

MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS CULTURES: ACCESS, TREATMENT ENGAGEMENT, AND STIGMA (MH ACCESS) PROGRAM

The majority of individuals with mental health needs do not access effective mental health treatment. Further, 20%- 70% of individuals who initiate mental health services discontinue treatment prematurely. Mental health interventions and services are likely to be ineffective with individuals who do not access treatment, who drop out of treatment prematurely, or who do not engage to intervention protocols.

Despite annual investments of millions of dollars to develop and disseminate these interventions, nonengagement remains a significant threat to treatment effectiveness. Research has identified a range of attitudinal and structural barriers and promoters for individuals seeking and remaining engaged in treatment. Many of these treatment barriers and promoters are similar across cultures, while many more are entrenched in the culture that influences the help-seeking process and service utilization. Stigma and exclusion in all communities can often exert a destructive effect on the lives and functioning of people with mental health issues, including their recovery, functioning, and participation in society at large. A need exists for greater understanding and cultural sensitivity to identify specific experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding mental illness to deliver services more effectively to underserved and marginalized populations.

The MH Access Program researches barriers and promoters to treatment engagement, stigma, treatment beliefs, perceptions, and the formal and informal pathways to care across ethnic and cultural populations nationally and internationally, specifically in underserved communities. The investigations and examinations of this program will identify and develop common components of help-seeking and engagement strategies, while addressing culturally-bound components that can be leveraged to improve access and engagement, as well as informing evidence-based mental health treatments to meet the individual needs of different communities. Acknowledging health inequities, the MH Access Program includes a focus on strategies to resolve unequal access, engagement, and retention to mental health services across underserved populations.