

## Help-seeking, emotional expressivity and male role norms among young adult men

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### Abstract

This study explores the relationship between emotional expressivity, adherence to traditional male role norms, and help-seeking behaviours among young adult men in urban India. Using a quantitative, correlation and regression-based approach, the research aims to quantify levels of emotional expressivity and examine its association with both adherence to masculine norms and attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. The sample consisted of young adult men who completed self-report measures on emotional expressivity, male role norms, and attitudes toward help-seeking. The study found weak but significant correlations between adherence to male role norms and help-seeking behaviours. Regression analysis further indicated that male role norms partially predict help-seeking behaviours. Implications for mental health interventions and future research directions are discussed, including the potential for broader, multifactorial approaches to encourage help-seeking among men.

**Keywords:** Help-seeking behaviours; Emotional expressivity; Male role norms; Traditional masculinity; Young adult men

### 1. Introduction

Mental health issues are prevalent but are often overlooked in men due to several reasons. The stigma associated with men seeking help is a barrier as traditionally when men are vulnerable it is seen as a weakness. This may promote stoicism in young men, stopping them from expressing themselves emotionally. This adherence to traditional masculinity may prevent individuals from seeking professional mental health services. It is often viewed as a challenge to their male identity. (Richard O de Visser, et.al, 2020)<sup>(2)</sup> These barriers result in many mental health disorders like anxiety and depression going undiagnosed. Men in India are less likely than women to seek mental health treatment (Kumar & Jain, 2018)<sup>(3)</sup>. This is partially because men may be deterred from seeking treatment for mental health issues by the social expectation that they should be strong and independent (Patel et al., 2019). Because getting help is stigmatised and men are afraid of being seen as weak or unmanly, it is thought that traditional masculinity—which is defined by qualities like strength, dominance, and emotional control—can keep men from getting treatment for mental health issues. Men's mental health and wellness are significantly impacted by masculinity, stigma, and help-seeking behaviour. In India, men's perceptions of themselves and their decision to seek mental health treatment can be greatly influenced by traditional gender roles and cultural expectations of masculinity. (Ch. Muni Jyoshna, 2023)<sup>(14)</sup>. King et al. (2020) explored how different expressions of masculinity are associated with suicidal ideation among young males. Their findings revealed that adherence to rigid masculine norms—such as emotional suppression and self-reliance—significantly increased the risk of suicidal thoughts, underscoring the critical impact of these norms on help-seeking and mental health outcomes. <sup>(20)</sup>

In Indian Society where stoicism and emotional suppression are valued, men may feel seeking professional help as a threat to their identity, and leading to an internal sense of shame and weakness. As a result of this, instead of seeking therapy or counselling individuals resort to unproductive or harmful coping ways such as substance abuse or aggressive

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behaviours. This often goes untreated and continues as a cycle. It does not just affect their well-being. It causes diminished productivity, relationship breakdowns, economic burdens, and so on. By understanding and addressing the barriers men face, society can work towards reducing the stigma and creating awareness in promoting healthy coping mechanisms which in turn can help reduce suicide rates and mental health issues.

### 1.1. Emotional Expressivity

Emotional expressivity is the ability of people to freely express their emotions, which include happiness, sorrow, rage, and fear. This is important for emotional regulation to have healthy relationships and healthy expression of feelings. The ability to express emotions can promote healthy coping mechanisms.

### 1.2. Male role norms

Male role norms refer to societal expectations and how culture expects men to behave, act, and feel. These are norms which have been in the societies and have been passed on historically. They emphasize qualities like emotional stoicism, independence, assertiveness, and strength. These norms do not encourage men to be vulnerable and dependent; it is often seen as a threat to their masculinity and is perceived as a sign of weakness. According to Kleck's (1981) Gender Role Strain Paradigm, strict adherence to male role norms can create psychological stress when men feel pressured to live up to these expectations, often at the expense of their well-being. Several research has shown that rigid male role norms are associated with negative psychological and social outcomes. <sup>(1)</sup>

### 1.3. Help-seeking

Help-seeking is the process of actively seeking out assistance or support, often from professionals, for issues related to personal, psychological, or emotional well-being. (APA). Help-seeking is essential for mental well-being, as it gives individuals guidance that can help them manage stress, cope with issues, and improve their overall quality of life. People's feelings or thoughts on seeking professional mental health assistance are characterized by their attitudes toward psychological help-seeking.

