A Further Examination Of Financial Help-Seeking Behavior

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This study examines the factors associated with the choice of seeking help from a financial professional or non-professional. It was found, using data from a sample of faculty and staff, that those who sought help from professional sources tended to have higher levels of financial risk tolerance and exhibit better financial behaviors. To a lesser extent, being a homeowner and having a high level of financial satisfaction were also associated with seeking the help of financial professionals. The results presented in this paper are conditional on those who decided to seek financial help before they choose an alternative help source.

Key words: *Help-Seeking, Financial planners, Financial counseling, Help-seeking framework*

Introduction

Miller and Montalto (2001) succinctly summarized the state of personal finance help-seeking research when they concluded that "little previous research has examined the characteristics of people who use professional sources of help" (p. 2). This paucity of research devoted to understanding the help-seeking behaviors of individuals in relation to personal finance issues, problems, and questions is somewhat surprising considering the great strides similar research has made in academic and professional disciplines outside the domain of the financial counseling and planning profession. The literature that does exist continues to be limited almost exclusively to assessing the decision to seek help or not to seek help (Aniol & Snyder, 1997; King, 1997). Not enough is currently known about what motivates a person's decision to seek help or advice (Kerkmann, 1998), and even less is known about the factors that influence an individual's decision to seek and use help from a professional financial advisor (e.g., financial counselor, financial planner, insurance agent, stock broker) compared to a non-professional source (e.g., family or friend).

A previous study published in this Journal attempted to address some of these issues by presenting a framework for explaining personal finance help-seeking behavior. Grable and Joo (1999) used the framework to examine a set of demographic and socioeconomic factors that could be used to ascertain general personal finance help-seeking behaviors. The results of their study indicated that significant demographic and socioeconomic differences between personal finance help-seekers and non-help-seekers existed. They concluded that patterns of help-seeking behaviors for personal finance issues were similar to help-seeking patterns found in the psychological, psychiatric, medical, and sociological literature.

A shortcoming associated with the methodology used by Grable and Joo (1999) involved distinctions between help-seeking providers. The focus of their research was on the simple decision to either seek or not to seek help. The issue of whom or what kind of help a person sought was not addressed. This means that an important question remained unanswered, namely, were there demographic and socioeconomic differences between those who seek help from professionals versus those who seek help from non-professionals? This question is an important topic of interest. For example, some individuals may seek the help of a professional, while others may seek the help of family, friends, and work colleagues. Unfortunately, little is currently known about the factors that influence a person's choice of a personal finance help provider (Miller & Montalto, 2001).

The purpose of this research was to examine the factors associated with the choice of seeking help from a financial professional or non-professional. This paper provides a further examination of the help-seeking framework presented by Grable and Joo (1999). The research presented here builds upon the help-seeking framework by utilizing (a) a replication of the variables used in the Grable and Joo analysis, (b) the addition of new explanatory variables, and (c) a different sample frame. The research presented in this paper expands the working body of knowledge of financial counselors and planners by specifically describing who is more likely to seek personal finance help from a professional or a non-professional source.

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Background Review

Help-seeking behavior, in general, is operationally defined as an action by an individual to seek and use assistance from a secondary source. There is a general consensus that help-seeking behavior is a proactive process (Kaskutas, Weisner & Caetano, 1997; Lee, 1997; Phillips & Murrell, 1994; Reidy & Von Korff, 1991; Smith, 1992; Varney, Rohsenow, Dey, Zwick & Monti, 1995). The literature suggests that help-seekers proactively define their problems, search for an individual (or other source) to help them, and attempt to implement help provided.

While the field of help-seeking research is not new, the adaptation of existing models in sociology, medicine, and psychiatric care to the discipline of personal finance is relatively unique. Most recently, Suchman's (1966) health care help-seeking decision-making process was used as the basis for a personal finance help-seeking framework. The process of the adapted framework is relatively straightforward. The process consists of the following five steps:

Step 1 - the exhibition of a personal financial behavior(s)
Step 2 - the evaluation of the financial behavior(s)
Step 3 - the identification of financial behavior(al) causes
Step 4 - a decision to seek help
Step 5 - a choice between help provider alternatives.

Outcomes at Steps 4 and 5 are acknowledged through feedback and possible adjustments back to Step 1, where the process begins again. A person's demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial characteristics may influence both the decision to seek help and the choice of help provider (Joo & Grable, 2001; Miller & Montalto, 2001).

