SAPIEN LABS

Mental Health Has Bigger Challenges Than Stigma

Rapid Report

Mental Health Million Project 2021

Mental Health Has Bigger Challenges Than Stigma

Over 50% of those with clinical level mental health risks do not seek help. The major reasons are not knowing what kind of help to seek, thinking that it won't make a difference, and a preference for self-help.

Summary

Today a great deal of focus in the arena of mental health concerns removing stigma to speak about mental health challenges and to promote help seeking behavior. Here we provide insight into help seeking behavior reported by ~45,000+ respondents in 2021 through the Mental Health Million project. We find that over half of all people globally with clinical level mental health risks do not seek any help for their challenges. The major reasons are not knowing what kind of help to seek and thinking that seeking help won't make a difference. In the United States, only 25% of those not seeking help cite stigma or not wanting others to know as a reason.

Introduction

The Mental Health Million project captures comprehensive mental wellbeing profiles of adults across 10 English speaking countries (or countries with a large English-speaking population) using a tool called the MHQ. The MHQ captures symptoms across ten common mental health disorders as well as positive attributes of mental function, to position individuals on a spectrum from clinical to thriving. Those in the *Clinical* range of the scale represent those with symptoms that map to one or more DSM-5-defined mental health disorders and those *At risk* exhibit 5 or more clinical level symptoms although they may not map specifically to any single disorder. Together these groups comprised 30% of the respondents in Q1 of 2021 (N=13,416). The remaining respondents, classified from enduring to thriving, are considered within the normal range, although some may have indicated a few symptoms of mental health disorders.

All respondents were asked if they were currently seeking (or had sought in the last year) any professional help for any mental health concern. Those who answered 'No' were asked to select from a list of possible reasons. We present here these responses, providing insight into the deterrents to help seeking in the United States, United Kingdom and all 10 countries combined.

The majority with clinical mental health challenges do not seek help

Across the English-speaking population of 10 countries 58% did not seek help for clinical level mental health challenges. In the United States the number was 45% and in the UK it was 50%. In Australia and Canada the number was 45% and 47% respectively, meaning 55% and 53% did seek help. In contrast in South Africa, Singapore, Nigeria and India those not seeking help ranged from 61% to 81%.


% Clinical/At risk Not seeking help
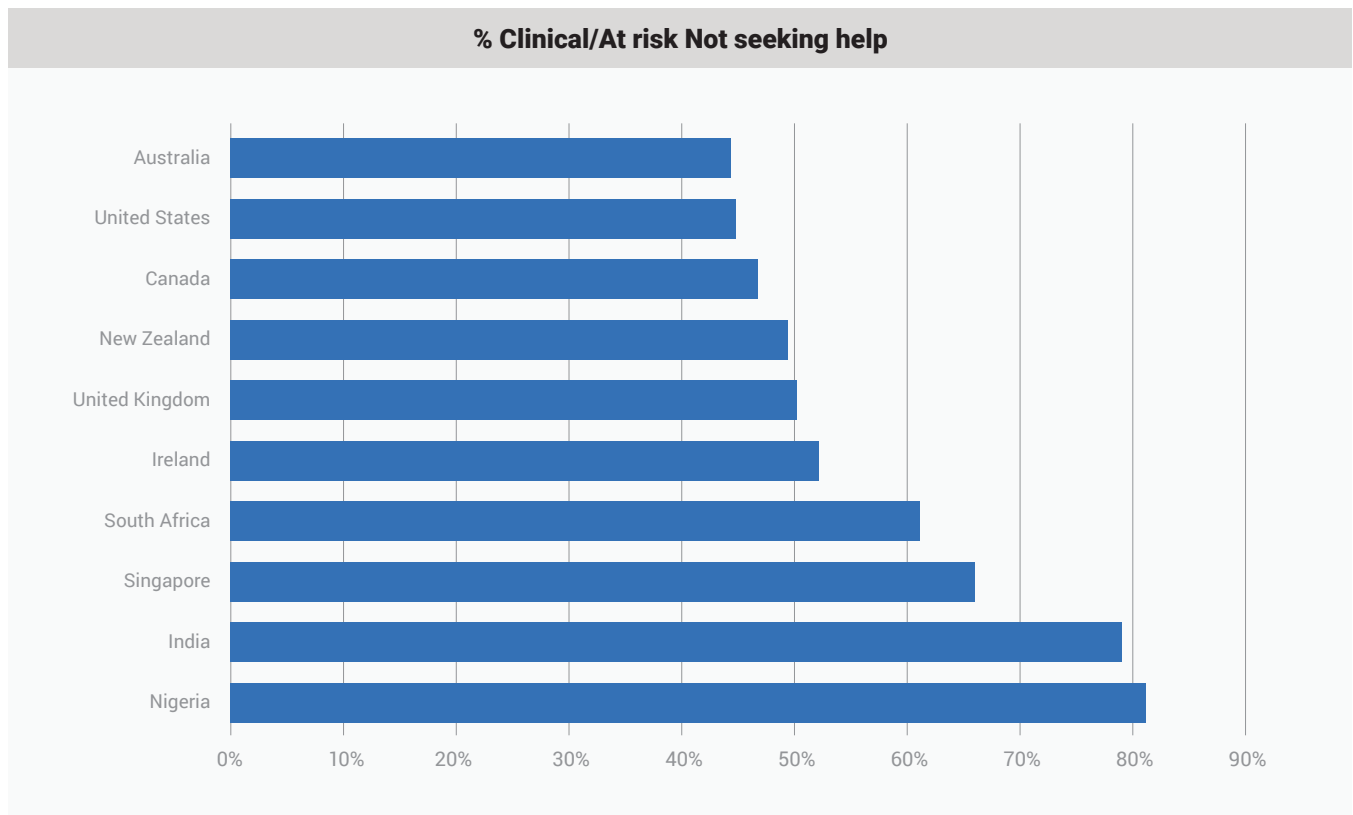
Conversely, it is interesting to note that across these 10 countries, 16% of those without clinical level mental health challenges i.e. in the categories of enduring to thriving on the MHQ scale, nonetheless sought help for sub clinical challenges. In the United States this percentage was 21% and in the United Kingdom it was 17%.

