a deliberate action performed by a person to seek support, help, or medical attention for a health concern they have identified or acknowledged (Saha et al., 2021). Men's help-seeking behavior in Karachi, Pakistan is influenced by masculinity norms, social support, perceived quality of healthcare, and financial constraints (Mumtaz et al., 2021).

Help-seeking behavior in nursing is influenced by one's own beliefs, culture, social support, and access to healthcare. Cultural beliefs, social support, and healthcare accessibility influence help-seeking behavior among Chinese elders in nursing (Chan et al., 2021). Medical professionals especially nurses should be able to recognize the causes, attributes, antecedents, and consequences of concepts to reduce the time between diagnosis and treatment, improve treatment compliance, and improve the quality of practice (Cynthia Tjomiadi & Surit, 2017). To promote help-seeking for depression, medical professionals should address stigma, boost self-efficacy, and strengthen social support (Jang et al., 2021).

Understanding help-seeking behavior in the context of digital mental health services has drawn increasing attention in recent years. For example, a study by Fergus et al., (2018) that looked at the help-seeking behaviors of young adults with mental health issues who used online resources discovered that perceived stigma, a lack of trust in online resources, and difficulty using online resources were significant barriers to getting help. Online help-seeking provides an alternative in

mental health diseases to stigma and self-reliance. It should be designed to meet the mental health needs of young people (Pretorius et al.,2019). In general, enhancing access to healthcare services for people with physical and mental health issues depends on our ability to understand how people seek help.

### **Determine the Purposes of the Analysis**

Concept analysis' main purpose is to clear the confusing ideas in a theory and to suggest a precise operational definition that represents the underpinning of the theory (Walker, 1983, pp. 27-28). It is important to analyze the concept of help-seeking behavior to better understand the elements that affect a person's decision to seek help for a problem. Researchers and health practitioners can help people seek help by evaluating help-seeking behavior. The ultimate objective of studying the concept of help-seeking behavior is to enhance the health and general well-being of people by encouraging early intervention, lessening the adverse effects of health issues, and expanding access to suitable care.

### **Background**

Help-seeking behavior is a critical factor influencing patient care, health outcomes, and nursing interventions. In healthcare settings, timely recognition of health issues and the willingness to seek appropriate support can significantly impact recovery and overall well-being. Despite its importance, help-seeking behavior is often affected by personal, social, and cultural barriers, including stigma, lack of awareness, and limited access to resources. Nurses, as frontline caregivers, play a pivotal role in identifying and facilitating effective help-seeking among patients and within their professional communities. However, there is a need to better understand this concept to design strategies that promote supportive environments and reduce delays in seeking care. This study focuses on analyzing the concept of help-seeking behavior using Walker and Avant's method, aiming to clarify its attributes, antecedents, and consequences, and to provide a framework that enhances nursing practice, education, and research.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the recognized importance of help-seeking behavior in improving patient care and health outcomes, many individuals delay or avoid seeking necessary support due to personal, cultural, and systemic barriers. In nursing practice, this delay not only affects patient recovery but also increases the risk of complications and healthcare costs. A lack of clear understanding regarding the defining attributes, influencing factors, and outcomes of help-seeking behavior further limits nurses' ability to support timely interventions. Without a structured framework, nursing professionals may struggle to identify and address help-seeking barriers effectively. Therefore, there is a critical need to analyze and clarify the concept of help-seeking behavior to guide nursing practice, education, and research toward promoting proactive and supportive healthcare environments.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to analyze and clarify the concept of help-seeking behavior within the context of nursing practice using Walker and Avant's eight-step method. Specifically, the study aims to identify and define the key attributes, antecedents, and consequences of help-seeking behavior, and to explore its application across physical health, mental health, and digital health settings. Additionally, the study seeks to develop a conceptual framework that can assist nurses in recognizing and supporting effective help-seeking behaviors among patients and colleagues. By achieving these objectives, the study intends to provide practical guidance for nursing education, clinical practice, and future research, ultimately promoting timely interventions and improved health outcomes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Help-seeking behavior is a widely studied concept in healthcare, particularly in the fields of nursing, mental health, and patient care. It is generally defined as the process by which individuals recognize a need and actively seek assistance from formal or informal sources to address physical, emotional, or social concerns (Rickwood et al., 2005). Understanding this behavior is essential for healthcare professionals, especially nurses, as it directly affects patient outcomes, care quality, and the efficiency of interventions. Existing literature emphasizes that help-seeking behavior is complex and influenced by multiple personal, interpersonal, and contextual factors (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011).