An example of the help-seeking process may help clarify the relationships as described above. During the Step 1 of the process a person exhibits one or more financial behaviors. Financial behaviors may be either positive or negative. Examples of negative behaviors include over-drafting checks, missing credit payments, and not saving for anticipated needs. Positive behaviors include saving on a regular basis and eliminating credit card debt. Financial behaviors, both good and bad, tend to be influenced by demographic and socioeconomic factors (Longshore, Grill & Anglin, 1997).

The second step in the process involves an evaluation of behaviors. This often entails a subjective review of behaviors; however, some behaviors can be evaluated objectively. For example, assume that a person has missed a monthly credit card payment. One person may subjectively evaluate this behavior as seriously negative, while another may assess the behavior as not significant. This same behavior can be evaluated objectively through the use of financial ratios and standardized guidelines (Greninger, Hampton, Kitt & Jacquet, 2000).

At Step 3 a person identifies the cause or set of causes for their behaviors. Potential causes of missing a credit card payment may include overspending, reduction in income, loss of job, or a health problem. One should not assume that all causes are negative. Some causes are, in fact, positive or neutral. A cause may also be something as simple as a delay in the mail system.

Step 4 of the process involves a decision to seek help. This is "the critical decision point within the process" (Grable & Joo, 1999, p. 17) because this is the juncture at which a person decides to seek or not to seek help. Consider again the person who fails to make a monthly credit card payment. If this is a one-time event with no pattern of reoccurrence it is unlikely that a positive help-seeking decision will be made (one can argue that the need for seeking help for this one-time behavior does not warrant help). On the other hand, if the behavior is longstanding and repetitive, with the possibility of causing serious financial problems, the choice to seek help should be positive; however, the choice to seek help may also be, and often is, negative even for those with serious financial behavioral problems.

The research that has been conducted, to date, related to personal finance help-seeking behaviors has tended to focus on Step 4 of the help-seeking process. Findings reported in the literature suggest that age, homeownership, financial stressors, and financial behaviors are related to the decision to seek help (Grable & Joo, 1999). These type of demographic and socioeconomic factors are similar to client relationship factors described in the medical, psychological, psychiatric, and financial planning literature (Fischer & Farina, 1995; Lee, 1997).

While Step 4 of the process may be a critical decision point in the framework, Step 5 is of special interest to financial counseling and planning practitioners. Only those individuals who have made a positive choice to seek help arrive at Step five (others who opt to not seek help exit the process at Step 4.) At this step a person is compelled to make a choice between and among help providers. For instance, a person who has chosen to seek help (i.e., Step 4) may seek out the assistance of a professional financial counselor or planner, a family member, colleague, or some other source.

The literature related to Step 5 of the process is limited. Studies that have been published suggest that clear distinctions exist between those individuals who seek help from professionals versus those who seek help from non-professionals. King (1997) found that of those who do seek help women, Whites, and higher income individuals were more likely to seek help from a professional. Joo and Grable (2001) reported similar findings. They reported, in relation to Step 5 of the help-seeking framework process, that the following groups were more likely to seek help from financial professionals when making retirement investment decisions:

A. Those with more income,
B. Those who exhibited better financial behaviors,
C. Those with a more positive mental outlook,
D. Those with a higher risk tolerance, and
E. Women.

Miller and Montalto (2001) also found that the use of financial planners varies by a household's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. They found that education, income, net worth, and financial assets were positively associated with the comprehensive use of financial planners.

Findings reported by King (1997), Joo and Grable (2001), and Miller and Montalto (2001) were similar to conclusions published in finance trade publications and non-finance research journals. For example, Advisors On Top (2000), Hansard (2001), and O'Brien (2001) reported that higher income individuals were much more likely to seek the help of a professional for investment services than others, and that other factors, such as knowledge of finance issues, may play a role in shaping a person's decision to seek help from a professional advisor. In general, researchers such as Aniol and Snyder (1997) have suggested that the choice of help provider is most likely influenced by a multiple number of factors, including a person's demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial characteristics.

Research conducted in other social science disciplines suggests that some additional factors influence help-seeking behaviors. The consensus view suggests that psychosocial based factors might help to more fully explain the process of seeking help. Factors such as locus of control, self-esteem, and satisfaction have a long history of use in help-seeking studies in the medical, sociological, and psychological professions (Aniol & Snyder, 1997; Lee, 1997). These type of factors have not been used widely within the financial counseling and planning profession to explain help-seeking behaviors. This lack of use may be the result of large data sets lacking measures of these items, or this could be an indication of the formative stage of such research within the profession. Regardless though, previous research on this topic suggest that psychosocial constructs should be used as independent factors in help-seeking studies.

