

College Students' Attitudes Towards Mental Health and Potential Barriers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore college students' attitudes towards mental health. The study also considered potential institutional and interpersonal barriers among students in seeking mental health support. There were a total of 137 Santa Fe College (SFC) students who completed our survey. The results indicated that students feel the most comfortable seeking mental health support from their friends in comparison to other support systems. Results also indicated that a lack of financial resources and awareness of available resources were primary barriers preventing students from seeking support.

Introduction

Attitudes towards mental health can be indicative of the level of support college students seek. Identifying present barriers is crucial to ensure students seek support when needed.

Previous Studies

- Most late adolescents prefer informal care through their social convoy over seeking professional help (Braithwaite, V. A. et al., 1994).
- People most likely to seek help are those who observed it from others and have an availability of social support (Halgin, R. P. et al., 1987).
- Many self-restrict themselves from receiving the care they need due to self-stigmatization and societal influence (Lannin, D. G. et al., 2016).
- Overall trends indicate increased utilization of mental health services by college students (Lipson, S. K., et al., 2019).

Purpose and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study was to: **1)** measure attitudes towards mental health and determine who students seek support from and **2)** identify potential barriers that may be preventing students from seeking support.

Methods

Procedure: SFC students completed an online survey which consisted of 21 items and remained open for two weeks. The survey items asked about demographics, attitudes towards mental health, who students felt comfortable seeking support from, barriers to seeking help and knowledge of counseling resources available at SFC. Some items were based on the SSOSH and the ATSPPHS scales (Vogel, D.L., et al., 2006 and Vogel, D.L., et al., 2007). Students were recruited both on campus and through social media platforms; professors and student clubs also assisted in promoting the survey.

Demographics: A total of 137 SFC students completed the survey (82 females, 45 males, and 10 individuals who identified as another gender). Most of the sample identified as Caucasian (58 participants; 42.6%) or Latino/Hispanic (35; 25.7%). 32.8% of the participants identified as first-generation students. Most of the participants had been attending SFC for less than one year (50.4%) or were sophomores (25.5%).

