

Original Paper

Development of an Image Scale for Support Agencies

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Abstract

In this study, we developed a scale to measure university students' perceptions and understanding of accessible counseling services (e.g., student counseling offices) and specialized child welfare agencies (e.g., child guidance centers). A total of 98 female Japanese university students participated. The results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed a two-factor model consisting of "trust and acceptance" and "resistance". The first factor, "trust and acceptance", includes items such as "A place I can trust" and "A place that accepts me". In contrast, the second factor, "resistance", includes items such as "A place that is hard to walk into" and "A place where I feel there is a psychological barrier to visiting". This scale is expected to be a valuable tool for assessing perceptions and understanding of specialized child welfare and counseling agencies in future research and practice.

Keywords

counseling agencies, image, scale, university students

1. Introduction

In recent years, reports of child abuse have been a persistent issue, with the number of cases increasing annually in Japan. In 2024, the number of children reported to child guidance centers by the police due to suspected abuse or other protective concerns reached 122,378, remaining at an alarmingly high level. Concurrently, mental health issues among children and young people are becoming increasingly severe. Regarding student counseling, a 2023 survey by the Japan Student Services Organization highlighted a critical challenge: when asked about the most pressing future issues for student counseling services, the highest percentage of responses—87.4% across all universities—cited "dealing with students who are struggling but do not actively seek counseling".

In the field of clinical psychology, when individuals face problems they cannot resolve independently, seeking assistance from others is viewed through the lens of help-seeking orientation (Nagai, 2010).

Research on university students' perceptions of student counseling services indicates that help-seeking attitudes are significantly influenced by perceived benefits, apprehension or avoidance, and existing knowledge. Among these factors, the positive influence of perceived benefits is particularly robust, suggesting that a positive image and adequate knowledge facilitate help-seeking behavior, whereas a negative image hinders it (Yoshida, 2013).

However, while substantial research has focused on students' perceptions of campus-based student counseling services, few studies have examined their perceptions of specialized external child welfare agencies, such as child guidance centers. Possessing accurate knowledge about these specialized agencies is believed to lower the psychological barrier to seeking assistance when students require support.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: to develop a scale to measure perceptions and understanding of both accessible counseling services (e.g., student counseling offices) and specialized child welfare agencies (e.g., child guidance centers), and to investigate university students' latent perceptions of these institutions. Through this investigation, we aim to deepen our understanding of university students' knowledge regarding support services and to address the administrative and psychological challenges involved in fostering a willingness to seek assistance from specialized agencies.

2. Method

2.1 Item Generation

We initially conducted a preliminary survey with 10 female university students, asking them to freely list their images and perceptions of student counseling offices and specialized child welfare agencies. Based on their open-ended responses, an initial pool of items was generated.

2.2 Participants

The main study sampled a total of 98 female Japanese university students.

2.3 Procedure

The preliminary version of the Image Scale for Counseling Agencies consisted of 20 items selected from the initial pool. The 98 participants rated each item on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). To examine the scale's internal structure, we conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Subsequently, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to verify model fit, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess internal consistency and reliability.

3. Results

Based on the EFA, a two-factor model consisting of "trust and acceptance" and "resistance" demonstrated the best fit. Factor loadings ranged from -0.383 to 0.885 for trust and acceptance, and from 0.392 to 0.957 for resistance (Table 1). For the final scale construction, we selected five optimal

items with high factor loadings for each subscale.

The CFA indicated acceptable model fit indices: CFI = 0.955 and RMSEA = 0.088. All path coefficients for the selected items were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Cronbach's alpha coefficients demonstrated high reliability for both subscales, yielding 0.91 for trust and acceptance and 0.83 for resistance. Figure 1 illustrates the final CFA model with standardized estimates.

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Image Scale for Counseling Agencies

	F1	F2
F1: Trust and acceptance		
8 A place I can trust	0.885	0.007
6 A place that accepts me	0.822	-0.003
2 A place I can rely on	0.816	0.002
3 A place where I can get help	0.803	0.109
4 A place that provides peace of mind in case something happens	0.793	0.047
7 A place where I won't be judged	0.776	0.03
5 A place where I can open up about myself	0.77	0.044
9 A place where my secrets are kept safe	0.594	-0.035
10 A place where I can get suggestions for solving problems	0.535	-0.036
11 A place where I can receive professional support	0.509	0.119
12 A place where I can receive comprehensive support	0.418	0.037
1 A place where I can easily consult about even small matters	0.387	-0.233
18 A place I cannot trust	-0.383	0.094
F2: Resistance		
16 A place that are hard to walk into	0.086	0.957
15 A place where I feel there's a psychological barrier to visiting	0.032	0.916
14 A place where it's hard to consult with someone casually	-0.19	0.628
17 A place where I go to discuss serious issues	0.232	0.561
20 A place where I don't want others to know I'm going	0.033	0.538
13 A place where I'm not sure what they do	-0.11	0.493
19 A place that are hard to access, such as those that are physically far away	0.002	0.392
F1		-0.181

