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Help-seeking for dementia among older adults: an application of the self-regulatory model.

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Abstract: Recognition of dementia in the community is generally poor and individuals with dementia do not tend to access appropriate treatment until the disorder is advanced. Using the Self Regulation Model, this study examined a range of socio-demographic, attitudinal, and psychological factors in order to better understand professional help-seeking by community-dwelling older adults. The sample comprised 205 healthy older adults (50 to 94 years) recruited from community groups and independent living residences. Participants completed measures of dementia-specific knowledge, prior contact with a person with dementia, self-perceptions of ageing, mental health help-seeking attitudes, illness perceptions and professional help-seeking intentions. Lower levels of dementia knowledge ($r = -.17, p < .02$) were associated with an increased tendency toward professional care-seeking. Older adults who hold a more positive sense of their physical self ($r = .24, p < .001$), cognitive self ($r = .22, p = .003$), and who evaluate themselves more positively in the context of social relationships ($r = .28, p = < .0005$) are more likely to seek professional care. A more positive inclination toward seeking mental health services (Help-Seeking propensity) $r = .22, p < .002$, and more openness regarding psychological issues (Psychological Openness) $r = .17, p < .024$ were both found to be positively related to the behavioural intention to seek help. Using multivariate analyses to control for socio-demographics, dementia familiarity, and ageing self-perception factors, the attitudes towards mental health help seeking were found to be the strongest predictor of care-seeking intention (beta = .20, $p = .009$), while having negative beliefs in the controllability of the illness through treatment, a cognitive dimension of the Self Regulation Model, was a weaker predictor (beta = .17, $p = .03$). Older adults' subjective ageing perceptions also predicted help-seeking intentions (beta = .17, $p = .03$). Reduced internalization of old age stereotypes related positively to adaptive help seeking responses. There is a need for greater attention to be

paid to the impact of age-related stigma upon the path toward dementia care, both to increase understanding of normative ageing effects, and to implement strategies (e.g., anti-stigma programs) that will facilitate timely access to treatment.

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