Theoretical models such as the Health Belief Model and Andersen's Behavioral Model of Health Services Use have been utilized to explain help-seeking patterns. These frameworks highlight that perceived severity of symptoms, perceived benefits of action, and barriers such as stigma and lack of resources play crucial roles in shaping an individual's decision to seek help (Glanz et al., 2008). Rickwood et al. (2005) identified four key stages in help-seeking: awareness of the problem, expression of symptoms, identification of appropriate sources of help, and the act of seeking assistance. These stages align with the defining attributes presented in Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis, which underscores the importance of recognizing and articulating the need for support as foundational to the help-seeking process.

Research has demonstrated that cultural beliefs and social norms significantly influence help-seeking behaviors. Gulliver et al. (2010) found that adolescents and young adults often avoid seeking professional help due to fear of stigma and a preference for self-reliance. In contrast, collectivist cultures may encourage seeking help within familial or community settings rather than from formal healthcare providers (Yoon & Jepson, 2008). This suggests that cultural sensitivity is vital when developing interventions aimed at promoting help-seeking, particularly in multicultural healthcare environments.

In nursing practice, help-seeking behavior is not limited to patients. Nurses themselves must engage in help-seeking to manage workplace stress, prevent burnout, and ensure safe practice standards. Studies by Deane and Chamberlain (1994) highlight that nurses often underutilize mental health resources due to stigma and professional expectations of resilience. As frontline caregivers, nurses' own help-seeking patterns can influence their ability to model and encourage this behavior among patients, highlighting the need for institutional support and educational initiatives that normalize and facilitate professional help-seeking.

Emerging digital health platforms have introduced new dimensions to help-seeking behavior. Virtual consultations, telehealth services, and anonymous support forums offer alternative avenues for individuals hesitant to seek face-to-face help (Naslund et al., 2017). While digital solutions can improve accessibility, concerns about data privacy and the quality of virtual care remain barriers for many users (Larsen et al., 2016). Nonetheless, integrating digital tools into healthcare delivery has been identified as a promising strategy for encouraging early intervention and reducing stigma associated with traditional help-seeking pathways.

Empirical measures of help-seeking behavior typically include frequency of help-seeking episodes, the nature and timing of sought assistance, and patient-reported satisfaction (Rickwood et al., 2005). Recent studies also explore qualitative dimensions, such as personal narratives and lived experiences, to understand the subjective factors influencing help-seeking decisions (Cornally & McCarthy, 2011). However, gaps remain in comprehensively addressing help-seeking in non-mental health domains and in understanding the longitudinal outcomes of help-seeking actions.

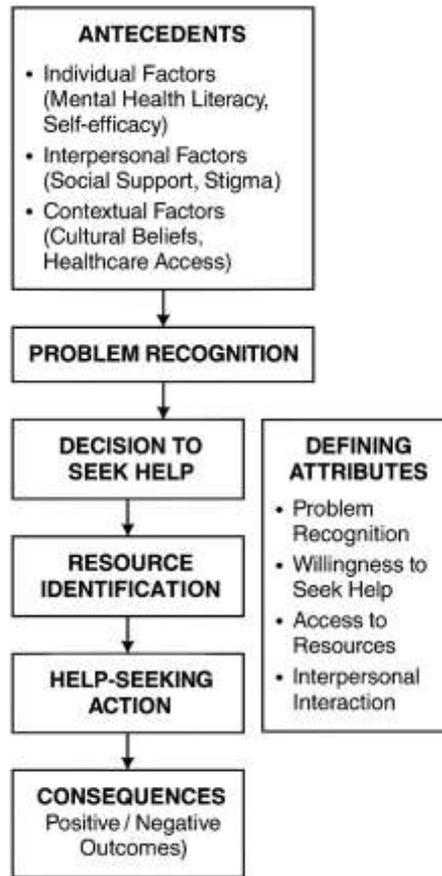
In conclusion, existing literature underscores that help-seeking behavior is multifaceted, shaped by individual beliefs, social influences, and systemic factors. While much research focuses on mental health contexts, there is a growing recognition of the need to extend these insights to broader healthcare settings, including digital platforms. For nursing practice, this understanding is crucial in designing supportive environments that encourage both patients and healthcare providers to seek timely help. This literature review highlights the need for concept clarification through structured analysis to develop practical frameworks supporting effective help-seeking behavior in diverse healthcare environments.

