

Determinants of intentions to seek formal mental health help among Palestinian adolescents in Israel

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Study Context

Mental health challenges are widespread among adolescents undergoing significant physical, emotional, social, and academic changes. Despite this, rates of formal help-seeking remain low, particularly among those from ethnic minorities. Contributing factors to the gap between the need for mental health treatment and help-seeking behaviors among adolescents are mental health literacy (MHL) and Trust in formal sources of information. However, there is a dearth of research exploring these factors among ethnic minorities, and as far as we know, No studies have been conducted among Palestinian adolescents in Israel, where nearly half of them live below the poverty line, face institutional discrimination, and endure political tension.

Aims

This study investigated the determinants of intentions to seek formal mental health help among Palestinian adolescents in Israel, focusing on MHL and trust in formal sources of information.

Methodology

This cross-sectional study involves 178 adolescents (Mage = 16.24 ± 1.24 years, 61.8% female) who completed self-administered questionnaires assessing intention for formal help-seeking, psychological distress, MHL based on Jorm's dimensions, trust in formal sources of information, sociodemographic, and clinical characteristics. Descriptive statistics were used to depict the participants' characteristics and main variables. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine the determinants of intention for formal help-seeking.

Key Findings

Table 1. Intention for Formal Help-Seeking, Mental Health Literacy, and Levels of Trust in Formal Sources of Information

	Mean (SD)	Possible Range
Intention for Formal Help-Seeking	2.90 (1.36)	1-7
Trust in Formal Sources of Information	2.94 (0.80)	1-4
Ability to recognize disorders	20.74 (5.82)	8-32
Knowledge of risk factors and causes	5.33 (1.30)	2-8
Knowledge of professional help available	7.74 (1.89)	3-12
Knowledge of self-treatment	5.32 (1.18)	2-8
Knowledge of where to seek information	12.69 (3.87)	4-20
Attitudes that promote recognition or appropriate help-seeking behavior	55.24 (8.92)	16-80

Table 2. Regression analysis for intention for formal help-seeking (N = 178)

	Formal help-seeking	
	β	Δ adj. R2
Step 1		.09***
Subjective Socioeconomic status	0.17*	
Psychological distress	-0.18*	
Mental illness diagnosis	-0.11	
Step 2		.07***
Trust in Formal Sources of Information	0.28***	
Step 3		.09***
Knowledge of where to seek information	0.25**	
Attitudes that promote recognition or appropriate help-seeking behavior	0.16*	
Total Adj. R2		0.25

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

What Does It Mean? Participants reported low levels of intention to seek formal help, alongside average or above-average levels on all MHL dimensions, and trust in formal sources for information.

What Does It Mean? The analysis revealed that socioeconomic status, psychological distress, trust in formal sources of information, and two MHL dimensions—knowledge of where to seek information and attitudes that promote recognition or appropriate help-seeking behavior—are the main determinants of intention for formal help-seeking.

Conclusion Highlights

Among Palestinian adolescents, there's a reluctance to seek formal mental health assistance, mirroring trends seen in other ethnic minorities, yet they exhibit higher levels of MHL. However, this study underscores the critical role of trust in formal sources of information and MHL in seeking formal help among adolescents from ethnic minorities. Interventions aiming to improve access to mental health-related information, address and enhance attitudes, and foster trust in formal professionals and institutions may contribute to an increased tendency for formal mental health help-seeking among Palestinian adolescents and others.

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