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HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF CHINESE LIVING IN BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Y.-W. Yeung

Social Work and Social Administration, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Aims: British Chinese have a low uptake of mental health services. Poor symptom recognition, language difficulty and mental illness stigma are the key barriers to accessing services. This study aims to explore their help seeking behaviours when they experience mental illness.

Methods: About 96% of Chinese in Northern Ireland worked in catering business. Questionnaires (both in Chinese and English) were sent to ninety-one addresses occupied by catering businesses in Belfast. A bilingual covering letter was enclosed to encourage recipients to ask their families and friends to return the questionnaires.

Results: Twenty-four questionnaires were returned. 66.6% reported that they visited their GP within the year prior to the study. Only one person visited the GP because of a mental / psychological problem. All others visited their GP for their physical illness. Racism (58.3%), physical ill health (50%) and lack of social support (41.7%) were the key stressors. 21% would visit their GP if they had a mental health problem and 45.8% would contact the GP if someone they knew became mentally unwell. Poor recognition of mental illness (41.7%) and mental illness stigma (25%) were the reasons for not seeking medical advice.

Conclusion: Findings revealed that the Chinese do seek help from their GP. However, little evidence suggests that the community will approach their GP when they or someone they know actually become mentally unwell. Further investigation is needed to explore different ways to provide information about mental illness symptoms and mental health services for the community.