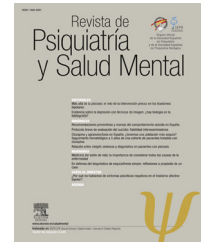


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REVIEW ARTICLE

Temporary stages and motivational variables: Two complementary perspectives in the help-seeking process for mental disorders[☆]Gema del Valle del Valle^a, Carmen Carrió^b, Amparo Belloch^{c,*}^a Agencia Valenciana de Salud, Departamento 04, Unidad de Salud Mental de Sagunto, Sagunto, Valencia, Spain^b Agencia Valenciana de Salud, Departamento 06, Unidad de Salud Mental de Burjassot, Burjassot, Valencia, Spain^c Unidad de investigación y tratamiento de obsesiones y compulsiones, l'TOC, Departamento de Psicología de la Personalidad, Evaluación y Tratamientos Psicológicos, Facultad de Psicología, Universitat de València, Estudi General, Valencia, Spain

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KEYWORDSHelp-seeking;
Delay treatment;
Barriers to
help-seeking;
Motivators for
help-seeking;
Mental disorders**Abstract**

Introduction: Help-seeking for mental disorders is a complex process, which includes different temporary stages, and in which the motivational variables play an especially relevant role. However, there is a lack of instruments to evaluate in depth both the temporary and motivational variables involved in the help-seeking process. This study aims to analyse in detail these two sets of variables, using a specific instrument designed for the purpose, to gain a better understanding of the process of treatment seeking.

Material and methods: A total of 152 patients seeking treatment in mental health outpatient clinics of the NHS were individually interviewed: 71 had Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, 21 had Agoraphobia, 18 had Major Depressive Disorder, 20 had Anorexia Nervosa, and 22 had Cocaine Dependence. The patients completed a structured interview assessing the help-seeking process. Disorder severity and quality of life was also assessed.

Results: The patients with agoraphobia and with major depression took significantly less time in recognising their mental health symptoms. Similarly, patients with major depression were faster in seeking professional help. Motivational variables were grouped in 3 sets: motivators for seeking treatment, related to the negative impact of symptoms on mood and to loss of control over symptoms; motivators for delaying treatment, related to minimisation of the disorder; and stigma-associated variables.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Búsqueda de ayuda;
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tratamiento;
Motivos de demora;
Motivos de consulta;
Trastornos mentales

Conclusions: The results support the importance of considering the different motivational variables involved in the several stages of the help-seeking process. The interview designed to that end has shown its usefulness in this endeavour.

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Fases temporales y variables motivacionales: dos perspectivas complementarias en el proceso de búsqueda de ayuda por enfermedad mental

Resumen

Introducción: La búsqueda de ayuda profesional por enfermedad mental es un proceso complejo, con etapas y momentos temporales diferentes, en el que desempeñan un papel especialmente relevante los aspectos motivacionales. Sin embargo, no hay instrumentos de evaluación que permitan valorar tanto las variables temporales como las motivacionales. El objetivo de este estudio es ofrecer información detallada sobre ambos conjuntos de variables, mediante un instrumento específicamente diseñado para ello, de tal manera que se pueda comprender mejor el proceso de búsqueda de tratamiento.

Material y métodos: Participaron 152 pacientes ambulatorios que habían solicitado ayuda profesional en una unidad de salud mental del SNS. Los diagnósticos principales fueron: trastorno obsesivo-compulsivo (n = 71), agorafobia (n = 21), trastorno depresivo mayor (n = 18), anorexia nerviosa (n = 20) y dependencia a cocaína (n = 22). Los pacientes fueron evaluados mediante una entrevista estructurada, específicamente diseñada para el estudio. Asimismo, se obtuvieron datos sobre gravedad y calidad de vida.

Resultados: Los pacientes con agorafobia y depresión mayor tardaron menos en reconocer los síntomas que los pacientes de los otros grupos. Asimismo, los pacientes con depresión mayor demoraron menos en solicitar ayuda profesional. Las variables motivacionales se agruparon en 3 conjuntos: motivos de consulta, relacionados con el malestar y la falta de control; motivos de demora de la consulta, relacionados con la minimización del problema; y motivos asociados al estigma.

Conclusiones: Los resultados indican la necesidad de valorar las distintas variables motivacionales implicadas en las diferentes etapas del proceso de búsqueda de ayuda profesional. La entrevista que presentamos ha mostrado ser útil para ello.

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Introduction

People who suffer from a mental disorder, and often those close to them, face complex decisions as to how to approach their distressing condition and this may or may not lead them to seek professional help. The "path" providing access for patients to specialist healthcare professionals is not always direct and immediate, because it is very dependent on the extent of activation and direction when the process is started, and on how persistently it is followed. In this regard, it is very probable that the type of distress and its severity play a major role in motivating the search for help. Other elements ranging from sociodemographic aspects to attitudes, beliefs and values regarding mental disorders and illnesses and their treatment, held by both the sufferer and the people close to them, will determine where this search will be directed.

The difficulty in deciding to seek professional help is reflected in the low percentage of people with a mental disorder that seek treatment, despite great distress and impaired quality of life,¹ even though they are aware that

they need help. Published studies indicate that this percentage varies between 23.3% and 41%,²⁻⁷ and that it increases to 55%–65% if there is comorbidity and/or moderate and/or severe interference.²⁻⁴

Motivational variables play a fundamentally relevant role in the process of help-seeking. The specialist literature has particularly focussed on analysing the motivators for professional help-seeking. From this perspective, very diverse motivators have been demonstrated, from those that are specifically disorder-related, to the distress felt in appraising the disorder, concern about stigma, fear of the opinion of third parties, fear that the symptoms will worsen and even a determination to self-manage the problem. Another group of motivators are belief-related: from those that question the utility and/or efficacy of treatment, to beliefs that the symptoms will pass without treatment, or will be resolved with the support of family and friends, or that the disorder is not serious enough to warrant specialist treatment. The third group of motivators includes very diverse variables, generally associated with factors that are outside the problem

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