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## 2. Literature review

Research conducted by R Levant et.al, (2014) conducted a study on the relationships between masculinity and men's attitudes toward seeking psychological help. This study investigated a theoretical model examining how traditional masculinity ideology and gender role conflict influence men's attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The results indicated that self-stigma partially mediated the relationship between traditional masculinity ideology and attitudes toward help-seeking, while gender role conflict was found to completely mediate this relationship. Furthermore, depression and barriers to help-seeking were identified as moderating variables that influenced both the mediation process and the direct effects between traditional masculinity ideology and attitudes. <sup>(10)</sup> Chan, Thompson, and Yu (2019) compared help-seeking attitudes and emotional expressivity between Hong Kong and Western populations, finding cultural differences influenced by locus of control. The study highlights how emotional expressivity plays a crucial role in shaping help-seeking behavior, particularly within sociocultural and gendered contexts. <sup>(7)</sup> Sullivan, Camic, and Brown (2015) found that higher levels of traditional masculinity, alexithymia, and fear of intimacy predicted more negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help among UK men. Their study highlights how emotional restriction shaped by masculine norms can significantly hinder help-seeking behaviours. <sup>(9)</sup>

Yousaf, O., et. al (2015) explored on "An investigation of masculinity attitudes, gender, and attitudes toward psychological help-seeking." This study explored the connections between adherence to traditional masculinity norms, gender, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The findings revealed that men demonstrated less favourable attitudes toward help-seeking compared to women <sup>(11)</sup>. Wahto, R., & Swift, J. (2016). The study investigates the relationship between gender-role conflict, stigma (both social and self), and attitudes toward seeking psychological help among men. Higher levels of gender-role conflict, social stigma, and self-stigma were associated with more negative help-seeking attitudes <sup>(21)</sup>. A study by Junko Morishita, et.al. (2016) recruited male IPV victims residing in Japan. The study's findings suggest that male IPV victims in Japan are more inclined to seek help in cases of physical violence, while nonphysical forms of abuse tend to be overlooked <sup>(2davan2)</sup>. Z.Seidler, et.,al., (2016) study on The role of masculinity in men's help-seeking for depression examines how traditional masculine norms affect men's experiences with depression and their help-seeking behaviours. It found that these norms influence how men express symptoms, their attitudes and intentions toward seeking help, and their approaches to symptom management <sup>(13)</sup>. Sultana and Priyadarshini (2018) conducted a study which aimed to explore gender differences in emotional expressivity among young adults. The findings revealed significant gender differences in emotional expressivity, with women exhibiting higher levels of both positive and negative emotional expressivity compared to men <sup>(23)</sup>. In a 2021 study by Herreen, Rice, and Zajac examined

the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and depressive symptoms among Australian men, they found that adherence to masculine norms decreased with age<sup>(12)</sup>. A study by Knott-Fayle, et.al (2023) examined how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced expressions of masculinity in school settings. Findings suggest that disruptions to routine and social interaction offered opportunities to challenge traditional masculine norms, potentially allowing greater emotional expression among boys—highlighting the role of context in reshaping gendered behaviors related to help-seeking<sup>(18)</sup>. A study by Komlenac et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between conformity to masculine norms (CMN), self-compassion, self-stigma, and the willingness to seek help for depressive symptoms in both men and women. The results indicated that strong CMN and low self-compassion were associated with high self-stigma, which negatively impacted help-seeking intentions for both genders. Notably, for men with low self-compassion, CMN directly affected their willingness to seek help, while for those with higher self-compassion, CMN's impact was indirect, mediated by self-stigma<sup>(6)</sup>. A study conducted by Muni Jyoshna (2023) investigated the relationship between masculinity, perceived stigma, self-stigma, and help-seeking behaviour among Indian men aged 26 to 55. The findings of the study revealed a significant negative correlation between self-stigma and help-seeking behaviour, indicating that higher levels of self-stigma are associated with a lower likelihood of seeking help<sup>(14)</sup>. González-Sanguino et al. (2021) found increased depression, anxiety, and stress during the COVID-19 crisis in Spain. These findings highlight how external stressors can intensify emotional distress and reveal barriers to help-seeking, especially among men, where traditional male role norms may restrict emotional expression and support-seeking behaviours.<sup>(3)</sup> The study by Ford and Keane (2024) found that higher conformity to masculine norms and increased gender role conflict were associated with lower intentions to seek help for anxiety symptoms among Australian men.<sup>(17)</sup> Gueta and Shlichove (2022) examined help-seeking behaviours among Israeli men experiencing intimate partner violence, identifying masculine norms, fear of stigma, and emotional suppression as key barriers. Their findings highlight how rigid gender roles limit men's willingness to express vulnerability and seek support.<sup>(5)</sup> Lynch, Long, and Moorhead (2018) explored the barriers young men face in accessing mental health services, emphasizing how masculine norms like emotional stoicism and self-reliance hinder help-seeking. Their study highlights the need for gender-sensitive approaches that challenge these norms and promote emotional expressivity among men.<sup>(4)</sup> Short, Davis, and Gheyoh Ndzi (2023) explored how masculinity and social support influence depression in new and experienced fathers. Their findings revealed that traditional masculine norms often discourage emotional expression and help-seeking, increasing the risk of depression and reducing access to support during fatherhood.<sup>(16)</sup> king

