



# Barriers And Stereotypes Around Seeking Professional Help In Young Adults” – A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract:

With increasing awareness in regards to mental health, various barriers and stereotypes persist among young adults towards seeking professional help. Individuals refuse to seek and recognize or acknowledge the symptoms of mental illness due to various barriers and stereotypes. The current study examines those barriers, stereotypes, and aspects about the same among young adults towards seeking professional help. Help-seeking behaviors and barriers that prevent young adults from seeking help are discussed distinctly. The chief objectives of this study are to understand barriers and stereotypes among young adults. The study also aims to answer what are the prominent barriers among young adults and if there exists a correlation between belief in feminine stereotypes and help-seeking behaviors. Various studies were reviewed to understand the barriers and stereotypes and their results suggested the barriers like negative stereotypes, cultural barriers and lack of black mental health professionals, acceptance from peers, personal challenges, cultural and environmental influences, Self-medicating with alcohol, perspectives around seeking professional help, fear of homophobic responses, and traditional masculine ideas are perceived by young adults towards seeking mental help. Findings of this study reported that belief in feminine stereotypes is related to help-seeking behaviours for both men and women.

*Keywords: Barriers, Stereotypes, professional help, feminine stereotypes, help-seeking behaviors*

## Introduction:

World Health Organization (WHO) states that “The single most important barrier to overcome in the community is the stigma and associated discrimination towards persons suffering from mental and behavioral disorders.” The awareness among individuals is growing about mental health, however, this progress doesn’t come without setbacks. Around the world, mental health now is on the minds of medical professionals as well as citizens. Talking about mental health conditions, ‘stigma’ tops as the most persistent obstacle for people experiencing a mental health condition. Medical research shows that mental health problems are nothing to be ashamed of and that it is real. However, people still refuse to believe in this idea and sign of mental health problems. From misinformation to discrimination there stand many reasons for which people refuse the idea of mental illness.

One aspect that makes the stigma around mental health that stays persistent is uninformed people spreading myths about mental health problems, which may also be detrimental for those who don’t have access to mental health information that registers common misconceptions spread by uninformed people. This might also lead to Self-stigma, negative thoughts in those experiencing mental disorders. Just the information about the stigma that it is a huge problem isn’t enough, for change to occur, there needs to be action. It is very important to reject these mental health stigmas and stereotypes (SingleCare Team, 2019).

### Stigmas relating to mental health:

It can be said that mental health stigma is categorized into two. Firstly, there is an invisible (not-obviously physical) nature of the mental illness. It can be explained using an example, that unlike a broken arm or broken leg, someone’s depression isn’t visible. Secondly,

manifestations of mental illness break established social norms. This can be explained using as an example that an individual in their manic disorder phase might talk too much when out with others. These factors contribute to making an individual’s poor mental health condition look unpredictable or even scary. People also internalize this unpredictability as a threat which leads them to believe in or spread stigma. Although mental health stereotypes are common, they shouldn’t be accepted and treated as a part of daily life. Stereotypes both major and minor may contribute to diminishing an individual’s ability to recognize their mental health condition (SingleCare Team, 2019)

Often People refuse and sometimes delay in seeking professional help because of concerns about being treated differently or fear of losing jobs and livelihood, this is due to the stigma, prejudice, or discrimination against people considering mental illness is still a huge problem. It doesn't matter if the magnitude of the stigma, prejudice, or discrimination against people with mental illness can be subtle or obvious, this can lead to harm. Those individuals experiencing mental illness are discriminated and marginalized against in various ways. The stigma around seeking professional help comes from lack of awareness, lack of understanding, or fear. Inaccurate or misleading information through media representations of mental illness and misinformed people spreading myths about the same, contributing to both of those factors.

### **Researchers have identified different types of stigmas:**

Public stigma- The negative or discriminatory attitudes that people hold towards mental illness; Self-stigma- This refers to negative attitudes like internalized shame in people with mental illness about their condition; Institutional stigma- This involves policies of the government and private organizations who intentionally or unintentionally limit opportunities for people experiencing mental illness (Borenstein, 2020). Rickwood et al. in one of the few broad studies into help-seeking behavior in Australia, (as cited in "Breaking down barriers to help-seeking," 2010) define help-seeking in four stages: Awareness and appraisal of problems, Expression of symptoms and need for support, Availability of sources of help, Willingness to seek out and disclose to sources.

### **Barriers preventing young people from seeking help:**

A detailed literature review was published in 2010 by Guiller et al. which discussed 15 qualitative and 17 quantitative studies of young people's experiences in regards to help-seeking for anxiety or depression. Key themes in the barriers young people identified to help-seeking were: Stigma and embarrassment This is the most frequently reported barrier. Along with this, what also concerns young people is what others, including the source of help, may think of them if they reach out for professional help. In addition, Public, perceived and self-stigmatizing attitudes to mental illness create an embarrassment and fear of identifying with a mental illness and seeking help for the same.

