

The relationship between over-adaptation, help-seeking preference, and help-seeking styles.

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1. Introduction

Over-adaptation is defined as 'an individual's attempt to conform to the demands and expectations of the environment in a near-perfect form, and the effort to meet external expectations and demands, even if internal needs are forcibly suppressed'. In other words, it is regarded as a state of unbalanced adaptation in which 'external adaptation' to meet the needs and expectations of others is excessive, while 'internal adaptation' to satisfy one's own internal needs is impaired. Such over-adaptation is a risk factor for the decline of an individual's mental health. For example, it has been shown that individuals who engage in over-adaptation have strong irrational thoughts and negative emotions (Kanetsuki & Kanetsuki, 2010). In addition, high external adaptation, such as 'consideration for others' and 'efforts to meet expectations', which are characteristics of over-adaptation, function positively in maintaining interpersonal relationships (Ishizu & Anbo, 2009), suggesting that external adaptation is more easily maintained.

Ozawa (2016) considers external adaptation as altruistic behaviour and points to the existence of performative support as a quid pro quo effect of such behaviour. It has also been pointed out that performative support given to over-adaptation increases their sense of psychological debt, which

may lead to maladaptive effects (Ozawa, 2016). Thus, we can assume that those who over-adapt, while behaving in an other-oriented attitude, are resistant and conflicted about accepting such help themselves. However, how those who over-adapt actually perceive receiving help and what behaviours they adopt in order to receive help have not been examined.

The present study focused on 'help-seeking preference' in a cognitive aspect and 'help-seeking styles' in a behavioural aspect. Help-seeking preference is defined as 'a cognitive framework of whether individuals seek help from professional helpers such as counselling and mental health service professionals and teachers, and informal helpers such as friends and family with emotional and behavioural problems and core real-life issues' (Mizuno & Ishikuma, 1999).

There are three help-seeking styles: the 'self-directed help-seeking style', in which people try to solve problems by themselves and only request help when they have difficulty solving them; the 'excessive help-seeking' style, in which people easily request help without making sufficient self-help efforts when they have difficulties; and the 'avoidant help-seeking' style, in which people consistently avoid requesting help when they have difficulties (Nagai, 2013). It can be inferred that people who over-adapt have conflicting perceptions and behaviours regarding

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help-seeking, both towards others and themselves. In other words, they are likely to be reluctant to accept or seek out help from others.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between help-seeking orientation and help-seeking styles in individuals who over-adapt. The presence or absence of the internal aspects (consisting of 'self-inhibition' and 'imperfection of the self') and the external aspects (consisting of 'consideration for others', 'efforts to meet expectations', and 'desire to be perceived well by others') differs from individual to individual. A comparison was made by combining the high and low levels of these two factors. This study hypothesized that individuals of over-adaptation with high internal and external aspects show less help-seeking preference and are more likely to engage in 'avoidant help-seeking' than those who do not.

2. Methods

Participants and Procedure

A total of 550 university students (257 males and 293 females, mean age: 20.60 years, standard deviation = 1.83) were included in this study.

Surveys related to this study were conducted on the website of the Just-Systems Corporation in Japan. At that time, the participants were asked to respond to the Over-Adaptation Tendency Scale for university students (Ishizu & Saito, 2011) and were divided into four groups based on the respective means of their total scores for 'internal aspects' and 'external aspects', as follows: (1) High internal aspects and High external aspects group (HH group, 201 subjects), (2) High internal aspects and Low external aspects group (HL group, 51 subjects), (3) Low internal aspects and High external aspects group (LH group, 62 subjects), (4) Low internal and High external aspects group (LL group, 236 subjects), and were used as the final subjects for

analysis.

Questionnaire

1) The Over-Adaptation Tendency Scale for university students was developed by Ishizu & Saito (2011) and was used in this study. It contains 31 items with a five-factor structure consisting of two internal aspects (self-inhibition and imperfection of the self) and three external aspects (consideration for others, efforts to meet expectations, and desire to be perceived well by others). The reliability and validity of this scale have been confirmed.

2) The Trait Help-Seeking Preference Scale, developed by Tamura & Ishikuma (2006) for junior high school teachers, was also used in this study. Baba (2015) checked the factor structure to see if there would be any problems when targeting university students and confirmed that it could be used without problems. As such, Baba (2015) was used as a reference. The two-factor structure includes 12 items, such as 'positive attitude towards the help-recipient' and 'low suspicion or resistance towards the recipient'. The reliability and validity of this scale have been confirmed.