### **Theoretical Background**

The theoretical background of help-seeking behavior is grounded in several health behavior models that explain how individuals recognize health problems and decide to seek assistance. The Health Belief Model (HBM) is particularly relevant, suggesting that an individual's likelihood of seeking help depends on their perceived susceptibility to a health issue, perceived severity of the condition, perceived benefits of seeking help, and perceived barriers such as stigma or financial concerns (Glanz et al., 2008). Similarly, Andersen's Behavioral Model of Health Services Use emphasizes predisposing factors (e.g., demographics, health beliefs), enabling factors (e.g., resources, access), and need factors (e.g., perceived and evaluated illness) as critical determinants of help-seeking behavior (Andersen, 1995). In nursing, Walker and Avant's concept analysis framework provides a systematic approach to dissect and clarify help-seeking behavior by identifying its defining attributes, antecedents, and consequences. Together, these theories and models offer a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, social, and environmental influences that guide help-seeking actions, enabling nurses to develop targeted interventions that promote timely and effective support-seeking among patients.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates help-seeking behavior as a dynamic, multi-phase process influenced by individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors. Based on Walker and Avant's concept analysis method and integrated with the Health Belief Model and Andersen's Behavioral Model, the framework highlights the sequential stages: Problem Recognition, Decision to Seek Help, Resource Identification, and Help-Seeking Action. Antecedents such as mental health literacy, self-efficacy, social support, cultural beliefs, and healthcare accessibility interact to shape these stages. Defining attributes include the recognition of a need, willingness to seek help, access to resources, and interpersonal communication. Consequences, both positive (improved health outcomes, patient satisfaction) and negative (stigma, financial burden), result from the help-seeking process. This framework serves as a guide for nurses to assess, support, and facilitate help-seeking behavior among patients and within professional settings.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework illustrating the stages and influencing factors of help-seeking behavior.

**Figure 1** presents a conceptual framework illustrating help-seeking behavior as a sequential process influenced by various factors. The framework begins with antecedents, including individual factors (such as mental health literacy and self-efficacy), interpersonal factors (like social support and stigma), and contextual factors (such as cultural beliefs and healthcare access), which collectively shape the individual’s recognition of a problem. Following problem recognition, the individual proceeds through stages of decision to seek help, resource identification, and ultimately takes help-seeking action. Throughout this process, key defining attributes—problem recognition, willingness to seek help, access to resources, and interpersonal interaction—play a central role. The process culminates in consequences, which may be positive (like improved outcomes and patient satisfaction) or negative (such as stigma or financial burden), highlighting the complexity and outcomes of help-seeking behavior in healthcare settings.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Model Development

A model case is a case that demonstrates and exemplifies the concept with all of its defining characteristics (Walker and Avant): A patient who has recently undergone surgery and is in intense pain can serve as an example of help-seeking behavior in nursing. The patient is in discomfort and unable to sleep, yet they are unwilling to seek help out of concern about upsetting the nursing staff.

The nurse observes that the patient is upset and inquires as to if they are in pain. The patient acknowledges having intense pain but says they are reluctant to seek help. The nurse reassures the patient that it is their responsibility to assist in pain management and reassures the patient to seek assistance whenever necessary. The nurse then takes steps to control the patient's pain, such as giving the patient painkillers or getting in touch with the doctor to modify the patient's pain management strategy. The patient's pain management and general satisfaction increased as a consequence of the nurse's ability to identify the patient's need for assistance and encourage them to ask for it. This example case emphasizes the significance of help-seeking behavior in nursing and shows how nurses may improve health outcomes by identifying and addressing patients' assistance needs.