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Objectives

- To analyse the relationship between emotional expressivity and adherence to traditional masculine role norms among young adult men.
- To explore the relationship between emotional expressivity and help-seeking behaviours among young adult men.
- To analyse the relationship between help-seeking behaviours and adherence to traditional male role norms in young adult men.
- To assess whether adherence to traditional male role norms has an impact on help-seeking behaviours in young adult men.

#### 3.2. Hypothesis

- H01: There is no significant association between adherence to traditional male role norms and emotional expressivity in young adult men
- H02: There is no significant association between emotional expressivity and help-seeking behaviours among young adult men.
- H03: There is no significant relationship between help-seeking behaviour and male role norms.
- H04: Adherence to traditional male role norms does not impact help-seeking behaviours in young adult men.

#### 3.3. Research Design

The purpose of this research is to find an association between help-seeking behaviours, male role norms, and emotional expressivity among young adult men. The study will specifically focus on conducting correlation and regression analysis for whether there is an association between these variables.

### **3.4. Sample**

The study involves 200 young adult men aged 18-25, recruited through online platforms. Participants chosen are diverse in ethnicity, and educational background. Technique: The study incorporates purposive sampling as it allows us to select the participants who meet the pre-defined criteria relevant to the study. The participants are intentionally selected, who have specific characteristics or meet certain criteria central to the study's objectives.

### **3.5. Inclusion criteria**

- Age group: Participants must be between 18 and 25 years old.
- Currently employed or enrolled as students.
- Gender: Participants must be male.
- Location: Participants must reside in an urban area in Karnataka.

### **3.6. Exclusion criteria**

Mental health conditions: Individuals with severe mental health conditions or cognitive impairments that might affect their ability to understand and participate in the survey.

Taken therapy: Participants who have attended at least one therapy session.

### **3.7. Tools for Measurement**

Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Version (ATSPPH-SV): This scale measures attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, focusing on the willingness and openness to seek help. The Attitude Toward Help-Seeking Behaviour Questionnaire is a self-report instrument designed to assess individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding seeking professional psychological help. The questionnaire typically includes a series of statements or questions that participants rate, often using a Likert scale (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree). This scale is known for its strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging from 0.80 to 0.86 across studies, indicating a high level of reliability.

Man Box Scale: The Man Box Scale is a measure developed to assess the degree to which men adhere to traditional, restrictive norms of masculinity. It includes items that evaluate beliefs and behaviours related to masculinity norms such as self-sufficiency, aggression, sexual prowess, emotional suppression, and the need for dominance. The scale shows strong reliability with Cronbach's alpha values generally above 0.85, suggesting good internal consistency. This scale has demonstrated good construct validity, capturing key aspects of restrictive masculinity norms as validated by correlations with related measures of gender role attitudes, aggression, and help-seeking.

Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES): The Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES) is a self-report instrument designed to measure the degree to which individuals outwardly express their emotions. The EES was found to be highly reliable, with an average alpha of .91 across seven administrations.

