

REVIEW ARTICLE

Attitudes toward Help-seeking Counseling, Stigma in Arab context: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have found that most citizens of the Arab world are reluctant to look out for assistance from psychologists and counselors because of negative help-seeking attitudes. This article is a systematic review study, intends to explore the factors that affect attitudes toward counselling among citizens of the Arab region. Besides, this study is procured based on the definitions of attitudes toward psychological help-seeking, various factors affecting the attitudes, and suggestions to deal with obstacles. Electronic database was used to search for appropriate reading materials and hence, a total of 11 articles were found. Findings from different journal sources indicated that stigma, fear of self-disclosing, traditional healing methods, mental illness conceptualization, culture and family, and religious leaders are still considered major barriers and discussed systematically. Finally, implications and suggestions for future interventional study conclude this article.

Keywords: Systematic review, attitudes, counseling, Help-seeking, stigma, Arab

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INTRODUCTION

Receiving psychological help is considered an adaptive behavior of coping with worries and problems (1), reviewing the previous literature about dealing with problems; it is viewed both as a reaction to pressure and stress as well as a mechanism that contributes to well-being (2). Seeking professional psychological and counseling help is important because it reduce the long-term negative effects of disorders (3). Furthermore, those who eventually decide to seek psychotherapy or counseling services often doing it at the eleventh hour or withdraw early (4).

Many researchers exhort the idea which is discordant within needs and use which is because of the conflict of differences in the practice of Western psychotherapy and the non-westerners' civilization, as in this case, the Arab cultures (5, 6). In the Arab world, both genders report that they hardly go for professional counselling and recoil in disgrace should they need to see therapists (7, 8). Moreover, West Indians in general possess negative perception of those who have received psychological help services. These psychosocial and societal blockades eventually prevent people from seeking psychological and counseling help (9).

Usually, the process of seeking professional counseling help begins when the need of these services is felt, and ends when done (10). Several studies have described a number of aspects which could be affiliated to one's hesitation to receive mental health and counseling help (11). A few of these elements are leaning towards avoiding from revealing the negative facts about self and unwillingness to self-disclose (12), low stigma tolerance, religiosity, and perceived social support (11, 13). Other factors also contain socioeconomic status, social networks, educational level, access to healthcare systems, and family structure (14, 15).

Despite the numerous conceivable gains of professional counseling services, many individuals with psychological and interpersonal dilemmas are still reluctant to seek treatments (16). For example, it was reported that more than 10% (13–15%) of Turkish college students with recognizable problems needed psychological treatments (17). The major psychological element which has been identified is concerning stigma, Self-stigma is the chief attitudinal blockade that thwarts help-seeking patients from getting professional assistance (16, 18).

Researchers indicate that self-stigma is formed since adolescence days as these group begin to realize the shared abiding beliefs also the thoughts of society (perceived public stigma, and gradually they personalize these stigmatizing attitudes (self-stigma) (19). For example, it is typical for a community who usually perceives mentally ill people as inferior, dangerous, or unacceptable and tags them as morally weak (19).

Barney shows that self-stigma and shame are affiliated to meeting a mental health specialist and this act portrays negative help-seeking demeanor (20). Moreover, personal demeanor appears to be a better predictor of intention to seek professional services than public acceptance. Moreover, self-stigma is able to reduce varied consultation sources, such as psychologists, counselors, and psychiatrists (20).

The connection between help-seeking attitudes and self-stigma have been studied by Sibicky and Dovidio (21), who realized that self-stigma may lead to avoidance of treatment and this would hinder them from getting psychological help regardless of the payoff. Further, Sibicky and Dovidio (21) and Vogel, Wade, and Haacke (22) assert that the main predictor of attitudes toward and willingness to getting professional psychological services is self-stigma, compared to other elements such as gender and perceived risk of receiving the services.

Stigma associated with help-seeking attitudes includes early beliefs about the causes of psychological and mental health problems, and thoughts that getting professional help is deemed undesirable or socially unacceptable (23). Self-stigma is actuated by public stigma and this scenario has an unmistakable effect on the decision-making process pertaining to help-seeking attitudes (18).

The need for counseling and psychological services is well documented in the psychology literature (7, 24, 25). Dismally, there is an astounding gap in the current literature on identifying factors which influence the attitudes toward seeking psychology and counselling among Arab communities.

