

Chapter 1

Addressing Stigma and Help-Seeking Barriers for Men

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ABSTRACT

When seeking care for mental health challenges, it is common for men to encounter emotional obstacles and self-stigma. Men are often reluctant to express their vulnerability or ask for help because of rigid cultural gender stereotypes. As a result, it has become common for men to postpone or avoid getting help, even when circumstances require it. To improve the rates and results of men seeking care, stigmas must be actively addressed, as well as ideas about masculinity. Through the lenses of key theories including feminist theory, the theory of planned behavior, and the health belief model, this chapter will examine the distinct stigma that males experience in relation to seeking help. The chapter will also explore how traditional masculine ideals of toughness, independence, and avoidance of femininity along with practical concerns such as money and time can discourage men from seeking assistance, therefore creating barriers to receiving physical and mental health care. Above all, men's lower rates of seeking medical and mental healthcare will manifest the magnitude of the issue.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1459-3.ch001

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

There are complex interpersonal and social factors that often prevent men from seeking mental health support. Accordingly, a multidisciplinary theoretical lens ranging from gender studies to health education to social work, can shed light on the foundational issues that account for masculine social norms. Furthermore, analyses in the contexts of these theories can provide invaluable perspectives of the gender constructs that explain the implicit biases of male help-seeking behaviors that societies disseminate into various ethnic and cultural groups, families, and individuals.

Feminist Theories

When addressing men's rejection of what they and society view as feminine characteristics, it is essential to incorporate theoretical frameworks that pertain to feminism. Although feminist theory extensively explores the intricacies of patriarchal power structures, analyses related to feminine ideals typically view male traits as inherently flawed rather than seeing male tendencies as the result of restrictive social institutions and ideals. While the critique of society's marginalization of women has been more than justified, historically, feminist-based research has frequently neglected to address the pressures that are placed on men to conform to traditional gender norms. As feminist research has progressed, it has uncovered evidence that the degree of gender conformity expected of men is nearly identical to that expected of women.

Feminist theory consists of a broad collection of feminist ideologies combined with the continuous evolution of women's rights and feminist movements. In their examination of the dynamic characteristics of feminist theory, Zastrow et al. (2019) employed the plural form of feminist "theories" to reflect the fact that feminist theory derives from various origins and undergoes a continuous process of development. Additionally, feminist theory offers a deeper understanding of topics related to male help-seeking behaviors and the stigma of help-seeking created at the individual micro and larger mezzo societal levels. These topics include the social construction of gender, gender as an institution, and patriarchal social structures (Lorber, 1991).

The Social Construction of Gender

In today's society, socially constructed gender norms have become deeply ingrained in everyday experience. In most cases, the deliberate disruption of societal conceptions of gender is necessary before society takes the time to reflect on these long-standing gender conventions. An intentional disruption, such as bringing attention to the

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