### **Borderline Case**

The majority of the characteristics of the concept under study are demonstrated by borderline cases. The following was an illustration of a hypothetical scenario that leaned on the way of help-seeking behavior: A man was walking out of a shop suddenly he felt chest pain and fell. A person, who was watching, called an ambulance. After reaching the hospital the man explained to the nurses and doctors that he felt breathlessness and chest pain. In this case, a man was the recipient of help. The identified problem was chest pain. The man did disclose the problem to the doctors and nurses of the hospital who are helpers; however, intentional action whereby the man decided to seek help and select a source of help was taken from him. If the person had not called the ambulance, the man might not have sought help. Perhaps he felt forced to attend the hospital in light of the ambulance arriving at the scene. He was a passive recipient of help.

### **Contrary Case**

According to Walker and Avant, "contrary cases are obvious examples of 'not the concept,' and learning what a concept does not enable us to understand how the concept under study operates." (p. 166). Discussed next is an example of a contrary case for the concept of help-seeking behavior. A young lady discovers that when she walks with her husband, experiences pain in her knees. She was exhausted after some time. Her husband notices that his wife has facial grimacing on walking indicative of pain and breathlessness and calls the local GP to arrange an appointment. The lady refuses to attend the appointment and will not take any of the medication that her husband has purchased. Instead, she stops walking with her husband and spends most of her day sitting at home in pain. As there is no receiver of help in this case, during mobilization the issue of pain was seen to be one that could be resolved without outside help. No defining attributes of help-seeking behavior are described here and this could be depicted as an opposing concept.

### **Method**

Walker and Avant's method of analysis was used to examine the concept of help-seeking behavior. The following steps are included in this method

1. Selection of a concept
2. determining the aims of the analysis
3. identifying all possible uses of the concept
4. defining attributes of concept
5. constructing a model case, borderline, and contrary cases
6. identifying antecedents and consequences of the concept
7. defining empirical referents.

A comprehension of the phenomenon may be obtained by carefully examining the ramifications of this idea. A comprehensive broad search for the term help-seeking behavior was conducted by using the following online databases, generating 535 hits. Academic journals, full-text articles, and English

articles were included. Exclusion criteria included non-English language articles, peer review articles, non-academic journals, and articles that did not address the key terms but 100 articles were more relative to the concept. 28 articles are referred to in this analysis. The research was exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and did not involve human subjects.

## RESULTS

### Identify all the Uses of the Concept

#### Surrogate Terms

Help-seeking behavior is a term that is used in different contexts. Its most commonly used surrogate terms are

1. Treatment-seeking behavior: (Chen et al.,2021).
2. Care-seeking behavior: (Stevellink et al.,2019).
3. Help-seeking intentions: (Jackson et al.,2019).

#### Related Concepts

Help-seeking behavior resembles two other concepts. The first is health-seeking behavior, which is described as any action or inaction made by persons who feel themselves to have a health condition or are unwell to find an adequate cure (Latunji & Akinyemi,2018; ). The second is health information-seeking behavior, which is described as the process of learning about health and illness and has the potential to affect perception and behavior connected to health (Schäfer et al., 2021).

#### Definitions of the Term “Help-Seeking”

Online dictionaries were searched as part of the original investigation of the term. As a result of the term "help-seeking" consisting of a noun and a transitive verb, There had to be a different definition for every term.

#### Help

The noun ‘help’ is defined in the Oxford Dictionaries as, ‘assistance or a source of assistance’, whereas the verb ‘help’ is defined as ‘to make it easier or It is feasible for someone to act by providing them with a service or an item they require (2023).

#### Seek

The meaning of seek is, “to go in search of something: look for someone: to try to discover something: to ask for need and advice” (Merriam-Webster,2023). When we try to find or get something especially that is not a physical object is called seek (Cambridge Dictionary,2023).

#### Help-Seeking Behaviors

According to the dictionary, "help-seeking" means "to attempt looking for something or aid for help in pursuit of relief." Although analytical, a more abstract perspective is needed. In psychology, "help-seeking behavior" was defined as any behavior that involves actively seeking assistance from the medical system or reliable acquaintances. This assistance can take the form of understanding, directing, caring and general support while dealing with difficult situations or feeling in need. (Umubyeyi et al.,2016). In the context of education, help-seeking is described as a learning approach when a student seeks to gain external aid to deal with obstacles encountered while working towards one (or more) educational goals (Spencer & Petersen,2020). Help-seeking for mental health issues is described by Rickwood and Thomas (2015) as an adaptive coping mechanism that includes an effort to get outside help to address mental health issues (p.180).