Lack of knowledge and confidence
in treatment are key deterrents to help seeking

Across respondents from all ten countries who did not seek help for clinical level mental health challenges, the primary reason was a preference for self-help (36%) where people indicated that they preferred to manage their challenges on their own or did not think they needed mental health treatment or therapies. This was followed by a lack of knowledge of what kind of help to seek or where to get it (34%) and a lack of confidence in mental health treatments (28%), which was largely because respondents felt it wouldn't help (19%), though 13% were fearful of being forced to take a medication or being committed. 22% were deterred from help seeking by stigma or fear of not wanting people to know and 17% were deterred by lack of affordability.

This ranking differed from country to country, however. In the United States lack of confidence in the mental health system topped the list at 37%, followed by a lack of knowledge of what kind of help to seek (34%). These also topped the list in the United Kingdom at 32% for both. We note that the preference for self-help substantially dominated Asian countries, pushing it to the top reason across all respondents. In the United States lack of affordability was an obstacle to getting help for 25% of people but was not a significant issue in the United Kingdom (less than 5%) where healthcare is nationalized.

Percentage with Clinical Level Mental Health Challenges Not Seeking Help
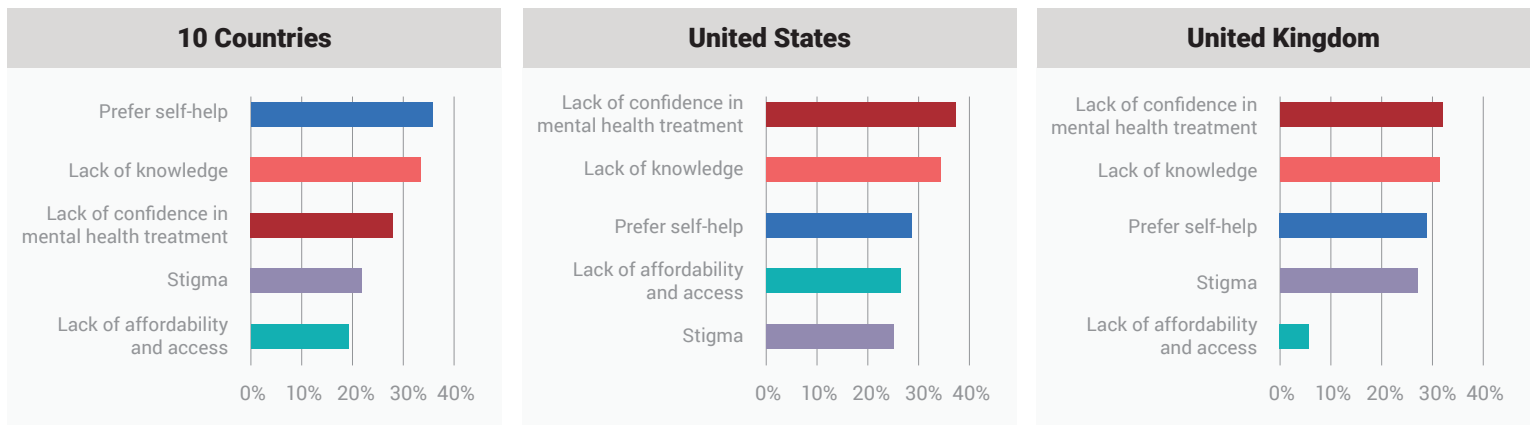
Getting to solutions

Altogether this demonstrates a mental health care system that is difficult to navigate and in which many do not see value. While eliminating stigma may enable people to have easier conversations with friends and family, for the majority there are more pressing challenges to help seeking. Thus moving towards better care requires more than just talking about the problems.

The ongoing efforts by many organizations to eliminate stigma may be behind its relatively smaller prevalence as a barrier to help seeking. However, this data largely points to the need for greater clarity in the mental health space to help individuals understand their specific challenges and direct them to the right resources. The core challenge, however, is *which resources*? Most currently available medications and therapies tend to be effective only for some patients, and only partially so, introducing a great deal of trial and error (For example: Cuijpers & Christensen, 2017). Furthermore, as shown in the <u>2020 Mental State of the World Report,</u> a greater number of psychiatrists per 100,000, while closely correlated to the fraction who seek help for clinical level challenges, does not ultimately have much bearing on clinical burden (Newson et al, 2021). To make progress therefore requires addressing this root challenge.

References:

Cuijpers P, Christensen H. Are personalised treatments of adult depression finally within reach? Epidemiol Psychiatr Sci. 2017 Feb;26(1):40-42. doi: 10.1017/S204579601600007X.

Newson JJ, Pastukh V, Sukhoi O, Taylor J and Thiagarajan TC, Mental State of the World 2020, Mental Health Million project, Sapien Labs, March 2021