Therefore, several studies have documented that Arab people have lower attendance rates for seeking helping sources from psychologists, counselors, and psychiatrists compared to other ethnic groups (7, 8, 26, 27). This unvarying finding is congruent to their cultural and traditional dependency on other helping sources, such as extended family, old people, traditional healers, and religious leaders (26-29). Thus, help seeking behavior variable is expected to exist in the interest of a range of determinants, including a pessimistic attitude toward seeking professional help due to traditional and cultural restraints, rejection of the possibility of mental problems existence in the society, and low awareness of services (12, 27).

This study mainly aims to systematically review the literature on the attitude towards seeking counseling and psychological help. In spite of many challenges may affect people differently, unsuccessful resolution of these challenges may subsequently negatively affect individual's quality of life, lack of motivation, and their psychological adjustment. Despite the numerous conceivable gains of professional counseling services,

many individuals with psychological and interpersonal dilemmas are still reluctant to seek treatments. Furthermore, difficulty encounter to these problems and stressors may lead to create new crises. Thus, the current study aims to explore the aspects which could be affiliated to one's hindrance to receive mental health and counseling help. In short, this systematic review of literatures aims to answer the following objectives was to determine the Factors Affecting Attitude towards counseling among Arab respondents and to identify the dealing Strategies with negative attitudes toward counseling help-seeking among Arab respondents.

METHODS

The literature used here was done based on the use of search strategy which enables the researcher to retrieve the literature related to the objectives of the review that derived from an area of interest which is attitudes toward professional counseling and psychological help in the Arab context. Generally, the available and suitable literature was selected from various sources based on the main objectives of the study.

The search strategy

In order to conduct and report this review, the priority in the current research was for recent literatures that were published in the past four years (2013 to 2017). However, the related journal articles on factors affecting attitude toward seeking psychological services were downloaded with cut off limit from 2003 to 2017. The articles and researches were mainly downloaded using databases, namely Ebscohost, and Scopus, and Google scholar. The keywords used in the initial search were: (a) Attitudes toward counseling, (b) stigma and help seeking, and (c) stigma in the Arab community. Inclusion and exclusion criteria as shown in table I were considered during selecting the relevant journal articles.

Table I: Inclusion and exclusion criteria of the systematic review

Inclusion Criteria Presented in Order	Particulars	Literatures Identified	Remaining Literatures
Key terms	Attitudes toward counseling, stigma and help seeking, stigma in the Arab community	167	167
Year	2003 to 2017	85	85
Participants	College student, school students, clients at care centers, patients at mental health hospital, Arab subjects	64	64
Exclusion Criteria			
Article Type	PhD dissertation	8	
	Master theses	14	
	Book	6	38
	Book Chapter	10	
Participants	school students, patients at mental health hospital	26	11

The search was limited to results into journals that were related to college students, clients at care centers,

and Arab subjects. The search was finally stopped when 11 most relevant journal articles were found. The downloaded articles were then summarized and organized in the following sections.

The systematic review done in the study as shown in Figure 1 started with looking for key terms, followed by year of publication, population, article type, and journal source. In the search done by the researcher, it was found that they were 167 papers related to the key terms. 85 of these papers were published between the years (2003-2017). As for the retrieved papers they were screened based on their titles and abstracts. Of these papers (64) were selected based on the participants, who were college students, school students, clients at care centers, patients at mental health hospital, and Arab subjects. This review excluded articles from PhD dissertation, Master theses, books, and book chapters. As well as, participants who were school students and patients at mental health hospital. Finally, 11 articles were selected from different journal sources.

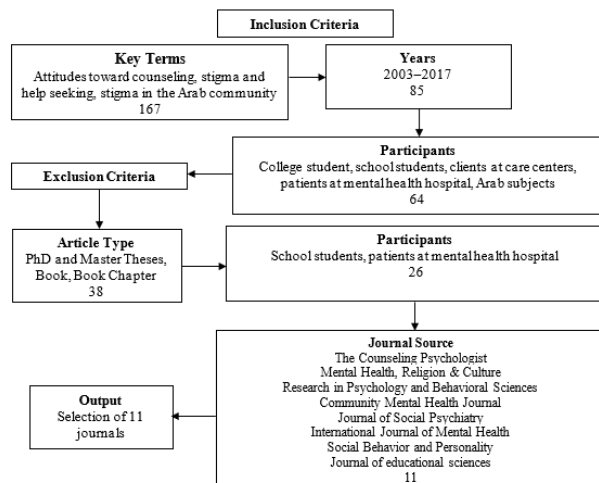


Figure 1: Flowchart of systematic review process. In keeping with the methods specified for systematic review, each part of the process is reported. Figure 1 shows the steps performed in this study and the number of papers identified at each step.

