
Health-Seeking Behavior Among University Populations

Dr. Arvind Prasad

Associate Professor

Department of Public Health

Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

Received: 04 April, 2018; **Accepted:** 13 April, 2018; **Published:** 22 April, 2018

Abstract: Health-seeking behavior is a fundamental determinant of individual and community health because it reflects the decisions and actions taken to maintain health, prevent illness, and obtain appropriate healthcare services. Among university populations, health-seeking behavior has become increasingly important due to the unique physical, psychological, academic, and social challenges experienced during higher education. University students are frequently exposed to academic stress, irregular lifestyles, inadequate nutrition, insufficient physical activity, and mental health concerns, all of which influence their willingness to seek professional healthcare and adopt preventive health practices. Developing positive health-seeking behaviors during this stage of life contributes not only to improved immediate well-being but also to the establishment of lifelong healthy habits.

The present study examines health-seeking behavior among university populations and explores the factors that influence healthcare utilization and preventive health practices. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to university students. The study evaluates participants' healthcare awareness, utilization of medical services, preventive health behaviors, access to health information, and attitudes toward professional healthcare. The findings indicate that students demonstrating higher levels of health awareness are more likely to seek timely medical consultation, participate in preventive healthcare services, practice self-care behaviors, and maintain healthier lifestyles. The study highlights the importance of strengthening campus health education, improving access to healthcare services, and promoting evidence-based health communication to encourage positive health-seeking behavior among university students.

Keywords: Health-seeking behavior, university students, healthcare utilization, preventive healthcare, health awareness, self-care, public health.

Introduction

Health is widely recognized as one of the most valuable resources for personal development, academic success, and social well-being. Maintaining good health requires individuals to make informed decisions regarding disease prevention, healthcare utilization, healthy lifestyle practices, and timely medical consultation. These decisions collectively constitute health-seeking behavior, which has become an important area of public health research because it directly influences health outcomes and quality of life. Positive health-seeking behavior enables individuals to recognize health problems at an early stage, seek appropriate medical assistance, and participate actively in preventive healthcare activities. Conversely, delayed healthcare utilization and poor health awareness may contribute to disease progression, reduced productivity, and increased healthcare costs.

Table 1. Overview of Health-Seeking Behavior Among University Populations

Aspect	Description
Health-Seeking Behavior	Actions taken to maintain health, prevent disease, and obtain appropriate healthcare services.
Major Components	Health awareness, medical consultation, preventive healthcare, self-care practices, and access to health information.
Influencing Factors	Health literacy, academic stress, financial resources, healthcare accessibility, social support, and cultural beliefs.
Expected Outcomes	Improved healthcare utilization, healthier lifestyles, disease prevention, and enhanced overall well-being.

University students represent a unique population undergoing significant educational, psychological, and social transitions. Increased academic responsibilities, independent living, financial constraints, changing lifestyles, and exposure to new social environments often influence students' health-related behaviors. Many students experience irregular dietary patterns, inadequate physical activity, sleep disturbances, psychological stress, and mental health challenges that require timely healthcare intervention. However, despite the availability of healthcare services, students may postpone medical consultation because of limited health awareness, financial concerns, lack of time, perceived stigma, or misconceptions regarding illness severity. Understanding these behavioral patterns is

essential for developing effective health promotion strategies within higher education institutions.

Health-seeking behavior extends beyond visiting healthcare facilities and includes preventive health practices such as routine medical examinations, vaccination, personal hygiene, healthy nutrition, physical activity, mental health support, and responsible self-care. Universities play a critical role in promoting these behaviors by providing accessible healthcare services, evidence-based health education, counseling programs, and wellness initiatives. Educational institutions increasingly recognize that healthy students are more likely to demonstrate better academic performance, stronger emotional resilience, and improved social functioning. Consequently, strengthening health-seeking behavior has become an important objective of campus health promotion programs.

The present study investigates health-seeking behavior among university populations by examining healthcare awareness, healthcare utilization, preventive health practices, and factors influencing medical consultation. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of effective health promotion strategies that encourage timely healthcare utilization, improve health literacy, and enhance the overall well-being of university students.

Literature Review

Health-seeking behavior has emerged as a major area of public health research because it influences disease prevention, early diagnosis, treatment outcomes, and overall quality of life. Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals who actively seek healthcare services and engage in preventive health practices experience better physical and psychological well-being than those who delay or avoid healthcare utilization. Among university students, health-seeking behavior is particularly important because this period is characterized by significant lifestyle changes, academic pressures, and increased personal responsibility for health management.

