

Workplace Mental Health Help-Seeking in Guangzhou: The Roles of Organisational Support, Social Support, Mental Health Literacy, and Social Face Consciousness

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Mental health challenges in the workplace have become increasingly significant, particularly in rapidly urbanizing economies such as China. This study investigates the influence of perceived organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy on employees' attitudes toward help-seeking and their intention to seek mental health counseling in Guangzhou. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and supported by recent mental health literacy and stigma literature, the study also examines the moderating role of social face consciousness and the mediating role of help-seeking attitudes. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured survey and analyzed through structural equation modeling. Findings reveal that all three antecedent variables significantly enhance help-seeking attitudes, which in turn strongly predict counseling intention. Mental health literacy emerged as the most influential predictor, while social face consciousness significantly weakened the relationships between support variables and attitudes. The mediation results confirmed that attitudes toward help-seeking act as a critical psychological pathway linking resources to behavioral intention. The study highlights that while organizational and social support systems are essential, cultural stigma remains a major barrier to mental health service utilization. The findings contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by emphasizing the need for integrated, culturally sensitive workplace mental health strategies in China.

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Introduction

The increasing prevalence of mental health challenges in the workplace has become a global concern, particularly in rapidly developing economies such as China. Urban centers like Guangzhou are characterized by intense work demands, organizational pressures, and evolving socio-economic conditions, all of which contribute to heightened psychological strain among employees. Despite the growing recognition of mental health as a critical component of employee well-being and productivity, help-seeking behavior remains notably low. Empirical evidence indicates that only a small proportion of individuals experiencing mental health problems in China actively seek professional support, highlighting a substantial treatment gap (Zhang et al., 2019). This gap underscores the urgent need to examine the factors that influence employees' willingness to seek mental health assistance within organizational contexts. One of the key determinants of employee well-being is perceived organisational support, which reflects the extent to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares about their welfare. Supportive organizational environments can reduce stress and foster psychological safety, thereby encouraging employees to seek help when needed. However, in many workplaces, mental health support systems remain underdeveloped or underutilized, limiting their effectiveness in promoting help-seeking behaviors. In parallel, social support derived from colleagues, friends, and family has been identified as a critical resource that can buffer stress and facilitate coping. Research demonstrates that higher levels of perceived social support are associated with more positive attitudes toward professional psychological help-seeking (He et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the interplay between organizational and social support in shaping help-seeking attitudes among employees in urban Chinese settings remains insufficiently explored.

Another crucial factor influencing help-seeking behavior is mental health literacy, which encompasses individuals' knowledge and beliefs about mental health conditions and available interventions. Studies in China have consistently shown that limited mental health literacy contributes to delayed recognition of mental health problems and reduced utilization of professional services (Huang et al., 2019). Conversely, higher levels of mental health literacy are associated with increased willingness to seek professional help, often through improved understanding and reduced stigma (Yang et al., 2024; Awan et al., 2025). Despite these findings, there is a lack of research examining how mental health literacy interacts with workplace factors to influence employees' attitudes and intentions in organizational contexts such as Guangzhou. Importantly, cultural factors play a significant role in shaping mental health behaviors in Chinese society. The concept of social face consciousness rooted in the desire to maintain social reputation and avoid embarrassment can act as a barrier to help-seeking. Individuals may avoid seeking psychological support due to fear of social judgment or perceived loss of status. Recent research highlights that stigma and social expectations continue to influence help-seeking decisions among Chinese populations, often discouraging individuals from accessing mental health services even when support is available (Li, 2026; Liu et al., 2025). However, empirical studies investigating the moderating role of social face consciousness in workplace mental health contexts remain limited.

Furthermore, while prior studies have examined individual predictors of help-seeking, there is insufficient integration of these variables within a comprehensive framework that considers both mediating and moderating mechanisms. In particular, attitude toward help-seeking has been identified as a critical mediator linking knowledge, support systems, and behavioral intentions (He et al., 2025). Yet, research exploring how this mediating process operates alongside cultural moderators such as social face consciousness in employee populations is scarce.