Method

The primary purpose of this research was to further examine and test Step 5 of the financial help-seeking framework as described in the review of literature. A replication of variables used by Grable and Joo (1999) was utilized in this study to help draw comparisons between Steps 4 and 5 of the framework. In addition to variable replication, additional explanatory factors and a different sample frame were utilized. The research question of interest was whether a set of independent variables, including demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial factors, could be used to differentiate those who sought help from a professional from those who sought help from a non-professional?

Sample

This study was conducted using data from a sample of faculty and staff from two large midwestern universities. A total of 1,000 employees were systematically selected, at random, from university directories. Survey was distributed twice, as suggested by Dillman (2000), through each campus' mail system. Of the original surveys distributed 478 were returned. Eighteen surveys were returned as nondeliverable and 54 were incomplete, leaving data from 406 potential respondents. This resulted in a sample response rate of 41.34% (406/982).

More than half of those who responded to the survey were women (55%). The average age of respondents was 43.20 years, with a standard deviation of 11.67 years. Respondents ranged in age from 20 years to 77 years. Approximately 63% of respondents were married, with the same percent holding a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. The average household income of respondents was approximately $52,500, while 73% indicated that they owned their own residence. The majority (86%) of respondents were White, with the remainder being primarily African-American or Hispanic. The average respondent was financially responsible for one or no children. The sample used in this study was comparable to that used by Grable and Joo (1999), and overall respondents tended to have slightly different socioeconomic characteristics compared to the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Specifically, this respondent sample tended to have, on average, higher earnings and higher levels of education than the average American.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for use in this study was based on a sequence of questions. The sequence began by asking respondents if "over the past 12 months have you sought information or advice about a personal finance question, problem, or issue?" This question was used to screen non-help-seekers from the research sample. In other words, this questions was used as a proxy for Step 4 in the help-seeking framework.

Each respondent that answered in the affirmative was classified as a help-seeker. This group of respondents was then asked a series of questions about the source, frequency, and usefulness of help sought. These inquiries were then followed by asking respondents to "indicate the one source of information or advice that you consider to be your primary help provider." Responses to this question were used to categorize respondents into one of two groups: Seekers of professional help and seekers of non-professional help. Those who indicated that their primary help provider was either a financial planner, financial counselor, insurance agent, or stockbroker were coded as 1; those who indicated that their primary help provider included either friends, family, or work colleagues were coded as 0.

The use of financial planners, financial counselors, insurance agents, and stockbrokers as the proxy for a professional help provider was based on two factors. First, the primary career function of these professionals involves the practice of providing personal finance advice and counsel (i.e., financial planning), and second, each of these professionals charge for their service(s), either in the form of a commission, fee-offset, hourly charge, percent of assets under management, or indirectly through third-party contracts. Other professionals, including attorneys, tax professionals, and CPAs, were excluded from the definition of professional in this study because, by definition, practitioners with these titles do not offer financial planning or counseling services as their primary form of assistance. Friends, relatives, and work colleagues were chosen as a proxy for the non-professional group because these sources of help typically do not charge for services and there generally is no explicit expectation of professional competence associated with these individuals.

As discussed above, this study was delimited to those respondents who indicated seeking help. The sample was further limited to those respondents who indicated having either a (a) financial planner, (b) financial counselor, (c) insurance agent, (d) stock broker, (e) friend, (f) family, or (g) work colleague as a primary help provider. Due to these restrictions and other data limitations (e.g., missing values) the final sample size for analysis included 136 respondents. Among the 136 respondents, 70 sought professional help.

The demographic profile of the delimited sample was similar to the larger survey respondent sample, however, a few differences are worth noting. For example, there were slightly fewer women in the delimited sample (52% and 55%, respectively). The average age of respondents in the delimited sample was slightly less than the age of all respondents (42.45 years and 43.20 years, respectively). The proportion of respondents who were married and holding a bachelor's degree or higher level of education was slightly higher in the delimited sample (64% and 63%, respectively). The most significant difference between the delimited and overall sample related to average household income. Household income in the delimited sample was approximately $55,865, while the average household income for all respondents was approximately $52,500. No differences were found in relation to ethnic/racial background, homeownership, or number of financial dependents. In general, demographic characteristics for the delimited sample were similar to samples used by others who have attempted to examine the factors associated with choosing a help provider (Joo & Grable, 2001).