Findings of literature review

The information of the selected articles regarding to attitudes toward seeking counseling and psychological help is shown in Table II. The author, year of publication, location (country), title of journal articles, setting of the study, participants, and main findings of each literature are clearly outlined. Table II is to provide clearer and better view of the information related to attitudes toward seeking counseling and psychological help.

DISCUSSION

Definitions of attitudes

Attitude is defined as proclivity towards anything where one can accept or unaccepted (35) whereas attitudes towards getting help from a psychologist is defined as a learned propensity to react towards in an acceptable or unacceptable way with due to psychological help-

seeking.

Generally, literature review Indicates that attitudes was used as a measure and also showed proof that attitudes are also may helpful in understanding help-seeking behavior. Furthermore, intervention strategies aiming to build the necessary skills to manage stigma and also the view towards seeking psychological help showed satisfying results.

Help seeking behavior: It can be defined as talking with people to get help in understanding, information, treatment, advice and general support as a reaction to a problem or unpleasant experience (36). Receiving psychological help is also seen as an adaptive behaviour of coping with distress problems and concerns problems (37). Generally, Individuals who are more willing to seek help for their problems commonly experience better adjustments and fewer emotional and behavioral problems (38). This suggests that attitudes toward seeking psychological help are therefore an essential aspect of the change process (39).

Factors affecting attitude towards counseling

Based on the review of the existing Attitude toward counseling and psychological help-seeking literature, amalgamations of determinants are speculated to be associated with pessimistic help-seeking attitudes among those who live in the Arab region. Taking into considerations the hindrance to those psychological treatments has pertinent ramifications of the psychological, physical, and economic strains due to worldwide untreated mental health (34). These are cultural determinants and thus may pose some difficulties when dealing with. The determinants include:

1. Stigma

Stigma is highly reviewed specially among the Arabs (15, 31, 32, 34). In the psychotherapy literature, help-seeking stigma refers to a disgrace that indicates that person belongs to a culturally devalued social group. Also it refers to a discriminate toward those who receiving psychological help (22). Due to this, stigma in the help-seeking process has been considered to be an important factor with general negative effect on help seeking among Arab (13, 31, 32, 34). Furthermore, two types of stigma exist, which are public stigma and self-stigma (40).

a. Public stigma is described as an external form of stigma that denotes the perception held by society that individuals are undesirable or socially unacceptable because of suffering mental health problems or if they seek psychological help (22).

b. In turn, self-stigma is described as an internal form of stigma, refers to the perception held by individuals that they are undesirable or socially unacceptable because of having a mental health problem or if they seek psychological help (22).