Given these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing employees' intention to seek mental health counseling in Guangzhou, China. Specifically, it seeks to assess the levels of perceived organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy; examine their effects on attitudes toward help-seeking; investigate the moderating role of social face consciousness; and evaluate the mediating role of help-seeking attitudes in shaping behavioral intentions. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to generate evidence-based insights that can inform the development of culturally sensitive and organizationally relevant mental health support strategies in the workplace.

Literature Review

A growing body of literature has examined the determinants of mental health help-seeking behavior, particularly in Asian contexts where cultural norms and workplace dynamics significantly shape psychological outcomes. Prior studies consistently highlight that mental health literacy (MHL), perceived organisational support (POS), and social support (SS) are critical antecedents of help-seeking attitudes and intentions. For instance, empirical evidence from Chinese populations demonstrates that individuals with higher mental health literacy exhibit more positive attitudes toward professional psychological help-seeking, largely because they are better able to recognize symptoms and understand treatment benefits (Yang et al., 2024; Shi & Tian, 2025). Similarly, perceived social support has been shown to strengthen help-seeking attitudes by reducing psychological distress and enhancing emotional resilience (He et al., 2025). Organisational research further indicates that employees who perceive strong organisational support are more likely to trust institutional resources, including mental health services, thereby increasing willingness to seek assistance (Liu et al., 2025). These findings collectively suggest that both workplace and interpersonal resources play a

crucial role in shaping psychological help-seeking behavior.

Recent studies also emphasize the mediating mechanisms underlying these relationships. Help-seeking attitude has been widely identified as a key mediator between psychosocial resources and behavioral intention. For example, mental health literacy has been shown to indirectly influence help-seeking behavior through stigma reduction and improved attitudes toward counseling (Yang et al., 2023; He et al., 2025). Similarly, social support and perceived organisational support enhance help-seeking intentions by first fostering more favorable attitudes toward professional psychological services (Liu et al., 2024). These findings suggest that attitudes toward help-seeking serve as a cognitive bridge between awareness/support systems and actual behavioral intention, reinforcing the importance of attitudinal change in mental health interventions.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioral intention is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Within this framework, mental health literacy and social support contribute to the formation of positive attitudes, while perceived organisational support strengthens perceived behavioral control by increasing accessibility and trust in organizational resources. In addition, the Socio-ecological Theory provides a broader lens by emphasizing that behavior is influenced by multiple levels of interaction, including individual, interpersonal, organizational, and cultural factors (Liu & Zhang, 2025). This multi-level perspective is particularly relevant in the Chinese context, where collectivist values and "face consciousness" significantly shape psychological disclosure and help-seeking behavior. A critical cultural construct incorporated into this conceptual model is social face consciousness, which reflects individuals' concern for maintaining social reputation and avoiding embarrassment. Recent research indicates that stigma and fear of social judgment

significantly reduce willingness to seek professional psychological help, even when support systems are available (Li, 2026; Liu et al., 2025). This suggests that social face consciousness may weaken the positive effects of mental health literacy, organisational support, and social support on help-seeking attitudes. Therefore, it is conceptualized as a moderating variable in this study.

Conceptually, this study integrates these variables into a comprehensive framework in which perceived organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy influence attitude toward help-seeking, which in turn predicts intention to seek counseling. Social face consciousness moderates the strength of these relationships, while attitude toward help-seeking mediates the relationship between psychosocial resources and behavioral intention. This integrated model contributes theoretically by extending the Theory of Planned Behavior through the inclusion of culturally specific moderation (social face consciousness) and multi-level psychosocial predictors, addressing calls for more culturally sensitive and ecosystem-based models of mental health help-seeking (Liu & Zhang, 2025; Shi & Tian, 2025). Overall, this study advances existing literature by providing a holistic, culturally grounded framework that explains how organizational, social, and cognitive factors interact to shape mental health help-seeking intentions among employees in Guangzhou.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among perceived organisational support, social support, mental health literacy, social face consciousness, attitude toward help-seeking, and intention to seek mental health counseling among employees in Guangzhou, China. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data at a single point in time, which is appropriate for assessing associations among psychological and behavioral constructs within organizational settings (Kharuddin et al., 2026). Quantitative designs are

widely recommended for hypothesis testing and structural relationship analysis in behavioral research, particularly when examining mediating and moderating effects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hair et al., 2022).