Independent Variables

Each of the variables used by Grable and Joo (1999) were replicated in this study. In addition, two new psychosocial variables (i.e., financial satisfaction and self-esteem) were included in the analysis as suggested by other researchers (Aniol & Snyder, 1997; Lee, 1997). The following demographic and socioeconomic factors were used in this study: Age, education, gender, marital status, ethnic/racial background, number of financial dependents, homeownership, and household income. Age, number of dependents, and household income were measured at the interval level. Education, gender, marital status, ethnic/racial background, and homeownership status were dummy coded. Specifically, those who had more than a bachelor's degree level of education, were male, married, White/Caucasian, and homeowners were coded 1, otherwise 0.

Financial risk tolerance was measured using the five items shown in Table 1. Respondents were asked to choose the most appropriate response for their situation from those listed below: (a) strongly agree, (b) tend to agree, (c) tend to disagree, and (d) strongly disagree. Responses were coded as 1, 2, 3, or 4, respectively, and a summated score was generated for each respondent.

Table 1.
Financial Risk Tolerance Items

Item	Mean Score	SD
1.Investing is too difficult to understand.	1.2.66	.87
2.I am more comfortable putting my money in a bank account than in the stock market.	3.2.49	.94
4.When I think of the work "risk" the term "loss" comes to mind immediately.	5.2.34	.82
6.Making money in stocks and bonds is based on luck.	7.3.00	.68
8.In terms of investing, safety is more important than returns.	9.2.37	1..74

Risk tolerance scores ranged from 5 to 20. The average score for respondents was 12.86, with a standard deviation of 3.01. Higher scores were indicative of increased risk tolerance. The coefficient alpha for the summated scale was .80.

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Self-esteem was measured using 10 items originally developed by Rosenberg (1965). The items are shown in Table 2. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item using the following scale: (a) strongly disagree, (b) tend to disagree, (c) tend to agree, and (d) strongly agree. Responses were coded as 1, 2, 3, or 4, respectively. As was the case with financial risk tolerance, a summated score was generated for each respondent. Note that higher scores indicated a more positive respondent self-esteem. The possible range of self-esteem scores was 10 to 40 and the actual range of self-esteem for the respondents was 13 to 40. The average score for respondents was 33.89, with a standard deviation of 4.66. The coefficient alpha for the summated scale was .89.

Financial stressors used in this study were measured using a series of items that required respondents to check all of the events that occurred to them over the past year. Examples of stressor events included: (a) My income decreased; (b) I had an investment and/or business loss; (c) I had a vehicle accident that cost a lot of money; and (d) I filed for personal bankruptcy (for a complete list of financial stressors, see Joo, 1998). Items circled were coded as 1. Affirmative responses were then summed to create an index of financial stressors, with a higher score representing a higher number of financial stressors, and a lower score suggesting fewer financial stressors. From a total of 24-items, the mean score was 1.95 (range 0 to 24), with a standard deviation of 1.74.

Financial knowledge was measured using ten true and false questions (Table 3). These items were coded as correct (1) or incorrect (0) and summed to provide a financial knowledge score for each respondent. The mean and standard deviation scores for respondents to this summated quiz were 7.53 and 1.40, respectively, with a possible maximum score of 10.

Table 2.
Self-Esteem Items

Item	Mean Score	SD
4.At times I think I am no good at all.	1.3.22	.85
2.I take a positive attitude toward myself.	3.3.30	.64
4.I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.	5.3.47	.60
6.I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	7.3.56	.52
8.All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	9.3.72	.52
10.I certainly feel useless at times.	11.3.15	.82
12.I am able to do things as well as most other people.	13.3.40	.58
14.I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	15.3.56	.65
16.I wish I could have more respect for myself.	17.3.13	.88
18.On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	19.3.34	1..67

1.Items 1, 5, 6, 8, and 9 were reverse coded.
2.
3.