**Defining Attributes**

According to Walker and Avant, “determining the defining attributes of a concept is the heart of concept analysis” (1985, p. 162). The attributes have to be connected to the concept of help-seeking behavior to properly characterize the concept.

**Constructed Cases**

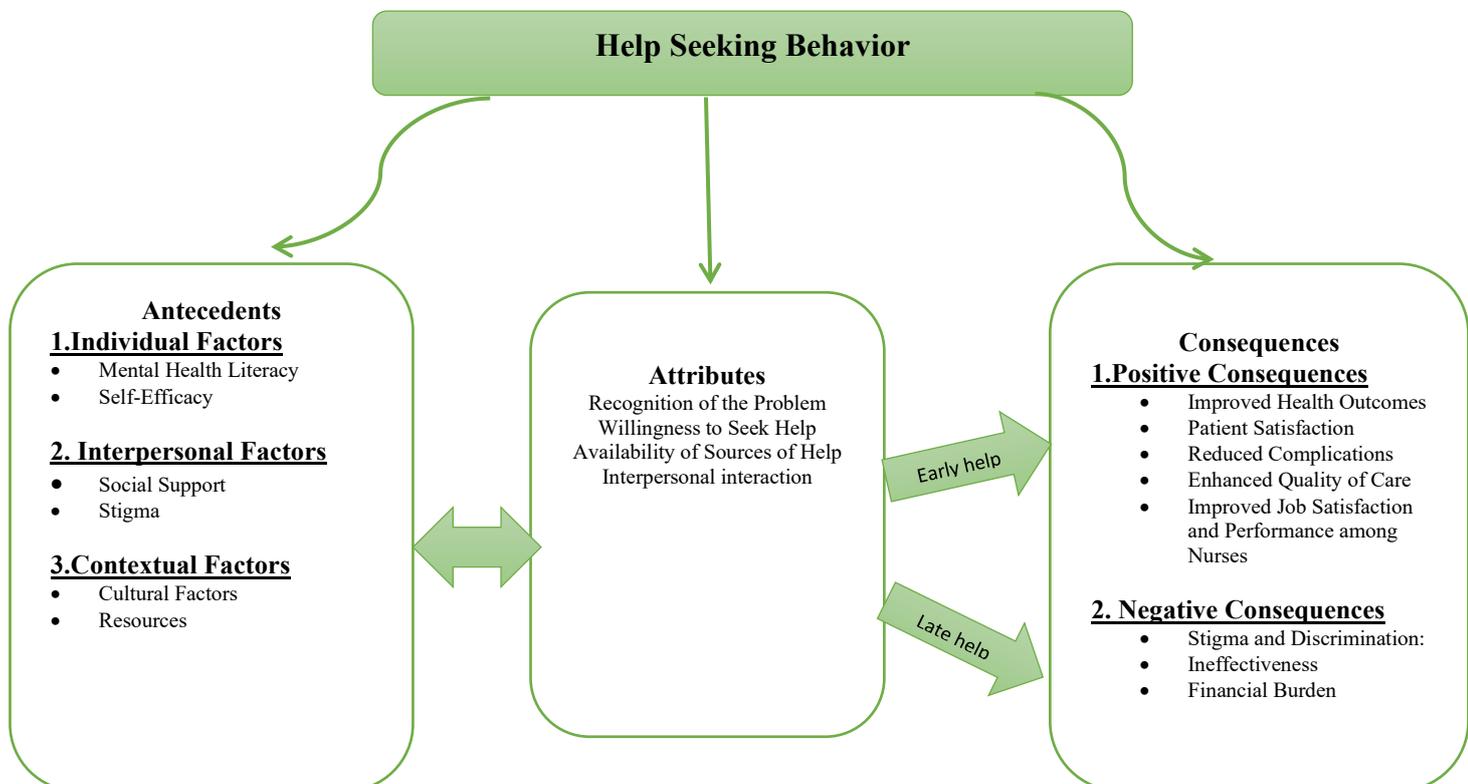
The constructed case demonstrates the concept through the implementation of the attributes, antecedents, and consequences. A model case includes all the defining attributes, a borderline case represents a connection to the concept, and a contrary case is a clear example of when the concept is absent.