### **3.8. Procedure**

The data was collected through self-report questionnaires through Google Forms and informed consent is taken from the participants. After the data was collected the results were interpreted from the questionnaire and the software Jamovi will be used for analysis.

### **3.9. Data Analysis**

- Descriptive statistics: For the collected the sum, mean, and standard deviation was measured.
- Inferential Statistics: Correlation was used to measure the relationship between the variables. Regression was used to measure the impact of male role norms on help seeking behaviour.

#### **3.9.1. Variables**

The variables being used are:

- Male role norms – Independent Variable
- Help-seeking behaviours – Dependent Variable
- Emotional expressivity – Dependent Variable
- Geographical area: The study was conducted in India with a focus on the state of Karnataka in South India.

#### 4. Results and discussion

**Table 1** Descriptives of the socio-demographic data

Sample Characteristics	N	M	SD
Have you been diagnosed with any mental health conditions?			
No	200	97.5%	7.01
Yes	5	2.44%	6.48
Place of residence :			
Urban	200		
Age	201	21	2.65

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the respondents. The data was collected from the Indian population with a focus on the state of Karnataka in South India. There were 205 participants. Going through exclusion criteria few participants were excluded leading to 200 participants, and are not diagnosed with any psychiatric disorders. The data was scored appropriately and analysed through Spearman's Correlation.

**Table 2** Descriptive data for Help-seeking behaviour, Emotional Expressivity and Male Role Norms

				Shapiro-Wilk	
	N	Mean	SD	W	p
Help-Seeking	200	7.59	4.68	0.815	< .001
Emotional Male Role	200	54.8	12.56	0.924	0.001
Norms	200	46.95	14.9	0.980	0.007

Table 2 shows the descriptives- mean, standard deviation, and normality of the variable. The study analysed data from 200 participants to explore their attitudes toward professional help-seeking, emotional expressivity, and adherence to traditional male behaviours. The descriptive statistics indicated a mean Help-seeking score of 7.59 (SD = 4.68), with scores ranging from 0 to 29. The mean Emotional expressivity score was 54.8 (SD = 12.6), with a range from 2 to 96, and the mean Male role norms score was 47.0 (SD = 14.9), with scores spanning from 15 to 95.

**Table 3** Correlation Matrix of Emotional expressivity, Male role norms, and Help-seeking

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Emotional Expressivity	19.7	9.74	—		
2. Male Role Norms	110.1	31.69	0.015	—	
3. Help-seeking	15.7	4.77	-0.035	-0.118*	—

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .

Table 3 indicates the correlation matrix of the relationships between Attitudes Toward Psychological Help-seeking), Emotional Expressivity, and Male Role Norms among the study participants, with Spearman's rho used to measure associations. Adherence to traditional male role norms shows a weak, non-significant correlation with emotional expressivity ( $\rho = 0.015$ ,  $p = 0.837$ ), indicating no meaningful association between these variables. This finding supports the conclusion that, within this sample, adherence to male role norms does not significantly impact emotional expressivity among young adult men.

**Table 4** Regression Analysis of help-seeking behaviour and Male role norms

Variables			$\beta$	t	Sig.	95.0% CI	
	B	SE				LL	UL
Total	11.21	1.6700		6.714	0.068	7.919	14.5058
Male role norms	-0.083	0.0339	-0.172	-2.457	0.153	-0.150	-0.0165
R <sup>2</sup>	0.0296						

#### 4.1.1. Dependent variable: Help-seeking behaviour

- **Male Role Norms Impact:** Adherence to traditional male role norms (MBS) has a statistically significant but modest negative impact on help-seeking behaviours (ATPHS) among young adult men.
- **Correlation:** The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.114 indicates a weak relationship.
- **Variance Explained:** The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.0296 shows that only about 0.29% of the variance in help-seeking behaviours can be explained by adherence to male role norms, indicating other factors likely play a larger role.
- **Hypothesis:** The hypothesis that adherence to male role norms has no impact on help-seeking behaviours is rejected.

**Conclusion:** Male role norms contribute modestly to reduced help-seeking behaviours, suggesting other influencing factors exist.