Table 3.
Financial Knowledge Assessment Items

Item	T/F*	Mean	SD
If you thought someone who loaned you money was not fair, you would ask the credit union for help.	F	.606	.490
A stock is an interest bearing security that pays interest at the discretion of a board of directors.	F	.579	.496
A mutual fund is an investment company that raises money from shareholders and invests in securities.	T	.794	.406
Over 20 years, you are more likely to make money than lose money in the stock market.	T	.924	.267
During times of inflation it is more expensive to borrow money.	T	.863	.345
Employees are responsible for all investment decisions within a 401(k)	T	.289	.455
Both employees and employers pay into Social Security.	T	.888	.317
Higher insurance deductibles lead to lower insurance costs.	T	.733	.443
The interest rate charged on major credit cards, like Visa, is set by the federal government.	F	.896	.306
you money was not fair, you would			
Interest paid on credit cards is tax-deductible.	F	.939	.240

*Answer = True or False

Respondents' satisfaction with their financial situation was measured using one item with 10 levels (1 being unsatisfied and 10 being the most satisfied), presented as an anchored stair step assessment. This item was similar to a measure originally used by Joo (1998) and Porter and Garman (1993). Previous research using this item indicated that, as a measure of financial satisfaction, distributions of responses can be expected to remain consistent and reliable (Porter & Garman). The mean score on the stair step assessment was 5.37, with a standard deviation of 2.25 and a median of 5.00.

Financial behaviors were measured using the eight items shown in Table 4. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item using the following scale: (a) never (b) sometimes, (c) usually, and (d) always. Responses were coded as 1, 2, 3, or 4, respectively. As was the case with financial risk tolerance and self-esteem, a summated score was generated for each respondent. Possible scores ranged from 8 to 32. The mean score for the summated scale was 24.24, with a standard deviation of 4.55. Higher scores indicated that a respondent was exhibiting better financial behaviors than a respondent with a lower score. The reliability coefficient for the scale was .74.

Table 4.Financial Behavior Items

Item	Mean	SD
4.I set money aside for savings.	1.2.76	1.06
2.I set money aside for retirement.	3.3.29	1.12
4.I had a plan to reach my financial goals.	5.2.56	1.01
6.I had a weekly or monthly budget that I followed.	7.2.28	1.00
8.I paid credit card bills in full and avoided finance charges.	9.2.67	1.19
10.I reached the maximum limit on a credit card.	11.3.57	.75
12.I spent more money than I earned.	13.3.36	.75
14.I used a credit card to get a cash advance.	15.3.73	1..56

Items 6, 7, and 8 were reverse coded.

Data Analysis

A discriminant analysis, using SPSS for Windows, was used as the data analysis method. Discriminant analysis is a form of regression that is designed to allow two or more independent variables to be used to place survey respondents into distinct categories (Vogt, 1993). A discriminant analysis is used whenever the dependent variable is measured categorically. In this case, the dependent variable was measured dichotomously (i.e., 1 = sought help from a professional and 0 = sought help from a non-professional). While other data analysis methods can also be used when the dependent variable is coded categorically (e.g., logistic regression), the discriminant analysis method was used in this study to maintain consistency with the approach employed by Grable and

Joo (1999). Huberty (1994) recommends the use of linear discriminant functions whenever a research question calls for describing differences between two groups. With-in group correlations are the preferred method to interpret constructs that underlie group differences. According to Vogt, a successful discriminant analysis enables researchers to predict group membership with some accuracy. Furthermore, a successful discriminant analysis allows one to "compare the relative importance of each of the predictor variables" (p. 71). In the case of this study, discriminant analysis was used to predict who would be more likely to seek the help of a professional and who would not.

Results

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for each of the independent variables corresponding to the two dependent variable groups. For dichotomous variables (e.g., gender), the mean is the proportion of cases with a value of one. For example, 54% of respondents who sought help from a professional were men, while only 43% of respondents who sought help from non-professionals were men. The total mean scores for the delimited sample are provided in column six of the table.

Data in Table 5 are useful in describing differences between the two dependent variable criterion groups. The data was used to conclude that those who sought the help of professional service providers (i.e., financial planners, financial counselors, insurance agents, or stock brokers) tended to be older, homeowners, and more risk tolerant. Data also indicated that those who sought help from professionals exhibited better financial behaviors. Those who sought professional help also had a greater level of financial satisfaction than others. While the data in Table 5 are useful in determining general characteristics of the delimited sample used in this study, the information is based on simple bivariate relationships. Data in Table 5 do not reveal the relative significance of the variables in determining a respondent's decision to seek professional help. This information can be found in Table 6.