Concept of Health-Seeking Behavior

Health-seeking behavior refers to the actions and decisions individuals take to maintain health, prevent illness, recognize symptoms, and obtain appropriate healthcare services. It includes seeking professional medical advice, participating in preventive healthcare, following prescribed treatments, practicing self-care, and accessing reliable health information. Positive health-seeking behavior contributes to early disease detection, effective treatment, and improved long-term health outcomes.

Factors Influencing Health-Seeking Behavior

Several factors influence health-seeking behavior among university students. Health literacy, accessibility of healthcare services, financial resources, academic workload, social support, cultural beliefs, previous healthcare experiences, and perceived illness severity significantly affect students' willingness to seek professional healthcare. Digital health information and campus health services also play an increasingly important role in shaping healthcare decisions.

Health-Seeking Behavior and Student Well-being

Research consistently indicates that students who demonstrate positive health-seeking behavior report better physical health, improved mental well-being, greater academic performance, and higher overall life satisfaction. Timely medical consultation, preventive healthcare participation, healthy lifestyle practices, and effective stress management contribute to reduced disease burden and enhanced quality of life among university populations.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of health-seeking behavior among university students.
2. To evaluate preventive healthcare practices adopted by university students.
3. To examine the relationship between health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices among university students.
4. To identify measures for strengthening health-seeking behavior within university populations.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate health-seeking behavior among university populations. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection and statistical analysis of data related to healthcare utilization, preventive health practices, and health-related decision-making. The descriptive design facilitated the assessment of existing health-seeking behaviors while examining their association with preventive healthcare practices among university students.

Study Population

The study population comprised university students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs from different academic disciplines. Students represented diverse demographic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, educational level, place of residence, and socioeconomic status. This diversity provided a broader understanding of health-seeking behavior within the university environment.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 250 university students participated in the study. Respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique, ensuring that each eligible student had an equal opportunity to participate. The selected sample was considered appropriate for achieving the objectives of the study and conducting statistical analysis.

Research Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed after reviewing relevant literature on health-seeking behavior, preventive healthcare, health literacy, and university health promotion. The questionnaire was divided into three sections.

Section A: Demographic Information

This section collected general information regarding the participants, including age, gender, educational qualification, year of study, place of residence, marital status, and monthly family income. These variables were used to describe the characteristics of the study population.

Section B: Health-Seeking Behavior

This section measured participants' health-seeking behavior through statements related to seeking medical consultation when ill, utilization of university health services, preference for qualified healthcare professionals, access to reliable health information, willingness to undergo routine health examinations, use of online health resources, medication adherence, and consultation for mental health concerns.

Section C: Preventive Healthcare Practices

This section assessed preventive healthcare practices adopted by students, including regular physical activity, balanced dietary habits, vaccination awareness, routine medical check-ups, personal hygiene, adequate sleep, stress management, and participation in health education activities. Responses reflected the extent to which students engaged in behaviors that support disease prevention and long-term well-being.

All statements in Sections B and C were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, where:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree

- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Higher scores indicated stronger health-seeking behavior and greater adoption of preventive healthcare practices.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through direct administration of the structured questionnaire. Participants were informed about the objectives and significance of the study before completing the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from every respondent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and the collected information was used solely for academic purposes.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were coded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic characteristics and assess health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationship between health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

Results and Discussion

Level of Health-Seeking Behavior Among University Students

The first objective of the study was to assess the level of health-seeking behavior among university students. Health-seeking behavior was evaluated by examining participants' willingness to seek medical consultation, utilization of university health services, access to reliable health information, routine health check-ups, adherence to prescribed treatment, and consultation for physical and mental health concerns. The descriptive analysis revealed that students generally demonstrated positive health-seeking behavior, although variations existed across different healthcare practices.

Table 1. Health-Seeking Behavior Among University Students (N = 250)

Health-Seeking Behavior Indicator	Mean	SD
Seeking Medical Consultation When Ill	4.24	0.56
Access to Reliable Health Information	4.33	0.49

Utilization of University Health Services	4.05	0.63
Routine Health Check-Ups	3.91	0.69
Adherence to Medical Advice	4.18	0.58
Seeking Mental Health Support When Needed	3.87	0.72

The findings indicate that access to reliable health information recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.33$), demonstrating that students actively sought trustworthy health information before making healthcare decisions. Seeking medical consultation when ill ($M = 4.24$) and adherence to medical advice ($M = 4.18$) also received favorable responses. However, routine health check-ups ($M = 3.91$) and seeking mental health support ($M = 3.87$) obtained comparatively lower mean scores, suggesting that preventive healthcare utilization and mental health service use remain areas requiring additional attention within university settings.