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive and explanatory research design. Descriptive analysis was first conducted to determine the levels of perceived organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy. Explanatory analysis was then applied to test causal relationships among variables using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Kharuddin et al., 2026). This approach is suitable for simultaneously examining direct, indirect (mediating), and interaction (moderating) effects within a single conceptual framework (Kline, 2016).

Sampling and Participants

The target population comprised full-time employees working in various sectors in Guangzhou, including manufacturing, services, education, and technology industries. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across occupational categories. Stratification improves external validity by reducing sampling bias and ensuring proportional representation of subgroups (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The required sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

where $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level), $p = 0.5$ (maximum variability), and $e = 0.05$ (margin of error), resulting in a minimum sample size of 384 respondents.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed both online and in printed form. The questionnaire consisted of validated scales adapted from prior studies. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data

collection, and participation was voluntary with informed consent. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to minimize response bias. Data collection was conducted over a six-week period to ensure adequate response rates and diversity of participants. Similar procedures have been widely used in workplace mental health studies to ensure reliability and accessibility of responses (He et al., 2025).

Measures

All constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Perceived organisational support was measured using items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (2020). Social support was assessed using a multidimensional support scale. Mental health literacy was measured based on recognition, knowledge, and attitude dimensions. Social face consciousness was assessed using culturally adapted items reflecting concern for social reputation. Attitude toward help-seeking and intention to seek counseling were measured using validated psychological help-seeking scales.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS software. The analysis proceeded in three stages: preliminary analysis, measurement model assessment, and structural model testing. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to determine variable levels. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), while validity was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The structural model was tested using

SEM, with mediation effects assessed through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). Moderation analysis was conducted using interaction terms within SEM. The model fit was evaluated using indices such as Chi-square (χ^2/df), CFI, TLI, and RMSEA, following recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2022).

The structural relationship model can be summarized as:

$$AH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 POS + \beta_2 SS + \beta_3 MHL + \beta_4 SFC$$

$$INT = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AH + \epsilon$$

where AH = attitude toward help-seeking, POS = perceived organisational support, SS = social support, MHL = mental health literacy, SFC = social face consciousness, and INT = intention to seek counseling.

Data Analysis, Results, and Findings

Data analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among perceived organisational support (POS), social support (SS), mental health literacy (MHL), social face consciousness (SFC), attitude toward help-seeking (AH), and intention to seek mental health counseling (INT). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the measurement and structural models. Prior to hypothesis testing, data screening confirmed normality, absence of multicollinearity, and acceptable reliability and validity of all constructs. The results are presented in stages: descriptive statistics, measurement model assessment, structural model testing, mediation effects, and moderation effects.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Perceived Organisational Support (POS)	3.42	0.71	Moderate
Social Support (SS)	3.68	0.65	High
Mental Health Literacy (MHL)	3.21	0.74	Moderate
Social Face Consciousness (SFC)	3.55	0.69	Moderate–High
Attitude Toward Help-Seeking (AH)	3.46	0.68	Moderate
Intention to Seek Counseling (INT)	3.39	0.70	Moderate

The results indicate that employees in Guangzhou generally report moderate levels of perceived organisational support, mental health literacy, and help-seeking attitudes. Social support is comparatively higher, suggesting that interpersonal networks are relatively strong in workplace and personal environments. However, mental health literacy remains only moderate, indicating gaps in understanding mental health conditions and available professional services.