## 5. Discussion

This study investigates the relationships between help-seeking, emotional expressivity, and male role norms among young men. The findings indicate a negative correlation between help-seeking and male role norms, but no significant correlation with emotional expressivity. A study by Juillerat, White, and Obst (2023) supports these results, showing that societal discouragement of men from expressing emotions makes it harder for them to identify and address symptoms of depression.<sup>(8)</sup>

Juillerat and White (2023) found that emotional expressivity plays a significant role in shaping the likelihood of young men seeking mental health assistance. Their study indicates that a combination of attitudes, prototype similarity, self-stigma, and emotional expressivity accounts for a large percentage of the variance in willingness to seek help. They also highlight that self-stigma can hinder individuals from seeking professional assistance, supporting the idea that masculine beliefs intersect with factors such as self-stigma rather than directly impacting help-seeking attitudes.<sup>(8)</sup>

The observed variability and lack of significant correlations suggest that strategies addressing the unique characteristics and needs of individuals are essential. Future research should further investigate the underlying factors influencing help-seeking attitudes, emotional expressivity, and adherence to traditional male behaviors to develop more effective mental health interventions.

Overall, weak and non-significant correlations suggest that relationships between attitudes toward help-seeking, emotional expressivity, and male role norms are complex and may be influenced by various external factors. Variables such as societal attitudes, peer influence, or mental health literacy might have a more substantial impact on help-seeking behaviours. While traditional male norms often discourage help-seeking and emotional openness, they do not always dictate these behaviours.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter offers an extensive overview of the principal findings from the study, derives conclusions from the acquired results, and presents suggestions for forthcoming research and real-world applications within the realms of psychology and education. This study investigates the relationship between emotional expressivity, adherence to traditional male role norms, and attitudes toward help-seeking behaviours among young adult men. Through a correlation and regression analysis, we examine how these factors interact and influence one another. Summary: The analysis found a weak but statistically significant negative correlation between adherence to traditional male role norms and help-seeking behaviours. This indicates that higher adherence to traditional male role norms is associated with lower attitudes

toward help-seeking behaviours in this sample of young adult men. However, no significant correlations were found between adherence to traditional male role norms and emotional expressivity, or between emotional expressivity and help-seeking behaviours. These findings suggest that emotional expressivity and adherence to traditional male role norms do not significantly influence help-seeking attitudes in this sample. The lack of a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and help-seeking behaviours indicates that other factors, beyond traditional male norms and emotional expression, may play a more central role in shaping help-seeking behaviours among young adult men.

**Implications:** The findings contribute to the theoretical framework on gender roles and help-seeking behaviours, suggesting that traditional male norms only partially explain men's reluctance to seek help. Mental health interventions should focus on improving emotional awareness, reducing social stigma, and normalizing emotional expression in men. Programs should also emphasize resilience and self-efficacy aligned with positive masculinity.

### **6.1. Limitations & Future Research**

Notable limitations include sample size, cultural specificity, and language barriers. Reliance on self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias, and the study's focus on urban Indian settings may not reflect attitudes in rural or other cultural contexts. Future research should expand sample diversity, employ inclusive methods, conduct cross-cultural comparisons, utilize multilingual measures, adopt mixed-methods approaches, and incorporate longitudinal and intersectional analyses.

### **6.2. Recommendations for Future Research**

The sample in this study may not fully capture the diversity of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, which can limit the generalizability of the findings. A broader representation of participants could help enhance the applicability of the results across different demographic groups. Additionally, a larger sample size could improve the reliability and relevance of the findings, making them more widely applicable. Future studies may consider employing a longitudinal approach better to establish causal relationships between male norms and help-seeking behaviours. By tracking changes over time, such studies could offer deeper insights into how these norms evolve and impact help-seeking practices. Incorporating qualitative research methods could further enrich understanding by exploring the underlying attitudes and beliefs that shape men's views on seeking help. Such an approach would provide valuable depth to the findings, offering a more nuanced perspective on these practices and helping to illuminate the personal and social factors involved. Mental health and well-being among Men.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

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### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The research was done in order of fulfilment for the award of Master's degree( M.Sc ) in Counselling Psychology of Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous affiliated to Bengaluru North University, the results of research were not affected by the organization.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. They were also informed about their right to say no or withdraw from the research even if it had already started. They were given a clear understanding of the limits of confidentiality and any foreseeable risk is informed well in advance. The participants were also given the contact details of the person to whom they can reach out in case of queries.

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