3) The Scale for Measuring Help-Seeking Styles, developed by Nagai (2013), was used. The reliability and validity of this scale have been confirmed. The scale consists of 12 items, four items for each of the three styles, i.e., 'self-directed help-seeking,' 'excessive help-seeking,' and 'avoidant help-seeking' styles.

3. Results and Discussion

Firstly, four groups (HH group, HL group, LH group, and LL group), combined by high and low internal and external aspects of the over-adaptation scale, were classified. Then, a single factorial analysis of variance was conducted to examine the extent to which the two subscales

('positive attitude towards the help-recipient' and 'low suspicion or resistance towards the recipient' in the Trait Help-seeking Preference Scale) and the three subscales ('self-directed help-seeking', 'excessive help-seeking', and 'avoidant help-seeking' styles in the the Scale for Measuring Help-Seeking Styles) differed among the four groups. In addition, Tukey's HSD test was used for multiple comparison tests (Table 1).

There was a significant difference in positive attitude towards the help-recipient between the groups ($F(3, 546) = 29.42, p < .01$). Continuing the multiple comparison tests, significant differences were found between the HH and HL groups, between the HH and LL groups, and between the LH and LL groups. In other words, the higher the internal and external aspects of over-adaptation, the lower the positive attitude towards the help-recipient.

There was a significant difference in low suspicion or resistance towards the recipient between the groups ($F(3, 546) = 18.55, p < .01$). Therefore, when multiple comparison tests were performed, there were significant differences between the HH and LH groups, the HH and LL groups, and the HL and LL groups. In other words, those with both internal and external aspects of over-adaptation were more likely to have doubts and resistance to receiving help.

There was a significant difference between the groups for the self-directed help-seeking style (F

(3, 546) = 10.89, $p < .01$). Therefore, a multiple significant difference between the HH and LL comparison test was conducted. No significant difference was found between the groups for the excessive help-seeking style. Finally, there was a significant difference between the groups for the avoidant help-seeking style ($F(3, 546) = 7.22, p < .01$). Therefore, a multiple comparison test was performed, which indicated a significant difference between the HH and HL groups and between the HH and LL groups.

Consideration of the total results of this study suggests that individuals of over-adaptation with high internal and external aspects tend to consistently not seek help in difficult situations or to seek help only when they are unable to resolve the situation on their own. However, for the self-directed help-seeking style, both the internal and external aspects are high only for those who are highly over-adaptive. Although they behave altruistically towards others, there is evidence that they feel a need to be independent, rather than seek help from others in similar situations. In particular, we found that the avoidant help-seeking style was influenced by the high internal aspect. Therefore, it is expected that receiving help may induce self-inhibition and imperfection of the self, and therefore, they may not seek help themselves in order to avoid such a situation. It has been suggested that those who are over-adaptive are more likely to feel a

Table 1 Results of one-way ANOVA, mean and standard deviation of The Over-Adaptation Tendency Scale in 4 groups.

	HH		HL		LH		LL		<i>F</i> (3, 546)					
	N=													
		<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>					
The Trait Help-Seeking Preference														
Positive Attitude towards the Help-Recipient	201	11.56	(3.57)	51	13.57	(3.37)	62	12.48	(3.76)	14.73	(3.55)	29.42**	HH<HL, HH<LL, LH<LL	
Low Suspicion or Resistance towards the Recipient		18.63	(5.57)		20.14	(4.64)		20.84	(5.33)		22.34	(4.43)	18.55**	HH<LH, HH<LL, HL<LL
The Help-Seeking Styles														
Self-Directed Help-Seeking		14.35	(14.53)		14.53	(5.53)		15.66	(5.11)		13.99	(4.62)	10.89**	HH>LL
Excessive Help-Seeking		17.19	(5.76)		17.00	(4.52)		15.11	(5.70)		15.04	(4.88)	1.53	
Avoidant Help-Seeking		19.22	(5.04)		17.96	(4.58)		18.11	(4.22)		16.67	(4.47)	7.22**	HH>LH, HH>LL

Note. HH: High internal aspects and High external aspects group, HL: High internal aspects and Low external aspects group, LH: Low internal aspects and High external aspects group, LL: Low internal and High external aspects group.

** $p < .01$

sense of psychological debt in obtaining performed support (Ozawa, 2016). In the results of this study, the avoidance of actually receiving help may be seen as an indication of not wanting to feel psychological debt.

Although those who are over-adaptative have low self-compassion (Kanetsuki & Kanetsuki, 2021), if they can develop a perspective of self-compassion, it will bring about a reduction in their sense of self-deficiency and enable them to seek help in appropriate situations. This point needs to be further studied and clarified in the future.

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