

Knowledge about mental illness increases likelihood of seeking help

June 1 2011

Increased knowledge about mental illness, attitudes of tolerance toward people with mental illness, and support for providing them with care in the community lead to an increased likelihood of individuals seeking help, according to research appearing in the June issue of the American Psychiatric Association's journal *Psychiatric Services*.

The question of what makes people willing to seek mental health care is an important area for research. Many people who need and could benefit from treatment do not seek it, which may result in unnecessary suffering for them and their families as well as high social and financial costs. Researchers looked at data from a United Kingdom Department of Health survey of 1,751 adults in England. Survey participants were asked a series of questions relating to knowledge and attitudes about mental health and contact with people with mental illness. The researchers were particularly interested in the group who responded that they would seek care if they had a mental health problem.

Participants who said that they would seek treatment if they needed it were also those who expressed stronger attitudes of [tolerance](#) toward people with mental illness and stronger support for providing care in the community (rather than in institutions). These participants, who tended to be older than those who were less willing to seek care, also had better knowledge about mental illness and available treatments. Women were more likely than men to be willing to seek help and to disclose a mental illness to friends and family.

In addition, past or present contact with individuals with mental illness was associated with greater knowledge and greater tolerance and support for community care but not with greater willingness to seek help or to disclose a mental illness to others. [Attitudes](#) of prejudice and exclusion were associated with poorer knowledge and less contact with individuals with mental illness.

“[Knowledge](#) of mental illness and treatments was the strongest predictor of both help-seeking and disclosure, a finding that underlines the role of [mental health](#) literacy in influencing reactions to developing a [mental illness](#),” the researchers concluded. The study authors, affiliated with King’s College in London and led by Nicolas Rusch, M.D., suggest that future efforts to increase care-seeking should include a focus on improving health literacy.

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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