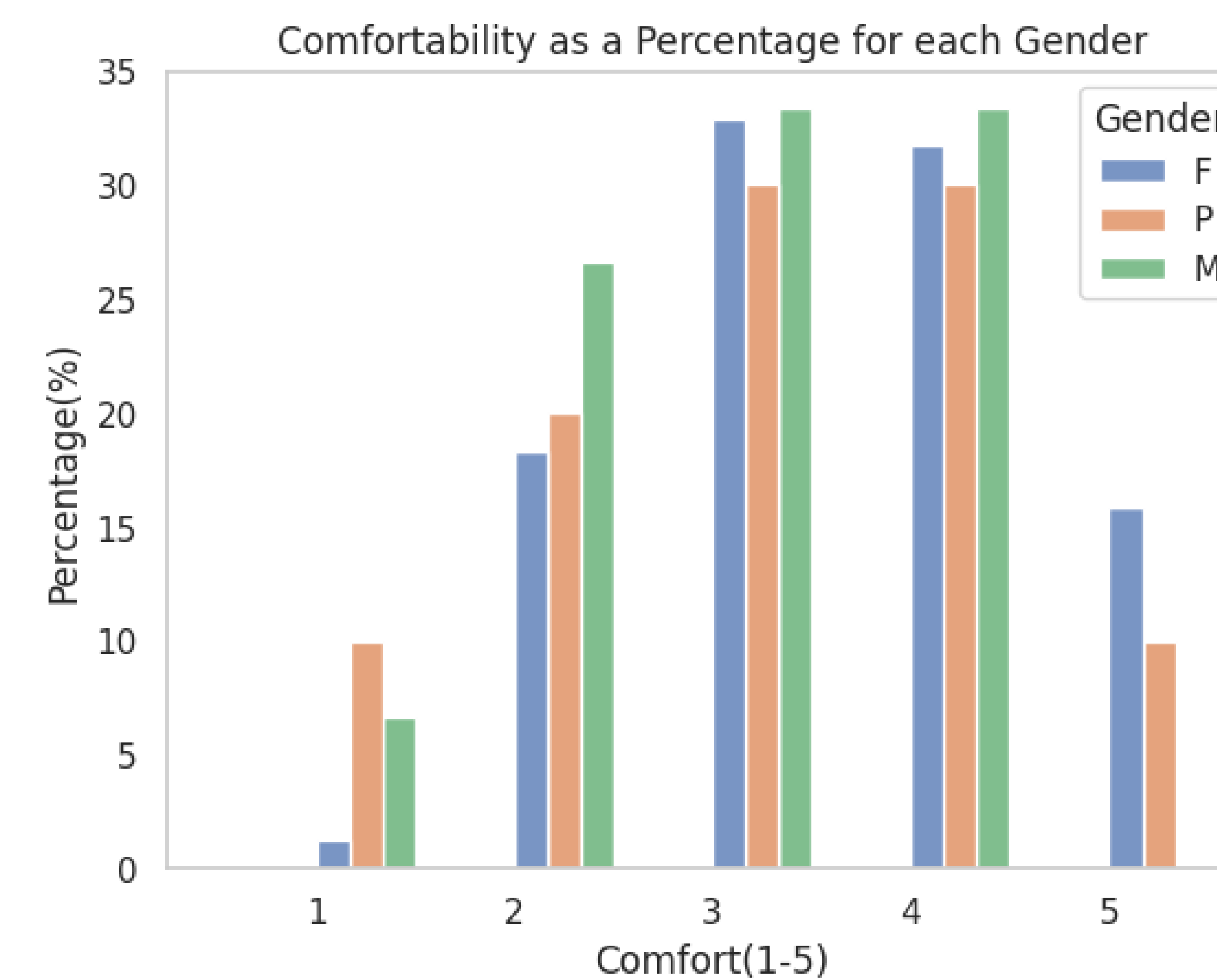
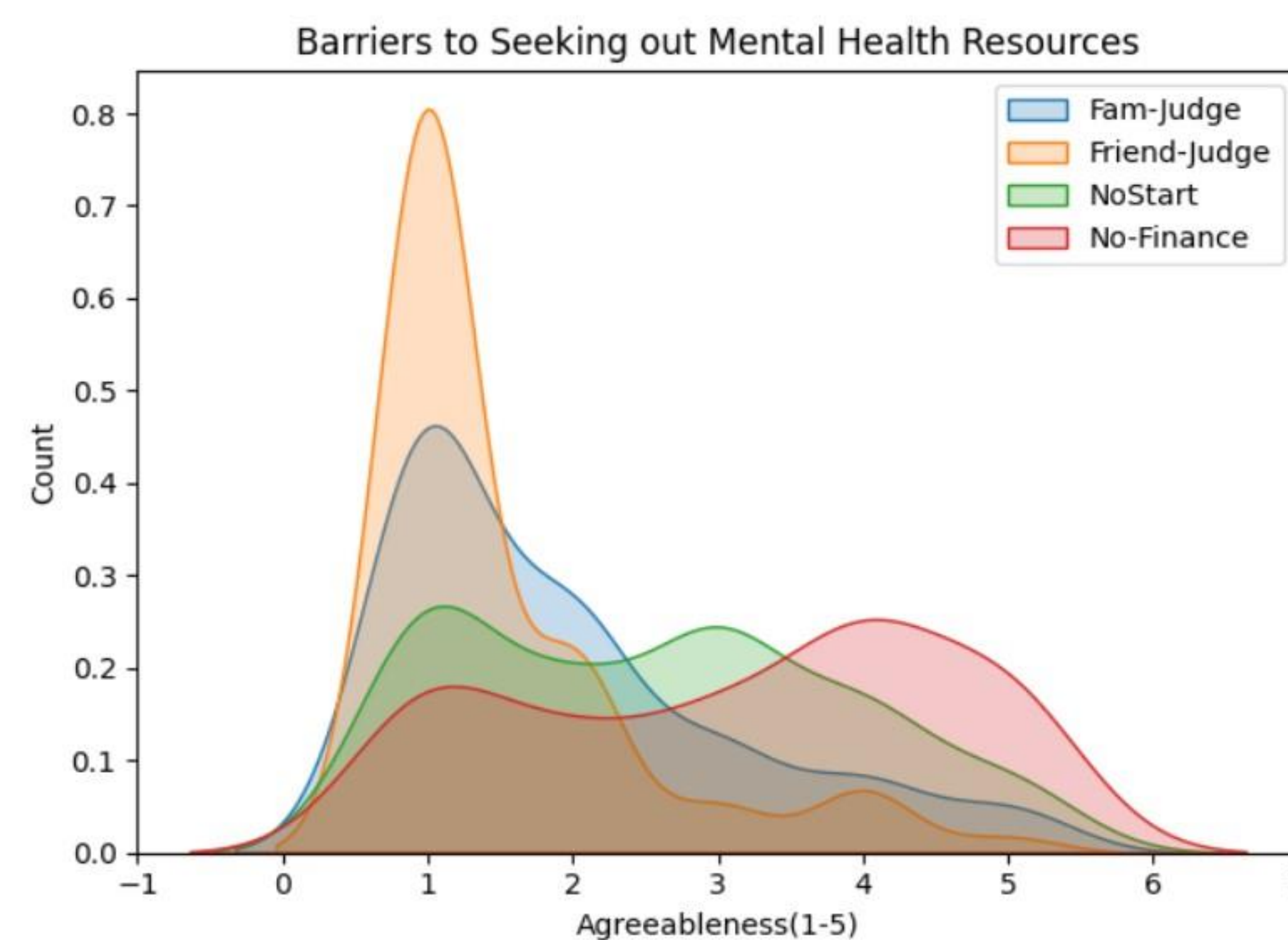
Results