Table II: Summary of selected literatures

Author / Year / Location	Title of the Article	Participants	Main Findings
Al-Darmaki [15] 2003 UAE	Attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help: What really counts for United Arab Emirates university students?	350 undergraduate students at UAE University	Undergraduate students who are in art majors and senior years indicated low scores of stigma and more confidence regarding to counselors and psychologists. Level of education, family values, and cultural beliefs about psychological illness are important factors affect individuals' view of receiving counseling and psychological services.
Almalki, [28] 2003 Qater	Attitudes of Qatari Citizens Towards marriage and Family Counseling	247 subjects of Qater Citizens	Qatari Citizens showed slightly positive attitudes Towards marriage and Family Counseling. In spite of the respondents admitted about the irrational thoughts toward receiving counseling and psychological services, Qatari citizens had seen the efficacy of religious ways, Traditional methods, and old family members instead of counseling services.
Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, & Eltaiba [30] 2004 Jordan, UAE, And Arab 48	Cross-national study of attitudes towards seeking professional help: Jordan, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Arabs in Israel	262 female Muslem-Arab students	Subjects from all nationalities rely on different sources of help such as, asking help from Allah (God) through prayer and reciting Quranic verses during times of psychological distress. Married subjects and students in advanced years of age and study had more positive attitudes than single subjects and those younger and junior in the university regarding to seeking counseling and psychological help.
Youssef & Deane [31] 2006 Arab in Australia	Factors influencing mental-health help-seeking in Arabic-speaking communities in Sydney, Australia	35 subjects represented 3 Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanese, and Jordan)	Clients feel shameful and stigmatized with psychological problems, due to this fact, individuals are not encouraged to show and express their emotions/feelings in front of others in Arab culture, also some Arab traditions regard talking to outsiders about personal and family problems as shameful In the Arab world, clients and patients continient view psychology as a science which doesn't have strong and deep foundation to be viewed as a recognizable discipline which provides trusting healing choices in comparison to medical treatment that depend on psychological mediation by drugs and vaccine. Cultural and traditional sources of help, for example, old family members, traditional healers, and religious leaders are more trusted.
Al-Krenawi, Graham, Al-Bedah, Kadri, & Sehwal [29] 2009 Egypt, Kuwait, Palestine, and Arab 48	Cross-National Comparison of Middle Eastern University Students: Help-Seeking Behaviors, Attitudes Toward Helping Professionals, and Cultural Beliefs About Mental Health Problems	716 undergraduate students in 4 countries.	Participants vary in terms of their attitudes toward help-seeking behavior, stigma, the traditional and modern psychology methods, and recognition of personal need. Participants from Palestine demonstrated more sensitive to other's views about seeking psychological help as compared to other group's respondents. Participants from Kuwaiti tended to find acceptable help in traditional healing method, in the other hand, Egyptian subjects were more trusting regarding to modern psychological system comparing to other groups respondents
Alaedein [13] 2011 Jordan	College Students' Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help: The Role of Personality Factors	286 college students	Participants have showed negative attitudes toward seeking counseling and psychological help. Furthermore, females are more desirable than males in term of seeking psychological and counseling help. need recognition and psychological openness are important factors might contribute to encourage men seeking mental health services
Hamid & Furnham [8] 2013 UK	Factors affecting attitude towards seeking professional help for mental illness: a UK Arab perspective	204 adults: 104 British, 100 Arab born outside of the UK.	Arabs showed less positive attitudes towards mental health and counseling services, Arab people have stronger beliefs in supernatural instead of Western physiology. Confidentiality concerns are important factor regarding to Arab attitudes than British subjects. Generally, self-disclose is seen as something negative, as a weakness in the Arab tradition.
Heath, Vogel, and Al-Darmaki [12] 2016 UAE	Help-Seeking Attitudes of United Arab Emirates Students: Examining Loss of Face, Stigma, and Self-Disclosure	407 college students.	Individuals start seeking professional help as a last resort. Discouragement of self-disclosing to outsiders, stigma, and loss of societal face were considered important barriers associated with Emirati students' reluctance to seek professional psychology and counseling services.
Rayan & Jaradat [32] 2016 Jordan	Stigma of Mental Illness and Attitudes Toward Psychological Help-seeking in Jordanian University Students	519 Jordanian university students	Students in Jordan have relatively less favorable attitudes towards seeking counseling and psychological help. Participants who reported less stigma scores and those who experienced counseling and psychological services were more likely to have positive attitudes towards seeking professional help.
Al Ali, Alqurneh, Dalky, & Al-Omari [33] 2017 Jordan	Factors affecting help-seeking attitudes regarding mental health services among attendance of primary health care centers in Jordan	482 clients who attend 25 primary care centers in Jordan with an average age were 34.75 years.	Cultural beliefs about psychological and mental health illness, stigma, fear of self-disclosing, and traditional healing methods are considered major factors stop people from seeking counselling help. Many families and clients with psychological problems are likely to view the infliction as a demonic devotion or "evil eye". Counselling and psychotherapy are considered "just talk". So visiting a counselor/therapist or seeking a help of a counsellor or psychotherapist is not only viewed as a worthless method which cannot bring about the desired change but also portrays weakness or humiliating act that might put the family in disgrace.
Vogel, Strass, Heath, Al-Darmaki, ...Zlatti [34] 2017 UAE & 9 Countries	Stigma of seeking psychological services: Examining college students across ten countries/regions	417 college students from UAE, the total sample: 3,276 college students.	Stigma in the help-seeking process has been considered to be an important factor with a small to moderate negative effect on help seeking among college students in UAE.