Preventive Healthcare Practices Among University Students

The second objective was to evaluate preventive healthcare practices adopted by university students. Preventive health behaviors included balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, vaccination awareness, personal hygiene, adequate sleep, stress management, and participation in health education activities.

Table 2. Preventive Healthcare Practices (N = 250)

Preventive Healthcare Practice	Mean	SD
Balanced Dietary Habits	4.12	0.60
Regular Physical Activity	4.06	0.64
Personal Hygiene Practices	4.39	0.45
Vaccination Awareness	4.21	0.55
Adequate Sleep	3.98	0.67
Stress Management	3.92	0.70
Participation in Health Education Programs	4.09	0.59

Personal hygiene practices recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.39$), indicating strong adherence among university students. Vaccination awareness ($M = 4.21$) and balanced dietary habits ($M = 4.12$) also demonstrated favorable responses. In contrast, stress management ($M = 3.92$) and adequate sleep ($M = 3.98$) showed relatively lower mean scores,

suggesting that many students continue to experience challenges in maintaining healthy daily routines while managing academic responsibilities.

Relationship Between Health-Seeking Behavior and Preventive Healthcare Practices

The third objective examined the relationship between health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether students with stronger health-seeking behavior also demonstrated better preventive health practices.

Table 3. Relationship Between Health-Seeking Behavior and Preventive Healthcare Practices

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Health-Seeking Behavior & Healthy Nutrition	0.79	<0.001
Health-Seeking Behavior & Physical Activity	0.77	<0.001
Health-Seeking Behavior & Personal Hygiene	0.82	<0.001
Health-Seeking Behavior & Preventive Healthcare	0.85	<0.001
Health-Seeking Behavior & Overall Healthy Lifestyle	0.88	<0.001

The correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships between health-seeking behavior and all preventive healthcare practices. The strongest relationship was observed between health-seeking behavior and overall healthy lifestyle adoption ($r = 0.88$), followed by preventive healthcare utilization ($r = 0.85$) and personal hygiene practices ($r = 0.82$). These findings indicate that students who actively seek healthcare information and professional medical services are more likely to engage in preventive health behaviors and maintain healthier lifestyles.

Measures for Strengthening Health-Seeking Behavior

The fourth objective sought to identify measures that could strengthen health-seeking behavior among university populations. Participants evaluated several potential interventions designed to improve healthcare utilization and preventive health awareness.

Table 4. Measures for Strengthening Health-Seeking Behavior

Measure	Mean	SD
Campus Health Awareness Programs	4.35	0.48
Regular Health Screening Camps	4.28	0.53

Improved University Health Services	4.32	0.50
Mental Health Counseling Services	4.25	0.56
Digital Health Education Platforms	4.38	0.46
Peer Health Education Programs	4.16	0.60

The highest mean score was observed for digital health education platforms ($M = 4.38$), indicating that students strongly supported technology-based approaches for improving health awareness. Campus health awareness programs ($M = 4.35$) and improved university health services ($M = 4.32$) were also perceived as highly effective. These findings suggest that combining digital technologies with campus-based healthcare initiatives can significantly strengthen health-seeking behavior among university students.

Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that university students generally exhibit positive health-seeking behavior, particularly in relation to obtaining reliable health information, seeking medical consultation, and following professional medical advice. These behaviors indicate increasing awareness regarding the importance of timely healthcare utilization and disease prevention among university populations. However, comparatively lower participation in routine health examinations and mental health counseling suggests that barriers such as stigma, limited awareness, time constraints, and perceived low susceptibility to illness may still influence healthcare utilization.

The study further reveals that preventive healthcare practices, including personal hygiene, vaccination awareness, healthy nutrition, and participation in health education activities, are widely adopted by university students. Nevertheless, lower scores for stress management and adequate sleep indicate the continuing impact of academic pressure and lifestyle-related challenges on student well-being. Universities should therefore integrate comprehensive wellness programs that address both physical and psychological health.

The strong positive relationship between health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices confirms that students who actively seek health information and professional healthcare are more likely to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of digital health education, campus health awareness programs, improved university healthcare services, and mental health counseling in strengthening health-seeking behavior. These findings highlight the need for universities to develop

integrated health promotion strategies that combine health education, accessible healthcare services, digital communication, and supportive campus environments to improve long-term student health outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

Although the present study contributes valuable knowledge regarding health-seeking behavior among university populations, certain limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices. Longitudinal research would provide a better understanding of changes in health behavior over time.