Who do Students Seek Support From

- Students are most comfortable talking to their **friends** about their mental health (75.9% agree/strongly agree).
- When students were asked if they felt comfortable seeking support from a **family member**, the data was almost evenly distributed (25.5% disagreed, 24.1% felt neutral, and 20.4% agreed).
- Only 49.7% of students felt comfortable seeking mental help from a **counselor**.
- Most students (67.1% disagree/strongly disagree) do not feel comfortable seeking support from a **pastor/religious leader**.
- Most students indicated that they'd prefer **in person therapy** (71.6% agree/strongly agree) versus **virtual therapy** (25% agree/strongly agree).

Potential Barriers

- When asked if finances were of concern in seeking help, 21.5% of students selected strongly disagree and 21.5% of students selected strongly agree; however, most students seem to agree (27.4%).
- About 27% of our sample does not acknowledge the SFC Counseling Center as an option.



Discussion

Significance/Application

- There is evidence from this study that students are becoming more comfortable with seeking mental health support. Students are most comfortable seeking support from their friends (75.9%). Since this is their primary support system, colleges could look to promote connectedness among students through promotion of student life activities, social organizations and clubs. Some students are unable to identify where to receive help and some students lack the financial resources to seek professional help. This is something SFC and other colleges could look to address by ensuring students are aware of the free, confidential counseling resources available on their campuses.

Limitations/Future Directions

- A limitation in this study was the small sample size. Future studies could extend the survey time period to gain a larger sample. Our population demographics largely consisted of Caucasian students. Future studies could look to further analyze specific ethnic groups and determine if some are more inclined to seek support or carry a greater stigma due to cultural differences. Given the findings about counseling formats (in-person vs virtual), it may be interesting to explore reasons for such preferences.

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