## Problems recognizing symptoms (poor mental health literacy)

When the difficulties which young people are facing are beyond the normal threshold of stress, it was reported that they don't know how to identify them. A study reported that young people were aware of their distress, however they frequently changed their definition of what exactly was normal distress to refuse seeking professional help.

- Preference for self-reliance: Factor which was frequent in both qualitative and quantitative research was the trend that young people preferred to count on themselves rather than asking or seeking help from someone apart from them for the problems they were experiencing. Seeking help is seen as an indicator of weakness as if the person is weak and can't handle their problems or isn't capable of dealing with life problems.
- Confidentiality and trust: Lack of trust concerning the source of help is another major concern or barrier reported in young adults. Breach of confidentiality, distrust of the credibility or authenticity of providers, perceptions of judgmental attitudes, and a lack of familiarity are also the factors that identified barriers.
- Hopelessness: Rickwood et al. suggested feelings or perceptions of hopelessness are also considered to be the strong contributors to help of negation effect which refers to a pattern in which the higher the level of distress an individual is experiencing, the less likely they are to seek support.

### Significance of the study:

This review paper focuses upon understanding the barriers and stereotypes around seeking professional help that is perceived among young adults. The focal rationale is the peculiarity to know and understand the help-seeking behaviors and the barriers that prevent individuals from seeking help. The findings of the papers reviewed in the study help to understand the factors that discourage individuals and develop strategies to improve mental health literacy.

**Objectives:**

The main objectives of this research are to understand the barriers around seeking professional help in young adults and stereotypes around seeking professional help in young adults. This study focuses on answering what are the prominent barriers faced by young adults and whether there is a correlation between belief in feminine stereotypes and help-seeking behaviors.

**Research questions:**

What are the prominent barriers among young adults?

If there exists a correlation between belief in feminine stereotypes and help-seeking behaviors

**Inclusion and Exclusion criteria:**

This study includes the barriers and stereotypes that young adults face toward seeking professional help. This study however does not talk about barriers and stereotypes toward seeking physical health

**Literature Review:**

Gulliver et al. (2010) researched upon reported barriers and facilitators of seeking help in young people. They've used both qualitative research from surveys, focus groups, interviews as well as quantitative data from published surveys. They reviewed via systematic research methodology and incorporated published studies depicting the perception of young people and barriers and facilitators in seeking help for mental health problems. For the study, they cumulated twenty-two published studies of barriers or facilitators in young adults through various sites such as PubMed, PsycInfo, and the Cochrane database. Thematic analysis was used on results that were reported in both quantitative and qualitative literature. Results showed that out of fifteen qualitative and seven quantitative studies that were considered, Stigma and embarrassment, difficulty in recognizing symptoms i.e., poor mental health knowledge, and self-reliance were the most crucial barriers perceived by young people towards seeking professional help. The study also demonstrated shreds of evidence that they perceived such as positive past experiences, social support, and encouragement from others to seek professional help. The study emphasized strategies for improving help-seeking by young adults that should center on developing mental health literacy, stigma reduction, and considering the desire of young adults for self-reliance.

Pattyn et al. (2014) in their study explored the effect of stigma aspects on help-seeking attitudes. The data collected was from 2009 stigma in a Global Context-Belgian Mental Health Study. One-on-one interviews were conducted with a representative sample of Belgian's general population. A total of 728 respondents were given a vignette. A validated instrument was used to compute the stigmas. The results showed that participants who reported a higher level of anticipated self-stigma attached little or less importance to care providers, and participants who reported a higher level of perceived public stigma attached less importance to informal help-seeking. The study also resulted in gender and ethnicity of individuals' sociodemographic characteristics having little impact on help-seeking attitudes. The hypothesis was proved to be correct that anticipated self-stigma and perceived public stigma do have a differential impact on attitudes toward formal and informal help-seeking and that respondents were deterred or discouraged from acknowledging the importance of informal care by the stereotypes held by others.

Lynch et al. (2016) in their study examined the barriers and solutions concerning seeking professional help for mental health problems among young men living in the North West of Ireland. Two focused groups with six participants each, following a qualitative approach and their face-to-face interviews with men of age-group 18 to 24 years was conducted. Thematic analysis was used for the analysis of data. The study contributed to finding four important aspects that discourage young men to seek professional help for mental illness, first- young men fear psychiatric medication; second- young gay men fear homophobic response from professionals; third- the study also focused on the impact of Catholicism on seeking help behaviors in young men, and fourth- young men need genuine care from professionals or source of help. The study also emphasized that young men can be encouraged to seek professional help if they were often addressed about the barriers, combining advertising, services, and education with paying attention and respect to how and when can they seek professional help and with whom they feel comfortable sharing their problems with.