**Antecedents**

The antecedents of help-seeking behavior can be widely characterized into individual factors, interpersonal factors, and contextual factors. The following are some examples of antecedents in each category,

**Consequences**

The consequences of help-seeking behavior can have positive or negative effects depending on the type of help sought, timing, and quality of help. Many examples demonstrate the consequences of asking for help.



**Figure 2.** Attributes, Antecedents and Consequences of Help-Seeking Behavior

This figure presents a conceptual framework outlining the attributes, antecedents, and consequences of help-seeking behavior. Antecedents (left) include individual factors such as mental health literacy and self-efficacy, interpersonal factors like social support and stigma, and contextual factors such as cultural beliefs and resource availability. These factors influence the attributes (center) of help-seeking behavior, which are problem recognition, willingness to seek help, access to resources, and interpersonal interaction. Based on whether help is sought early or late, the process leads to positive consequences (right), such as improved health outcomes and patient satisfaction, or negative consequences, including stigma, ineffectiveness, and financial burden. This framework emphasizes the importance of early intervention and supportive conditions in promoting effective help-seeking behavior.

### Empirical Referents

The empirical referents of the Walker method in the context of help-seeking behavior include frequency of seeking help, type of help, reason for seeking help, time to seek help, and satisfaction with help-seeking. These are measured through self-report or records of service or clinical assessments or surveys. These empirical referents could provide light on the usefulness of treatments designed to encourage help-seeking behavior as well as the challenges and boosters to seek help in various contexts (Ahn& Kim,2019; Ali et al.,2020; Biddle et al., 2021; Kaddatz et al.,2022).

**Table 1:** Summary of Concept Analysis Findings on Help-Seeking Behavior

Component	Identified Elements
<b>Defining Attributes</b>	- Recognition of the problem - Willingness to seek help - Availability of support resources - Interpersonal interaction
<b>Antecedents</b>	<b>Individual Factors:</b> - Mental health literacy - Self-efficacy <b>Interpersonal Factors:</b> - Social support - Stigma <b>Contextual Factors:</b> - Cultural beliefs - Healthcare access/resources
<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Positive:</b> - Improved health outcomes - Patient satisfaction - Reduced complications - Enhanced quality of care - Improved nurse performance <b>Negative:</b> - Stigma and discrimination - Ineffectiveness - Financial burden
<b>Empirical Referents</b>	- Frequency of help-seeking episodes - Type and timing of support accessed - Patient satisfaction levels - Observed help-seeking behaviors
<b>Model Case Example</b>	A patient experiencing anxiety seeks counseling services after recognizing symptoms and discussing concerns with a nurse.
<b>Contrary Case Example</b>	A patient experiencing chronic pain avoids medical consultation due to fear of social judgment and cultural beliefs.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this concept analysis emphasize that help-seeking behavior is not merely an individual decision but a complex process shaped by multiple personal, interpersonal, and contextual factors. The presence of key attributes—such as problem recognition, willingness to seek help, and access to resources—demonstrates that both psychological readiness and systemic support play critical roles in enabling timely interventions. Cultural beliefs, stigma, and healthcare accessibility remain significant barriers, particularly in mental health contexts. Nurses, as frontline caregivers, are uniquely positioned to identify these barriers and facilitate help-seeking behavior through patient education, advocacy, and supportive communication. The integration of digital health platforms also presents new opportunities

for overcoming traditional barriers and expanding access to care. By understanding and addressing the antecedents and consequences outlined in this analysis, nursing professionals can promote proactive help-seeking behaviors that contribute to improved health outcomes and overall patient well-being.

## CONCLUSION

This concept analysis of help-seeking behavior highlights its critical role in nursing practice and patient care. Help-seeking behavior is a complex, multi-dimensional process influenced by individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors, with defining attributes including problem recognition, willingness to seek help, access to resources, and interpersonal interaction. The analysis demonstrates that timely and effective help-seeking can lead to positive outcomes such as improved health, patient satisfaction, and enhanced nursing performance, while delays or barriers can result in stigma, ineffectiveness, and financial strain. Understanding this concept enables nurses to foster supportive environments that encourage early help-seeking, ultimately improving patient outcomes and care quality. This analysis also provides a practical framework for nursing education, research, and policy development aimed at normalizing and facilitating help-seeking behavior across diverse healthcare settings.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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