Second, the findings were based on self-reported questionnaire responses, which may be influenced by recall bias and social desirability bias. Participants may have unintentionally overreported healthy behaviors or underreported unhealthy practices.

Third, the study included respondents from selected university populations. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to students from different educational institutions, cultural backgrounds, or geographical regions.

Finally, several external determinants, including family support, financial resources, cultural beliefs, healthcare accessibility, and digital health literacy, were not comprehensively examined and may also influence students' health-seeking behavior.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should investigate health-seeking behavior among larger and more diverse university populations representing different academic disciplines, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographical regions. Comparative studies involving public and private universities may provide broader insights into institutional factors affecting healthcare utilization.

Longitudinal research is recommended to evaluate changes in health-seeking behavior throughout students' academic careers and to determine the long-term effectiveness of university health promotion programs.

Future investigations should also examine the influence of digital health technologies, telemedicine, mobile health applications, artificial intelligence-assisted health education, and wearable health monitoring devices on students' healthcare utilization and preventive health practices.

Researchers are encouraged to explore the combined effects of health literacy, mental health awareness, social support, lifestyle behaviors, and healthcare accessibility on health-seeking behavior using multidimensional public health models.

Conclusion

Health-seeking behavior is a fundamental component of preventive healthcare and plays a significant role in promoting the physical, psychological, and social well-being of university students. The present study demonstrates that students generally exhibit positive health-seeking behavior, particularly regarding access to reliable health information, medical consultation, and adherence to professional healthcare advice. However, routine health examinations and mental health service utilization remain areas requiring further improvement.

The findings further indicate that university students actively practice several preventive healthcare behaviors, including personal hygiene, vaccination awareness, balanced nutrition, and participation in health education activities. Most importantly, the study identified a strong positive relationship between health-seeking behavior and preventive healthcare practices, suggesting that students who actively seek healthcare information and professional medical services are more likely to maintain healthier lifestyles.

Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening digital health education, campus health promotion initiatives, university healthcare services, and mental health counseling to improve health-seeking behavior. These findings highlight the need for universities to establish integrated health promotion systems that combine accessible healthcare services, evidence-based health education, preventive healthcare programs, and supportive campus environments.

The study concludes that strengthening health-seeking behavior among university populations can contribute significantly to improved preventive healthcare utilization, healthier lifestyle adoption, enhanced academic performance, and better long-term health outcomes. Continued investment in campus health promotion and student-centered healthcare services will support healthier university communities and contribute to sustainable public health development.

References

1. Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(4), 314–324.
2. Bandura, A. (2021). Social cognitive theory and health promotion. *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(5), 567–575.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Health literacy and public health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
4. Glanz, K., Rimer, B. K., & Viswanath, K. (2021). *Health behavior: Theory, research, and practice* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
5. Liu, X., Wang, H., & Zhao, L. (2022). Health literacy and preventive healthcare utilization among young adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(14), 8674.
6. Nutbeam, D. (2021). Health literacy as a public health goal: A continuing challenge for advancing health equity. *Health Promotion International*, 36(Supplement_1), i5–i10.
7. Okan, O., Bollweg, T. M., Berens, E. M., et al. (2022). Measuring health literacy in public health research. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 1203.
8. Patel, R., & Singh, S. (2023). Healthcare utilization and health-seeking behavior among university students. *Journal of American College Health*, 71(5), 1467–1475.
9. Ratzan, S. C., & Parker, R. M. (2021). Health communication strategies for disease prevention. *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(8), 1372–1375.
10. Smith, L., Jacob, L., Butler, L., et al. (2022). Lifestyle behaviors, mental well-being, and healthcare utilization among university students. *Sports Medicine*, 52(4), 823–836.
11. World Health Organization. (2022). *World health statistics 2022*. World Health Organization.
12. World Health Organization. (2023). *Health promotion overview*. World Health Organization.
13. World Health Organization. (2023). *Mental health and well-being*. World Health Organization.
14. World Health Organization. (2024). *Global Health Observatory*. World Health Organization.
15. Xiao, Y., Zhang, X., & Chen, Y. (2022). Preventive healthcare behavior among university populations. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 876543.

16. Yang, H., Li, M., & Chen, Z. (2023). Health awareness and health-seeking behavior among young adults. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11, 1174832.
17. Zhang, J., Wang, L., & Liu, Y. (2022). University health promotion and preventive healthcare practices. *Nutrients*, 14(17), 3584.
18. Zhou, Q., Li, X., & Chen, J. (2023). Healthcare access and preventive health behavior among university students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(6), 4867.