2. Loss of face

Social reputation has been visualized as a “fear of loss of face” by Eastern cultures, or the eagerness to ward off unpermitted-cultural behaviour (13, 41). In the Arab world, ones’ actions are deemed as a manifestation of their families’ fidelity to social patterns, dignity, and anticipation (12, 42), and confirming the social influence of family is-considered to be very important (32). Hence, loss of face possesses ramifications not only on the person himself but also on the families social status (12, 13).

3. Extended Family

Caring, help and support from family members are common characteristics of extended families in developing countries. Likewise, families in the Arab world are extended families and that solving family members’ problems are their way of showing their cares and concerns (28). Moreover, some Arab traditions regard talking to outsiders about personal and family problems as shameful (5, 31). This leads ones to perceive this behaviour as pessimistic and hence restrain from seeking assistance to uphold status (31). In contrast, some researchers contest that only when extended families fall apart, counselling from non-family members would be recommendable (28, 31).

4. Fear of self-disclosure

In the Arab world, self-disclose is seen as something negative, as a weakness, and that is why in the Arab tradition, one wouldn’t look for help from professionals (8,15, 25). In general, individuals are not encouraged to show and express their emotions/feelings in front of others in Arab culture. Due to this fact, many tend to find acceptable help in the community (i.e., traditional methods, religious leaders, and old family members), in the other hands, clients feel more appropriate to bring up non-psychological issues to therapy (such as: career issues, academic adjustment) compared to personal psychological issues.

Moreover, many clients would verbalize their psychological and mental health symptoms are seen as being physical in order to avoid the stigma as seen as mentally sick. For instance, it was reported that in expressing their sufferings and illnesses, clients may use various types of metaphoric expressions for example “my heart is burning” to express sadness or “my blood is boiling” to visualize frustration and anger. These metaphoric expressions may reflect the clients’ cultural conception of mental processes rather than lack of the ability to express themselves (43).

5. Not trustworthy compared to medical treatments (i.e., psychiatry).

In the Arab world, clients and patients continent view psychology as a science which doesn’t have strong and deep foundation to be viewed as a recognizable discipline which provides trusting healing choices

in comparison to medical treatment that depend on psychological mediation by drugs and vaccine (29, 31). The reasons are predominantly in the notion that psychotherapy treatments generally, are seen as a tool of change as “just talk” with all the ramifications originating from such conceptualization (33, 44).

6. Traditional healing methods

Many families and clients with psychological problems are likely to view the infliction as a demonic devotion or “evil eye”. (33). Due to this believe, they opt for traditional healing methods (e.g. magic (sorcery), spiritual methods, and amulets (8, 29). The reason behind this issue is related to curing habits which are grounded in the classical healing in the nature of services provided in the Arab region (29).

7. Help-seeking from religious healers

“Mattawa”, a religious individual who provides traditional healing in the Arab Golf countries or “sheikh” in countries such as Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, is widely practised and an acceptable method of sick treatment in the Arab community. Mattawa or sheikh often employs nonmedical, and non-psychological methods of treatment such as reciting Quranic verses and traditional medicine (30, 31). These healers believe that this cure will fend of demon passion or “evil spirit” and therefore heal the illness. This idea or belief originates from the Arab believing that mental illness is due to a Jinni (devil) living in ones’ body and taking over ones’ mind (45).

This outcome is homogeneous to their cultural and traditional reliance on other sources of help, for example, old family members, traditional healers, and religious leaders, and (e.g. Mattawa or sheikh) (8, 27, 31).

8. Mental Illness Conceptualization

Traditionally, mental illness is seen within the medical model in the Arab region. Clients who suffer from mental illness are normally treated with occupation therapy. All those ways of treatment (e.g. Psychoeducational, counselling, and psychotherapy) are considered “just talk” and, hence not viewed as medicinal (31, 33). visiting a counselor/therapist or seeking a help of a counsellor or psychotherapist is not only viewed as a worthless method which cannot bring about the desired change but also portrays weakness or humiliating act that might put the family in disgrace (5, 46).

Dealing strategies with negative attitudes toward counseling help-seeking

Previous researchers have argued that to change personal and social norms can only be made through a concerted effort requires societal changes. They contend that we should use changes through education and persuasion (27). In order for ones to seek assistance, they must embrace the fact that they require professional assistance and gradually disregard pessimistic feelings

related to professional help-seeking services.

