

Mental Illness in the Middle East: Religion and Culture Modify Stigma

This study examines the stigma surrounding mental illness in the Middle East, specifically in Jordan. There is a lack of awareness of how mental illness is viewed and dealt with in the Middle East. It is crucial to further understand how mental health exists in the entire world, not just the West, so that care can be maximally accessible and effective for everyone. Leaving mental illness untreated can have dire consequences. I had two hypotheses: first, that the culture and prominent religion are detrimental to Arabs' willingness to seek care and second, that professionals are critical of their Western training. In order to test these hypotheses I interviewed six professionals in the mental health field practicing in Amman, Jordan. I found that whether an individual seeks mental health care is mediated by cultural and religious factors. While the culture often perpetuates the shame and stigma surrounding mental illness, Islam helps many clients come to peace with a diagnosis. It was additionally made clear that in order for professionals in the field to be most effective, they must adapt the Western module of training to fit with both the culture and religion of Eastern clients. Future research on mental health across the world should interview not only mental health professionals in the Middle East, but also their clients.