

# Helping patients with schizophrenia and their caregivers

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Researchers at the University of Miami (UM) have developed a family-focused, culturally-informed treatment for schizophrenia (CIT-S). The program is one of the first to incorporate elements of the patient's cultural background as part of therapy. The findings are published online ahead of print, in the *Journal of Family Psychology*.

The novel [treatment](#) aimed to reduce patients' symptoms and improve patient and caregiver emotional well-being, explains Amy Weisman de Mamani, Associate Professor of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences at UM and principal investigator of the study.

"We have developed a program for the treatment of [schizophrenia](#) that taps into the family's cultural beliefs, values, traditions, and religious practices to help them come to terms with the illness and better manage the symptoms," Weisman de Mamani said. "We found that adding culturally-based segments to an already established family-focused treatment for schizophrenia reduced patients' psychiatric symptoms, above and beyond an intervention that focused solely on educating [family members](#) about the illness."

For the study, patients diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder and their caregivers participated in 15 weekly one-hour sessions. The treatment covered a range of topics and skills, including education about the illness, techniques to bolster family cohesion and adaptive use of religious coping, communication training, and problem-solving. Homework was also assigned for family members to practice

the skills learned during therapy. A control group received three sessions of psycho- education about the illness.

Participants that completed the study came from 46 separate families of different ethnic backgrounds. About half of the families were randomly assigned to the CIT-S condition and the other half to the control condition. Assessments occurred in either English or Spanish, depending on the individual family's preference.

The findings indicated that patients who participated in the CIT-S program had significant reductions in their [psychiatric symptoms](#) (e.g., hallucinations, delusions, blunted affect) and their caregivers reported significantly lower levels of guilt, shame, and burden.

"The treatment is easy to administer and treatment manuals and materials are available in English and in Spanish," Weisman de Mamani said. "We hope that the ease and accessibility of CIT-S will facilitate dissemination to hospitals and clinics that service individuals with schizophrenia and their loved ones."

The study is titled "A [randomized clinical trial](#) to test the efficacy of a family-focused, culturally informed therapy for Schizophrenia" Co-authors are Marc J. Weintraub, Kayla Gurak, and Jessica Maura, PhD. students, from the Department of Psychology at UM.

The next step is for the researchers to test whether CIT-S can outperform a matched length control treatment that includes all of the ingredients of CIT-S, except those that directly tap into participants' cultural beliefs, values and behaviors. They also want to verify that changes in the use of adaptive cultural practices and belief systems are what account for the efficacy of CIT-S.

Provided by University of Miami

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