Stigma of mental illness is still prevalent even though the media has played a great role in increasing the awareness of the need for professional help services, and public awareness of psychological problems (e.g. Jordan and UAE) (15, 25). There is still stigmatization against those with mental illness and those who are visiting a psychologist, thus, still need more efforts to increase the awareness of need for psychological services through media (especially, social media, and radio) that penetrates the whole country. Parents should also understand the importance of counseling services to their children, and by sending their children to counselors doesn't mean they have mental health problems. Furthermore, Counseling sessions are commonly strictly confidential. In particular, facilitating maintenance of confidentiality consider important factor during sessions (8).

Despite a number of dramatic social, cultural, and economic shifts that have contributed to an increased prevalence of concerns such as adjustment disorder or stress, substance abuse issues, anxiety, and depression, many are still hesitant and reluctance to seek counseling help, highly likely due to negative attitudes toward seeking professional help (7, 15). Generally, the mass media (TV, radio, social media) and intervention programs could help to provide better perspectives on counseling and psychological help. The information shared in the media (TV, radio, social media) would reach all people and simultaneously promotes awareness about seeking help. Vogel et al (34) have suggested that to encouraging people to make use of mental health, psychological, and counseling services, therapists should designed interventions and treatments to reduce the self-stigma associated with seeking professional help.

Implications

Family and parents in Arab culture play a conventional role in the life of its members. The majority of Arab families are seen as the main and important source of social, emotional, and financial support and in many different ways to its members. Families should realize the importance of sending their children to counselors or therapists when needed since seeking counselling and psychological help is seen as a family affair.

Generally, to reduce the self-stigma related to help-seeking, the treatments and interventions should be designed to be more efficient in encouraging people in general and clients in particular, to make use of worldwide psychological services. Furthermore, Specific programs and treatments that might highlight the notion of expression ones' self to a counsellor or psychologist can help in freeing ones' emotions and helping one when faced with tough days should be made prevalent in the Arab community.

The individuals are not encouraged to express their

feelings and emotions in front of strangers or others in the Arab culture (12). Thus, therapists and counsellors need to encourage clients and teach them in regard to how express these emotions and feelings may affect their overall well-being.

Confidentiality is a main element in counselling, counselors and therapists should organize the sessions in suitable situations, for example, providing professional help services out of working hours or at the clients' home may provides a sense of security to reassure individuals and their families during seeking help. Also, providing psychological services for those who seeking professional help within the educational settings (schools, counseling centres, general health services), generally, would typically involved psychological services such as group therapy and individual therapy,

Since the religious leaders have important affects in the Arab community, it would be highly advisable to support them who actively handle religion and educational programmes on mental-health issues to enable them further to enhance the knowledge, practice, and methods of supporting those with psychological and mental health problems.

Well-trained practitioners, agencies and centres that usually lack resources need more facilitations and occupations.

Limitations

There are a few limitations in this study; one of these limitations in this review was not mentioning all the Arab countries; therefore, the results of the study- the attitudes toward counseling- cannot be generalizable for across all Arab world. Thus, research the attitudes toward counseling and psychology within other Arab countries is recommended, with other different sample (e.g. schools) is encouraged for future research.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion on the factors affecting attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help among Arab respondents gives us a clearer picture of the current trend of the said group. As aforementioned, self-stigma is predicted negative help-seeking attitudes. Vogel et al (22) found that self-stigma is more predictive of attitudes toward and willingness to receive counseling services than other important factors such as gender and perceived risk of counseling. The relationship between self-stigma and help seeking have investigated by Al-Darmaki (7) & Sayed (5) who found that self-stigma would prevent people and clients from seeking professional help regardless of any other consequences. In general, culture constraints, fear of self-disclosing, traditional healing methods, practitioners themselves, and are still considered important barriers associated with one's reluctance to seek professional psychology

and counseling services.

In spite of the potential benefits of professional psychological and counseling services, many with psychological and interpersonal problems reluctance to seek help for treatment. Shying away from receiving psychological help often increases the long-term negative effects of mental health problems. Understanding the variety of causes that could limit help-seeking may enable specialists to select the most appropriate solutions to enhance individuals' perception and their attitudes toward the role of counseling services.

In general, through this understanding the factors effecting attitudes related to Arab people may help specialists and psychologist to more understand the reasons behind people's reluctance to seek help in psychological and counseling sittings.

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