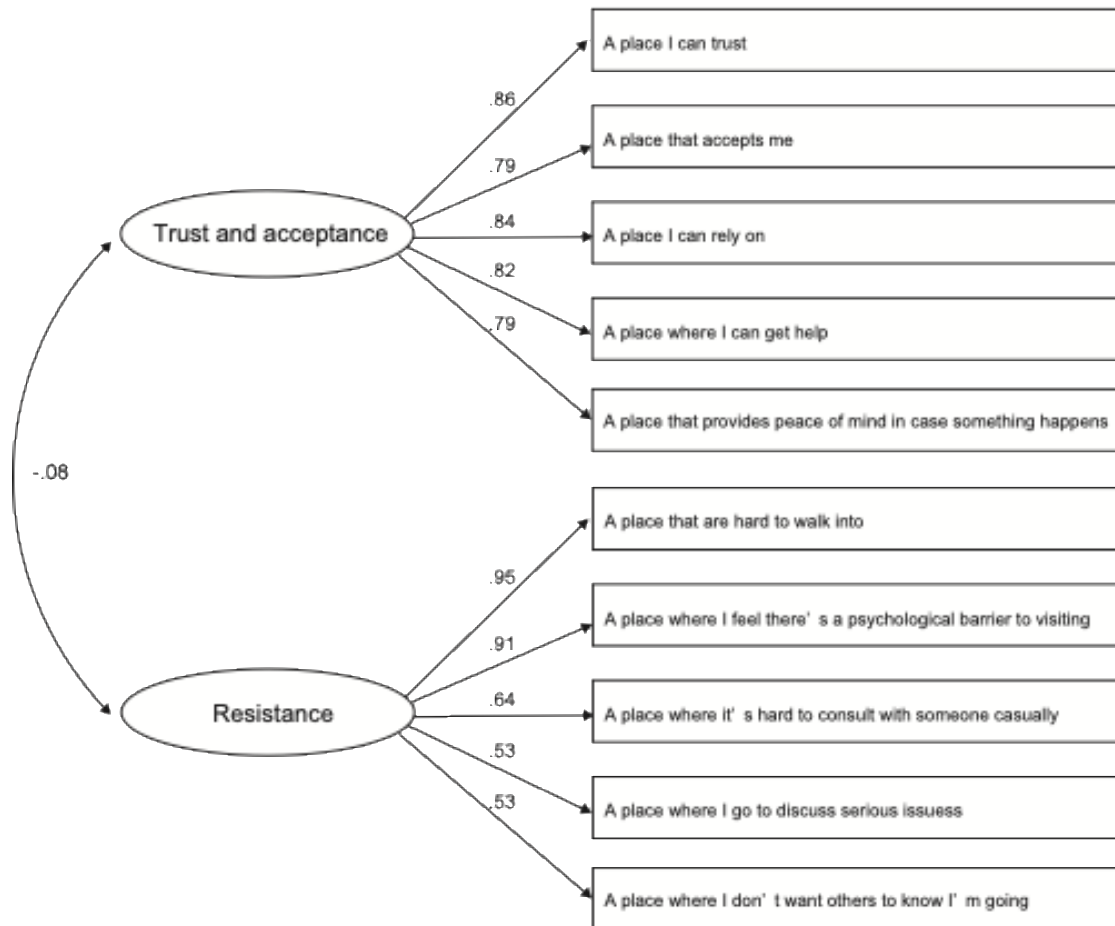


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for the Image Scale for Counseling Agencies

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we developed a scale to measure university students' perceptions and understanding of accessible counseling services and specialized child welfare agencies. The items were derived from qualitative, open-ended responses obtained in a preliminary survey regarding student counseling offices and child guidance centers.

The factor analysis confirmed the validity of a two-factor structure comprising "Trust and Acceptance" and "Resistance". The high Cronbach's alpha coefficients and adequate model fit indices indicate that this scale is a reliable and valid tool for evaluating how university students perceive and understand these vital support systems.

House (1981) conceptualized social support as an interpersonal interaction involving one or more of the following components: (1) emotional support, (2) instrumental support, (3) informational support, and (4) evaluative support. Among these, emotional support addresses the affective dimensions—such as validating a person's pain or joy—and solidifies reassurance. Our findings suggest that university students perceive specialized institutions primarily as domains offering emotional support and

psychological stability. Because the psychological experience of being understood and accepted directly fosters systemic trust, the factor of “trust and acceptance” was robustly identified.

Regarding the second factor, “resistance”, items such as “places that are hard to approach” and “places where I feel there is a high psychological barrier to visiting” emerged prominently. This implies that university students still experience a steep threshold for entering counseling environments. This resistance may stem from the unfamiliarity of clinical settings, which induces anxiety about self-disclosure to professionals with whom students have no prior relational connection in daily life. Additionally, students may harbor latent doubts about whether these professionals will genuinely comprehend their unique vulnerabilities. Furthermore, cultural and structural factors in Japan—such as limited public exposure to mental health resources in daily life—compound the perception that these services are socially isolated. To bridge this gap, it is imperative to widely publicize the pragmatic roles and welcoming nature of specialized agencies, ensuring that individuals facing crises are seamlessly connected to appropriate networks.

In conclusion, perceptions of counseling agencies may fluctuate depending on the specific mandate of the institution, the demographics of the target users, and the modality of support provided. Future research should explore nuanced differences in student perceptions across various types of welfare and counseling agencies to further refine outreach strategies.

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