Table 6 presents the standardized canonical discriminant function and corresponding discriminant coefficients for the variables. The coefficients can be interpreted as representing each independent variable's relative importance in describing the discriminant function. The canonical discriminant function was statistically significant ($p < .01$). The Wilks' lambda of the function was .77, with financial risk tolerance explaining, by far, the most variance in help-seeking behavior. This can be confirmed by judging the high relative coefficient associated with financial risk tolerance (.86).

Table 7 presents the with-in group structured coefficients. "The idea behind the use of structured coefficients is that the variables that share the most variation with a given linear discriminant function should define what attribute the linear discriminant function represents" (Huberty, p. 209). The results indicate, using a coefficient cut-off score of .35, that those who sought help from professional sources shared common financial risk tolerance, financial behavior, homeownership, and to a lesser extent, financial satisfaction and age characteristics. More specifically, those who sought the help of professionals, in this study,

Table 8 presents the classification results of the discriminant function. Overall, the model was able to accurately classify 69.10% of respondents into the correct category of help-seeking. This level of classification was better than by chance, suggesting an accurate level of discrimination between groups.

Table 5 Group Descriptive Statistics and Tests for Equality of Group Means Between Help-seeking Groups

Variable	Sought Professional Help		Sought Non-Professional Help		Total Help-seekers		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	Wilks' Lambda	F-Ratio
Age	44.61	12.58	39.69	12.74	42.45	.96	4.18*
Education (bachelors and higher =1)	.63	.48	.63	.49	.64	.99	.02
Gender (male = 1)	.54	.50	.43	.50	.48	.99	1.34
Marital Status (married = 1)	.66	.48	.63	.49	.64	.99	.30
Homeownership (homeowner = 1)	.81	.40	.65	.48	.73	.95	4.98*
Ethnic/Racial Background (White = 1)	.89	.32	.88	.33	.89	.99	.07
Number of Financial Dependents	.78	1.01	.78	1.08	.78	1.00	.01
Household Income	$59,831	$27,448	$51,569	$29,077	$55,865	.98	2.35
Risk Tolerance	13.46	2.77	12.39	2.72	13.46	.86	16.10†
Self-Esteem	35.20	3.93	33.72	4.42	34.52	.93	2.89
Financial Stressors	1.83	1.29	2.27	1.77	2.19	.98	1.88
Financial Knowledge	7.71	1.24	7.31	1.49	5.38	.99	2.33
Financial Satisfaction	6.17	2.14	5.28	2.29	5.78	.96	4.48*
Financial Behaviors	26.08	3.88	23.88	4.04	25.20	.93	8.47†

For dichotomous variables, mean is the proportion of cases with a value of 1.00

Wilk's Lambda is used for the test of hypothesis of equal mean vectors.

*Statistically significantly different at the p. < .05 level.

†Statistically significantly different at the p. < .01 level

Table 6. Discriminant Analysis of Respondent Factors Using Standardized Coefficients

Variable	Discriminant Coefficient
Age	-.11
Education	-.36
Gender (male = 1)	.37
Ethnic/Racial Background (White = 1)	-.10
Marital Status (married = 1)	.24
Homeownership (homeowner = 1)	.40
Household Income	-.31
Number of Financial Dependents	-.20
Risk Tolerance	.86
Self-Esteem	.16
Stressors	-.22
Financial Knowledge	.03
Financial Satisfaction	.07
Financial Behaviors	.26

Table 7. Discriminant Analysis of Respondent Factors Using Discriminant Loadings

Variable	Discriminant Coefficient
Risk Tolerance	.71
Financial Behaviors	.51
Homeowners	.39
Financial Satisfaction	.37
Age	.36
Self-Esteem	.30
Household Income	.27
Financial Knowledge	.27
Financial Stressor	-.24
Gender	.20
Marital Status	.10
Ethnic Background	.05
Financial Dependents	-.01
Education	-.01

Summary

The results of this study suggest that the decision to seek help from a professional financial planner, financial counselor, insurance agent, or stockbroker is most directly associated with financial risk tolerance, financial behaviors, homeownership, financial satisfaction, and age. Specifically, those respondents who sought professional financial help tended to be those who:

A. Had a higher level of financial risk tolerance,
B. Owned their own home,
C. Indicated a high level of financial satisfaction,
D. Exhibited better financial behaviors, and
E. Were older than average.

