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## College Student Perceptions of Mental Health Counseling at Minnesota State University, Mankato

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## College Student Perceptions of Mental Health Counseling at Minnesota State University, Mankato

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### Purpose

The Counseling Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato offers mental health counseling services to MNSU students that are free, confidential, and conveniently located on campus. Despite the range of services, the affordability and confidentiality, as well as current marketing strategies used by the Counseling Center, services appear to be significantly underutilized by students on campus. This study examines student perceptions of on campus mental health services and barriers that may prevent students from accessing services. The goal of the project is to assist the Counseling Center in improving their marketing strategies to students identified as being underserved.

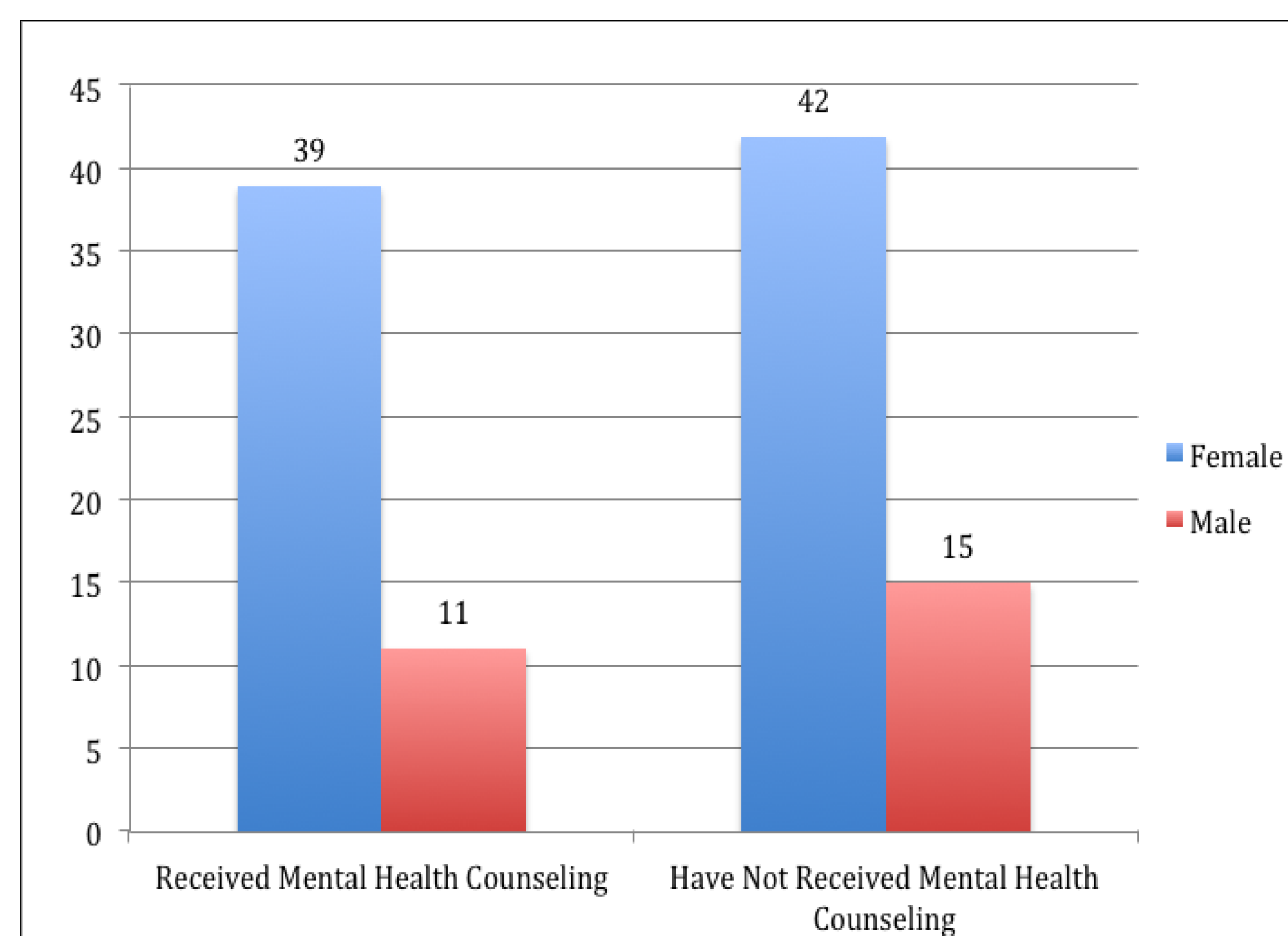
### Background

- Mental disorders are common in the United States, with estimates that as many as 1 in 4 adults suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year. <sup>1</sup>
- Mental illness is as prevalent in college students as in their non-college attending peers. <sup>2</sup>
- The typical onset of lifetime mental health disorders occurs during the ages of 18-24. <sup>3</sup>
- Untreated mental health disorders can result in substance use, poor class attendance, failure to graduate and suicide. <sup>4</sup>
- Identified barriers include stigma, treatment fears, or doubts about the effectiveness of treatment. <sup>5</sup>

### Methodology

An online survey was used to measure undergraduate student perceptions of mental health services among 111 randomly selected study participants at the university. The survey utilized the Beliefs About Psychological Services (BAPS) scale, which is designed to measure student levels of intent to use services, levels of stigma tolerance, and levels of belief in mental health counselors as experts. These variables were then analyzed in comparison with participant's gender and previous experience with mental health services. This project was approved by MNSU IRB [577003-3].

Figure 2.1 Survey Participants Who have Received Mental Health Counseling by Gender



### Key Findings

Findings show that while students overall had a favorable impression of mental health counseling, males had lower levels of stigma tolerance, were less likely to seek mental health services, and had a lower opinion of expertness. Female participants reported greater intent to use mental health services, a higher level of stigma tolerance, as well as greater belief in mental health counselors as experts. These findings are consistent with previous research studies regarding the differences in use of mental health services between genders.

### Implications

- Marketing materials to target male students
- Use of male role models or guest speakers to provide contact with males diagnosed with mental illness
- Use of virtual services for men who might otherwise resist seeking services due to concerns with stigma or confidentiality
- Education regarding symptoms of mental illness that are experienced by male students
- Advocacy campaigns that speak out against mental health stigma and challenge negative public perceptions

### References

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TABLE 1. Descriptive and Demographic Means Among Subscales (N=109)

Characteristic	Intent		Stigma Tolerance		Expertness	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	3.27***	1.34	4.16*	1.06	4.19*	1.21
Female	4.14	.99	4.70	.75	4.62	.89
<b>Rec'd MH Services</b>						
Yes	4.33***	1.14	4.76*	.81	4.66	1.02
No	3.56	.99	4.40	.91	4.35	.97
<b>MH Services to Close</b>						
Yes	4.12**	1.11	4.68	.90	4.63*	1.04
No	3.36	1.04	4.45	.84	4.10	.95

Note. Higher means refer to a more positive attitude (1=strongly disagree; 6=strongly agree); \* = p < .05, \*\* = p < .01, and \*\*\* = p < .001 based on independent samples t-test.