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# Help Seeking Behaviours and Depressive Symptoms in Arab Canadian and European Canadian Adolescents

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## INTRODUCTION

- A significant number of adolescents with mental health problems do not seek help from mental health professionals for their problems (Bergeron et al 2005; Zwaanswijk et al., 2007).
- Instead, adolescents prefer to seek help for their problems from informal resources, particularly peers and parent (Rickwood et al, 2007; Sheffield et al, 2004).
- There is a lack of cross-cultural research examining help seeking behaviours and social support for adolescents (Pines & Zaidman, 2003).
- There are cultural differences between European Canadian youth and Arab Canadian youth that may contribute to their help-seeking behaviours.
- In Arab Canadian youth, a collectivist culture exists (Pines & Zaidman, 2003) involving a greater emphasis on closeness and relatedness among their family and community (Florian, Mikulincer, Weller, 1993).
- Thus, it is important to examine the differences in help seeking behaviours between European Canadian and Arab Canadian youth, so that social supports and mental health interventions can be implemented in a culturally sensitive manner.

## OBJECTIVES

- The present study is an exploratory pilot study, with data taken from a larger study on adolescent help seeking. The research aim was to examine the relations between help seeking behaviours and mood problems among Arab Canadian and European Canadian adolescents.

### Research questions were as follows:

- What problems were reported by youth as their most stressful problem in the past 6 months?
- Of the youth who reported having a stressful problem, how many sought help for their problem?
- How many sources were consulted for help with the problem?
- Who did the youth report seeking help from?
- What types of barriers to seeking help were reported by Arab and European Canadian youth?
- Were there differences between the groups in depressive symptoms endorsed?
- For the Arab and European Canadian youth, were any depressive symptoms related to any of the reported barriers to help seeking?

## METHOD

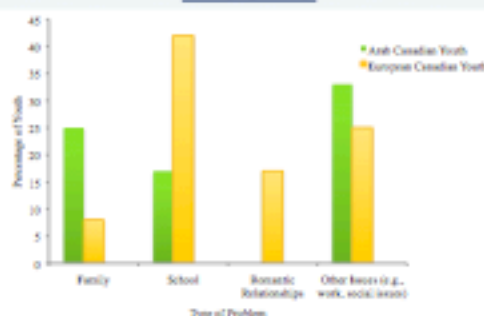
### Participants

- 12 Arab Canadian adolescents (six males) between the ages of 14 and 18 ( $M = 15.75$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) and 12 European Canadian adolescents, matched for age ( $M = 15.75$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) and gender (six males)
- Data were collected from adolescents at three demographically diverse high schools in a mid-sized city in Ontario, Canada.

### Measures

- Participants completed questionnaires assessing depressive symptoms, stressful life problems, sources of help, and barriers to seeking help for a stressful problem.
- Ethnicity information was collected in a background information questionnaire.
- Participants were asked to report the three most stressful or upsetting problems they had experienced in the past 6 months, and circle the most stressful or upsetting one.
- They indicated how stressful and serious this problem was, on 5-point Likert scales. They then indicated whether they felt they needed help, and whether they asked for help with the problem.
- If they had asked for help, they were asked to indicate, from a list of sources, whom they had asked (e.g., best friend, mother, teacher, psychologist). If they had not asked for help, they were asked to complete a checklist of reasons why they did not ask for help.
- Barriers to seeking help from informal sources were assessed with the 22-item Barriers to Informal Help Seeking scale (Stanhope, 2002), created for use in the larger study.
- Barriers to seeking help from formal sources were assessed with a modified version of the Barriers to Adolescent Help Seeking (BASH; Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick, & Morrissey, 1997) scale. This self-report measure contains 37 questions, with responses on a 5-point Likert scale.
- Depression symptoms were measured with the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), a 21-item self-report measure.

## RESULTS



1. *Figure 1.* Percentage of youth who reported each type of problem as their most stressful problem in the past six months.

Note. Participants indicated up to three problems.

There were no significant differences in perceived severity or stressfulness of problems between the two ethnic groups.

- Of those adolescents who reported having a stressful problem, 64% of European Canadian ( $n = 6$ ) and 44% of Arab Canadian youth ( $n = 4$ ) sought help for their problem.
- In asking for help with their problem, Arab Canadian youth consulted significantly less people ( $M = 1$ ,  $SD = 0$ ) than did European Canadian youth ( $M = 4$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ),  $t(8) = 2.803$ ,  $p = .02$ .
- Arab Canadian youth reported seeking help from only family members, whereas European Canadian youth reported seeking help from family, friends, and other sources (e.g., teachers).
- There were no significant differences between the two ethnic groups on the types of barriers to seeking help for their problem.
- Results revealed that Arab Canadian youth ( $M = 16.18$ ,  $SD = 12.87$ ) endorsed more depressive symptoms compared to European Canadian youth ( $M = 7.58$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ;  $t(21) = -2.119$ ,  $p = .046$ ).
- In Arab Canadian youth, depression was significantly positively correlated with the following barriers to help seeking: The problem being too personal, perception of family being sufficient for help, having an external locus of control, concerns of confidentiality, and affordability of professional services.

Table 1											
Correlations between BDI-II scores and BASH subscale scores											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Personal	1										
2. Confidentiality	-.001	1									
3. Knowledge	.002	.008	1								
4. Affordability	.001	.008	.008	1							
5. Too personal	.001	.008	.008	.008	1						
6. Family	.001	.008	.008	.008	.008	1					
7. Friends	.001	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	1				
8. Other	.001	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	1			
9. School	.001	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	1		
10. Romantic	.001	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	1	
11. Other	.001	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	.008	1

## DISCUSSION

- In the present study, Arab Canadian youth sought help for their most stressful problem less often than European Canadian youth. Additionally, Arab Canadian youth reported only seeking help from family members, whereas European Canadian youth sought help from family, friends, and others.
- This finding is consistent with research by Pines and Zaidman (2003) who found that Arab adults were less likely to discuss emotional problems and when the Arab adults sought help, the highest percentage of adults stated turning to their spouse or immediate family members. The authors suggested that these results might represent the shame felt by Arab individuals for disclosing personal information to others.
- Barriers to help seeking were examined in relation with depressive symptoms. This may help explain why Arab Canadian youth are less likely to seek help for their problems and to only seek help from family.
- Since the Arab culture is distinct from other Western cultures, helping Arab Canadian youth cope with mental health problems requires professionals to understand mental health within the context of the Arab culture.