Table 8. Classification Matrix for Two-group Help-seeking Analysis

Actual Group	No. of Cases	Predicted Group Membership: Professional Seeking Group	Non-Professional Seeking Group
Professional Seeking Group	59	43 (72.90%)	16 (27.10%)
Non-Professional Seeking Group	51	18 (35.30%)	33 (64.70%)

Percent of "grouped" cases correctly classified: 69.10%

These results add to the current body of knowledge within the financial counseling and planning domain by describing the role of demographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial factors within the help-seeking process. The results from this study mirror, in general terms, findings presented by help-seeking researchers in the psychological, sociological, and physiological disciplines (King, 1997; Lee, 1997; O'Brien, 2001). Findings also support the hypothesis that additional factors, such as a person's psychosocial characteristics, may play a role in the help-seeking process.

Discussion

The purpose of the research presented in this paper was to further examine and test Step 5 of the Grable and Joo (1999) help-seeking framework using (a) a replication of the variables used in their original analysis, (b) the addition of new explanatory variables, and (c) a different sample frame. Whereas Grable and Joo concluded that the financial stressors, financial behaviors, age, and homeownership were associated with the decision to seek help at Step 4 of the help-seeking framework, the results in this study indicate that in addition to financial behaviors, age, and homeownership, two new variables appear to effectively differentiate between individuals who seek help from a professional source from those who seek help from family, friends, and work colleagues at Step 5 of the framework. These additional variables include financial risk tolerance and financial satisfaction.

Why might risk tolerance and financial satisfaction be good indicators of a help-provider choice? The answer may be found in a concept called social competence perception. A general consensus among help-seeking researchers, as described most clearly by Lee (1997), supports the notion that some individuals forgo help because of a perceived low level of social competence. It is common for some individuals to use a psychological escape mechanism called self-concealment to keep intimate and personal information either to themselves or within the context of family and friends. This self-concealment helps someone "put up a front of social and financial competence" (Grable & Joo, p. 21). This may explain the role of risk tolerance as a differentiating factor in this study. Help-seeking in general, and seeking the help of a professional specifically, is equivalent to taking a psychological risk (Fischer & Farina, 1995; Reidy & Von Korff, 1991; Phillips & Murrell, 1994). Counselors and therapists face this issue on a daily basis (Esters, Cooker & Ittenbach, 1998). Those who feel that they will be ridiculed, behaviorally constrained, or reprimanded may tend to shy away from seeking professional help, and turn, instead, to family and friends. This appears to be the situation in this study.

While a large number of negative financial behaviors, being younger, and not owning a home were found to be factors in Grable and Joo's (1999) test of Step 4 of the help-seeking framework, the results of this study suggest that financial behaviors, age, and homeownership work differently once a person has decided to seek help. In this study, those who sought professional financial help exhibited more and better financial behaviors, were older than average, and they tended to own their own home.

Results related to financial behaviors suggest that initially a large number of negative financial behaviors may lead someone to seek help, but once that decision is made (Step 4), behaviors become a gauge as to what type of help is sought. It can be hypothesized that those who seek help from professionals may already exhibit relatively positive behaviors, and these behaviors may then improve further after working with a professional. The findings presented here imply that this may then result in the continued use of a professional in the future. The downside to this finding is that those individuals exhibiting worse financial behaviors - individuals who may need the help of professionals the most - may be caught in a pattern of using non-professional sources of help. Results from this study indicate that these individuals are, on average, less likely to seek professional help.

Findings from this study also help confirm the hypothesis that in addition to demographic and socioeconomic factors, psychosocial factors, such as financial satisfaction, may also play a role in determining who seeks help from professionals or others (Lee, 1997). In this study, those with a higher level of financial satisfaction tended to be more likely to seek help from a professional. Again, this ties back into the notion of social and financial competence. Those individuals who are confident in their behaviors and attitudes may be more likely to be proactive in their search for help. The findings from this study support the overall conclusion that a person's perceptions, in addition to tangible resources, play an important role in determining the choice of help-seeking providers.

Implications for Practitioners

Results of this study showed those individuals that tend to seek the advice and counsel of a professional financial advisor tend to be less risk averse than others. These individuals also exhibit better financial behaviors. Unfortunately, the majority of Americans do not share these two distinguishing characteristics. This helps explain why the greater part of Americans either do not seek help of any kind, or they seek help from non-professionals (King, 1997).