Salaheddin & Mason (2016) conducted their study intending to inspect the reason behind young adults for choosing not to seek professional help for emotional or mental health difficulties. They conducted a cross-sectional online survey for young adults from the age group 18-25 from the UK population. The method of the survey included an anonymous questionnaire that assessed psychological distress, help-seeking preferences, barriers to accessing the help that involved Barriers to Access to Care Evaluation

(BACE) scale, and to speculate their reasons open-ended questions were asked. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the Qualitative data. The results showed that 35% of participants (n=45) who experienced emotional or mental health problems refused to seek any formal or informal professional help. The main barriers among the participants were stigmatizing beliefs, problems in identifying and expressing problems, preferring self-reliance along difficulty in seeking or accessing help as acknowledged by thematic analysis.

Everett (2017) in her study directed to examine if belief in feminine stereotypes is associated with help-seeking behaviors. In addition, to know if the gender of the participant is a mediator of this relationship. Research suggested that beliefs in masculine gender stereotypes might have been associated with a negative perspective of seeking help for emotional distress. For this correlational study, 15 males and 49 females (N=64) participants participated. An online survey containing General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ), Femininity Ideology Scale (FIS), and questions based on demographic details were used. The results of the study suggested that according to a study reviewed, men may be more inclined to believe in masculine stereotypes so accordingly, there's a possibility that people consider there to be a stronger connection with what is expected of their gender. In the online survey conducted the score of men was higher as compared to women on GHSQ that measures help-seeking behaviors and lower score on FIS aiming to measure belief in feminine stereotypes. It was concluded that there is a significant correlation between belief in feminine stereotypes and help-seeking behaviors and that in comparison men are more probable to seek help from medical sources. However, women are more likely to go to a personal source prior than a professional.

Chandler (2019) studied the attitude of African American college students towards seeking professional help for mental health services. This study highlighted the negative stereotypes around seeking mental health services and their impact on the willingness of African American college students in respect to seeking professional help. It has been concluded that no matter the highest rate of mental health-seeking in African Americans, they do not seek treatment. However, five barriers were reported after conducting a Literature review, which are the Mistrust of the Healthcare system, financial barriers, Negative stereotypes, Cultural barriers, and Lack of black mental health professionals. Systematic and cultural barriers are crucial since they relate to developing strategies to ease the problems of Schizophrenia, behavioral issues, and others that students might face. The study suggested that involving cultural inclusiveness to treatment,

more Mental Health professionals of color would help deal with the problem of willingness to seek treatment among students. The study also suggested that untreated and unidentified mental health disorders might significantly have an impact on college students' academics as well as their productivity.

### **Conclusion:**

There can be seen growing awareness among individuals about mental health. However, there's still a long way to go because of stereotypes and stigmas that people perceive. Even though researchers have suggested that mental health illness is real and nothing to be ashamed of, there are still perceived notions about the same. Stigma stands tall when talking about the barrier or obstacle that stands in front of people who experience any mental health illness, and one rationale for it to stand determined is spreading myths and stereotypes by uninformed people. Sometimes the rationale behind refusing or delay in seeking help comes from the fear of being treated differently, losing jobs or livelihood which is because of stigma, prejudice, or discrimination against people experiencing mental illness. The study also focused on highlighting the barriers that prevent young adults from seeking professional help as well as ways that may be helpful to seek help. The research papers reviewed in this study suggested four important findings that discourage men from seeking professional help and perceived barriers in young adults. Findings recommend developing strategies for the amelioration of help-seeking in adolescents and young adults distinct to improving mental health literacy, lessening stigma, and considering young people's desire for self-reliance.

The rationale behind young people who are reluctant to seek help or approach others for the same can be explained by stigma and negative perceptions surrounding mental health and help-seeking. This research also explored the prominent barriers faced by young adults which were mistrust of the healthcare system, financial barriers, negative stereotypes, cultural barriers, and lack of black mental health professionals. Another research article reported prominent barriers, which re Acceptance from peers, personal challenges, cultural and environmental influences, Self-medicating with alcohol, perspectives around seeking professional help, fear of homophobic responses, and traditional masculine ideas. This research also reported that feminine stereotypes are related to help-seeking behaviors for both men and women and there's something about personalities of people believing in feminine stereotypes that enables



them to seek help more as compared to those who don't believe. Men are more probable to seek help from medical sources and women are more probable to go to a personal source.

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