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Recommended Citation

Breen, Samantha, "The Influence of Social Dialogue on Mental Health Help Seeking" (2017). *Spring 2017*. 11.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2017/11

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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE ON MENTAL HEALTH HELP SEEKING

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Underutilization of mental health service use is a well-documented problem, especially for Asian Americans who have been shown to have relatively high distress levels. This study examines if having more social discussions on mental healthcare increases help seeking behavior. Prior research suggests that a person's discussions with their social network and their perceived benefits about the effectiveness of treatment are important predictors of help seeking. We predicted that 1) the frequency of positive social dialogue about mental healthcare is positively associated with help seeking intention and that this effect is more robust when social discussions are with closer social partners, 2) Asian Americans will report fewer conversations about benefits of mental health relative to European Americans, and 3) Asian Americans will have lower help seeking intention. Results from 177 undergraduate online questionnaires indicated that help seeking intention was significantly positively correlated with frequency of positive social dialogue about mental healthcare for "total social network" and "very close social partners," marginally significant for "somewhat close partners," and not significant for "remote social partners." In this sample, group differences between Asian Americans and European Americans were not significant for help seeking intention and frequency of positive social dialogue about mental healthcare, although it was marginally significant that Asian Americans had fewer "somewhat close partner" discussions. Additional analyses indicated that Asian American students reported significantly more distress, school concerns, and religious concerns and significantly fewer "total social partners" and "very close social partners" relative to European Americans. We also found that perceived benefits was significantly correlated with help seeking intention and frequency of positive social dialogue about mental healthcare. These results reveal that transforming a stigmatized notion of mental health into positive social dialogue may improve utilization rates and research must continue to identify effective methods to increase help seeking in minority groups.