What implications do these findings have for practitioners? First, professional help providers need to clearly differentiate between help-seekers on the one hand, and seekers of professional help on the other. These two groups are not necessarily the same. The help-seeking market is large, but the current market for professional help is already fairly well defined and smaller (Miller & Montalto, 2001). A current need exists to expand the use of professionals among individuals who are inherently less likely to seek professional help. In order to successfully accomplish this objective interested practitioners must aggressively market services to underserved populations.

Marketing efforts should incorporate the recognition that help-seekers who turn to sources of help other than professionals may share underlying psychological and behavior barriers to seeking professional help. According to Lee (1997), many help-seekers do not know how to request help from potential help sources. She has argued that professional help providers may not understand common help-seeking motivating communication requests and methods, and thus, may be losing potential clients. For example, it is common for help-seekers to use verbal strategies to communicate requests for help that are often interpreted by professional advisors as signs of incompetence and indecisiveness. As Lee has indicated, "Individuals do not seek help, even when help is needed and available, because help-seeking implies incompetence and dependency, and therefore is related to powerlessness" (p. 336). Only by making cognizant outreach efforts that foster greater client confidence and reduce the fear of failure in the minds of potential clients will it be truly possible to persuade more individuals to take the psychological risk involved in seeking professional help.

Evidence presented by Advisors On Top (2000) and King (1997) indicates that the ultimate solution to bringing together more help-seekers with professional help providers may involve focusing further on client relationships rather than on business transactions. This marketing approach is what Rogers (2000) called the client advantage. He and others (Hansard, 2001) report that some potential clients lack information sources and frameworks to understand how professional help can be obtained and maintained. By emphasizing client relationships that are built upon trust, and efforts by counselors and planners to remove psychological barriers to seeking professional help, it is likely that advisers can expand their niche beyond today's typical client. O'Brien (2001) sounded a word of hope on this topic. He reported that the reputation of professional help providers is more important than brand name or product when clients seek the help of a professional. This suggests that practitioners who focus on client relationships stand the best chance to help more individuals. The challenge at hand involves spreading the word among those who are actively seeking help that professional providers can significantly improve the financial wellness of individuals and families.

Suggestions for Further Research

The essence of help-seeking research is determining which factors, including demographic, socioeconomic, psychosocial, and behavioral characteristics, play an important role in a person's decision to both seek help and the decision of whom to seek help from. The research findings reported in this paper help address this later issue; however, more research is needed to substantiate these and other findings and to rigorously test the help-seeking framework. A potential next step in the research process involves modeling the decision to seek help (i.e., Step 4) and the decision to seek help from a professional/non-professional (i.e., Step 5) in a way that accounts for the correlation between these two equations. Using a method, such as a bivariate probit analysis, to account for these correlations may provide an improvement in the estimation of help-seeking behaviors.

If it is correct, as Doyle (1999) has suggested, that explanations of behavior in relation to money and financial situations include more factors than those traditionally associated with economic thinking, then it is equally true that in order to truly understand help-seeking behavior it may be necessary to study this phenomenon using different methodologies. Fortunately, help-seeking research lends itself to different methodological approaches, including both quantitative and qualitative assessment. For example, those researchers interested in quantitative studies may find that sufficient data exists in pre-existing datasets (e.g., the Survey of Consumer Finances) to further test the help-seeking framework. Others may decide that a new national survey is needed to better understand the complex relationships involved in the help-seeking process. Qualitative researchers may also find opportunities to conduct focus group interviews and other forms of assessment in an attempt to understand these same relationships.

Further research will ultimately lead to an improvement in the knowledge of financial counselors, planners, and investment managers in relation to the motives and determinants of client help-seeking behaviors. The aim of future help-seeking research should be directed at adding to the financial counseling and planning professions' body of knowledge and literature by indicating why some individuals are more successful in meeting their financial objectives than others. The dimensions of help-seeking research are wide, including analysis of those who succeed in moving from welfare to work to understanding who is more likely to seek the assistance from a friend versus a professional advisor. As a result, a great opportunity exists for those interested in developing this type of research.

As suggested above, help-seeking research can be used to better understand why people save, invest, spend, borrow, make other financial decisions, or take other financial directions by linking knowledge, attitudes, demographic and socioeconomic foundations, and psychosocial factors into explaining help-seeking behaviors. More research is needed to facilitate the profession's appreciation for and knowledge of help-seeking behavior. Only by taking these research steps will additional tools be developed that will enhance the diagnosing of problems and in developing prescriptive measures to remove barriers to seeking help.

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