Social face consciousness is also relatively high, reflecting persistent cultural concerns regarding reputation and stigma in psychological help-seeking.

The measurement model was assessed using reliability and validity indicators, including Cronbach’s alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Results

Construct	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
POS	0.89	0.91	0.63
SS	0.87	0.90	0.61
MHL	0.85	0.88	0.59
SFC	0.86	0.89	0.60
AH	0.88	0.90	0.62
INT	0.90	0.92	0.66

All constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability values confirm construct reliability, while AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity. These

results confirm that the measurement model is suitable for structural analysis.

The structural model was tested using SEM to examine direct relationships among variables.

Table 3: Direct Effects

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
POS $\rightarrow$ AH	0.28	5.42	<0.001	Supported
SS $\rightarrow$ AH	0.31	6.15	<0.001	Supported
MHL $\rightarrow$ AH	0.36	7.02	<0.001	Supported
AH $\rightarrow$ INT	0.52	9.48	<0.001	Supported

The results show that all predictors significantly influence attitude toward help-seeking. Mental health literacy has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.36$),

followed by social support ($\beta = 0.31$) and perceived organisational support ($\beta = 0.28$). Attitude toward help-seeking strongly predicts

intention to seek counseling ($\beta = 0.52$), indicating that attitudes are a critical determinant of behavioral intention.

These findings suggest that employees who are more knowledgeable about mental health, perceive stronger workplace support, and receive higher social support are more likely to develop

positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help, which subsequently increases their willingness to access counseling services.

Bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples) was used to test mediation effects of attitude toward help-seeking.

Table 4: Mediation Effects

Relationship	Indirect Effect	95% CI	Result
POS $\rightarrow$ AH $\rightarrow$ INT	0.15	[0.09, 0.23]	Significant
SS $\rightarrow$ AH $\rightarrow$ INT	0.16	[0.10, 0.25]	Significant
MHL $\rightarrow$ AH $\rightarrow$ INT	0.19	[0.12, 0.28]	Significant

The results confirm that attitude toward help-seeking significantly mediates the relationship between all three predictors and intention to seek counseling. Mental health literacy shows the strongest indirect effect, suggesting that knowledge-based interventions are particularly effective in shaping behavioral intentions

through attitudinal change. This supports the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that attitudes serve as a key mechanism linking beliefs and intentions.

Social face consciousness was tested as a moderator using interaction effects in SEM.

Table 5: Moderation Effects

Interaction Path	β	t-value	p-value	Effect
POS $\times$ SFC $\rightarrow$ AH	-0.18	-4.21	<0.001	Significant
SS $\times$ SFC $\rightarrow$ AH	-0.21	-4.89	<0.001	Significant
MHL $\times$ SFC $\rightarrow$ AH	-0.16	-3.97	<0.001	Significant

The findings indicate that social face consciousness significantly weakens the positive relationships between POS, SS, MHL, and help-seeking attitude. This suggests that even when employees have high support or knowledge, concerns about social image and stigma reduce their willingness to develop positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help.

Graphical interpretation of interaction effects shows that individuals with high social face consciousness consistently report lower help-seeking attitudes, even at high levels of

organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy.

The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit:

- $\chi^2/df = 2.41$
- CFI = 0.93
- TLI = 0.92
- RMSEA = 0.056

These values meet recommended thresholds, confirming that the model fits the data adequately.

Overall, the findings confirm that perceived organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy significantly enhance attitudes toward help-seeking, which in turn increases intention to seek mental health counseling. Mental health literacy emerged as the most influential predictor, highlighting the importance of awareness and education in shaping psychological help-seeking behavior.

However, social face consciousness plays a critical inhibitory role, weakening the positive effects of all predictors. This indicates that cultural stigma remains a strong barrier, even in supportive environments. The mediation results further confirm that attitude toward help-seeking is a key psychological mechanism linking resources and behavioral intention.

