

Title: Exploring mental health literacy among prospective university students using GIS techniques in Bangladesh: an exploratory study

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Abstract: Prospective university students experience substantial academic stressors and psychological vulnerabilities, yet their mental health literacy (MHL) remains inadequately explored. This study investigates four dimensions of MHL - help-seeking behaviors, stigma, knowledge about mental health and understanding of mental illnesses. Besides, Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques are employed to analyze spatial disparities in MHL, which is the first in the context of MHL research. A total of 1,485 students were assessed for sociodemographic characteristics, admission-related variables, health behaviors and family histories of mental health issues. Data were analyzed using SPSS and ArcGIS software. Multivariable linear regression analyses unveiled predictors of the MHL dimensions, with gender, family income, admission test performance, smoking, alcohol and drug use, physical and mental health history, current depression or anxiety and family history of mental health and suicide incidents emerging as common predictors. GIS analysis unraveled notable regional disparities in MHL, particularly in knowledge of mental health and mental illness, with northern and some southern districts displaying higher literacy levels. In conclusion, these findings accentuate significant gender and sociodemographic inequalities in MHL among prospective university students, highlighting the imperative for targeted interventions to enhance MHL and foster mental well-being in this cohort.

Keywords: Help-seeking, Mental health Literacy, Mental illness, Spatial analysis, Stigma, Students.

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