Age, gender, and the underutilization of mental health services: the influence of help-seeking attitudes.
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Author: C S Mackenzie
       W L Gekoski
       V J Knox

Author Affiliation: Department of Psychology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

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The objectives of this study were to explore age and gender differences in attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and to examine whether attitudes negatively influence intentions to seek help among older adults and men, whose mental health needs are underserved. To achieve these objectives 206 community-dwelling adults completed questionnaires measuring help-seeking attitudes, psychiatric symptomatology, prior help-seeking, and intentions to seek help. Older age and female gender were associated with more positive help-seeking attitudes in this sample, although age and gender interacted with marital status and education, and had varying influences on different attitude components. Age and gender also influenced intentions to seek professional psychological help. Women exhibited more favourable intentions to seek help from mental health professionals than men, likely due to their positive attitudes concerning psychological openness. Older adults exhibited more favourable intentions to seek help from primary care physicians than younger adults, a finding that was not explained by age differences in attitudes. Results from this study suggest that negative attitudes related to psychological openness might contribute to men’s underutilization of mental health services. Help-seeking attitudes do not appear to be a barrier to seeking professional help among older adults, although their intentions to visit primary care physicians might be. These findings suggest the need for education to improve men’s help-seeking attitudes and to enhance older adults’ willingness to seek specialty mental health services.

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