ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Sometimes a Cigar Is Just a Cigar: Perceptions of Counseling
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ABSTRACT: People can have a negative attitude toward psychological counseling. Counseling is an important tool to not only the general public, but for the well-being of college undergraduates who are challenged with adapting to a new environment. This study looked at why there is a negative perception of counseling and explored ways to encourage people to seek counseling. We also looked at the perception of effectiveness and other ways students deal with their problems. Our participants included 39 undergraduate students. It was a convenient sample during the dinner rush of the campus cafeteria. Our survey addressed the effectiveness of counseling, the effectiveness of students' alternatives, and their general attitude about counseling. We found that students tend to use exercise, talking to friends and family, drug or alcohol usage, and meditation as alternatives to seeking counseling. Findings show that the attitude and perceived effectiveness of counseling is higher for students who have been required to go for a behavioral assessment than those who have voluntarily sought out counseling. Those who have never been to counseling had the lowest attitude and effectiveness towards counseling. Research also suggests that there is a correlation between students who knew about their free counseling sessions provided by our institution and those who actually had used their free sessions, suggesting that if students are informed about the counseling center they are more likely to use it. Some of the recommendations from students included more awareness, more encouragement, helping to normalize the idea of counseling, and an interest in group counseling. Results also showed that 32 out of 36 students reported that they would not feel embarrassed if their friends knew that they were seeking counseling. These findings lead us to believe that there may not necessarily be a stigma and perhaps the biggest hurdle is the initial contact with counseling.