The study demonstrates a complex interplay between organizational, social, cognitive, and cultural factors in shaping mental health help-seeking behavior among employees in Guangzhou. While support systems and literacy significantly improve attitudes and intentions, cultural pressures related to social face continue to suppress help-seeking tendencies. These findings emphasize the need for integrated workplace interventions that combine mental health education, organizational support systems, and culturally sensitive stigma reduction strategies.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study set out to examine the levels and effects of perceived organisational support (POS), social support (SS), and mental health literacy (MHL) on attitudes toward help-seeking (AH) and intention to seek mental health counseling (INT), while also investigating the moderating role of social face consciousness (SFC) and the mediating role of help-seeking attitude. The findings provide strong empirical support for all proposed relationships and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of workplace mental health behavior in Guangzhou, China.

In relation to RO1–RO3, the results show that employees reported moderate levels of perceived organisational support and mental health literacy, while social support was relatively high. This indicates that although interpersonal support systems are relatively strong, organizational mental health structures and awareness remain insufficient. This aligns with prior research suggesting that mental health literacy in China is still developing, particularly in workplace contexts where formal mental health education is limited (Yang et al., 2024). The moderate level of organisational support further reflects gaps in institutional mental health strategies, which may limit employees' psychological safety (Liu et al., 2025).

For RO4–RO6, all three predictors significantly influenced attitude toward help-seeking, with mental health literacy showing the strongest effect. This confirms that knowledge and awareness play a central role in shaping psychological openness. Employees who understand mental health conditions are more likely to perceive counseling as beneficial and acceptable. This supports the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes attitudes as key determinants of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). It also reinforces recent findings that mental health literacy reduces stigma and improves help-seeking willingness (He et al., 2025).

Regarding RO7–RO9, social face consciousness significantly weakened the positive relationships between POS, SS, MHL, and help-seeking attitudes. This finding is particularly important in the Chinese cultural context, where maintaining social reputation often outweighs personal psychological needs. Consistent with stigma-based literature, individuals with high face concerns tend to avoid psychological services due to fear of judgment or social exclusion (Li, 2026). This demonstrates that cultural norms can override even strong organizational and informational support systems, limiting their effectiveness.

For RO10–RO12, attitude toward help-seeking significantly mediated the relationship between all predictors and intention to seek counseling. This confirms that attitudes serve as a critical psychological mechanism through which support systems and literacy translate into behavioral intention. This is consistent with prior studies showing that interventions targeting attitudes are more effective in increasing actual help-seeking behavior than awareness alone (Yang et al., 2024).

From a broader perspective, the findings contribute directly to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by emphasizing the importance of workplace mental health promotion and access to psychological services. They also align with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), as employee mental well-being is essential for sustainable productivity and organizational performance. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for culturally sensitive mental health systems, supporting global efforts to reduce inequality in access to mental health care.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that perceived organisational support, social support, and mental health literacy are significant determinants of help-seeking attitudes and intentions among employees in Guangzhou.

However, social face consciousness remains a critical barrier that limits the effectiveness of these positive influences. The findings confirm that while organizational and social resources are essential, cultural stigma continues to suppress mental health help-seeking behavior. This reinforces existing literature emphasizing that mental health interventions must address both structural and cultural dimensions simultaneously (Liu et al., 2025; Li, 2026).

Recommendations

Organizations in Guangzhou should prioritize the development of comprehensive workplace mental health programs that integrate awareness campaigns, confidential counseling services, and leadership training to enhance perceived organisational support. Mental health literacy should be improved through structured educational workshops and continuous learning programs. Additionally, peer support systems should be strengthened to enhance social support within the workplace. Importantly, interventions must address social face consciousness by normalizing mental health discussions, reducing stigma, and ensuring strict confidentiality of counseling services. Policy-makers should also encourage organizations to embed mental health frameworks aligned with national workplace wellness strategies to support long-term employee well-being and productivity.

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