

# **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NORMS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA**

Sarah Benkirane, BA  
Université du Québec à Montréal  
Montréal, Québec

For many migrants, the process of immigration and settlement in a new country is often stressful and presents numerous challenges. Upon arrival in a new country, migrants are often required to develop new social ties, rebuild a social network, learn a new language, and understand new norms and values. Experiencing significant life changes, such as those that occur upon migration, can be associated with both psychiatric illness and lower well-being. Immigrants to Canada report more psychological distress than Canadian-born adult. However, they are less likely to access the available mental health resources than individuals born in Canada, despite an equal or greater need. While the small body of research on migrants' mental health help-seeking attitudes has heavily focused on psychosocial, demographic, and systemic factors such as language barriers, access to services, fear, and stigma, fewer studies have focused on the role of social norms and peer norms in help-seeking attitudes. To begin to unpack the social barriers to accessing mental health care, 155 participants completed a questionnaire regarding proximal norms (norms in their immediate network), distal norms (cultural and societal norms) and acculturation orientations that influence immigrants' attitudes toward seeking mental health care. Three multiple regressions demonstrated that (1) psychological openness - the degree to which an individual is open to recognizing the presence of a psychological problem - is negatively associated with orientation to their heritage culture; that (2) help-seeking propensity -one's willingness to seek help-is positively associated with proximal norms in the heritage culture; that (3) indifference to stigma - the extent to which individuals are concerned about stigma - is influenced by distal norms in the host and heritage cultures. These findings allow us to begin to understand the social factors that influence immigrant attitudes toward mental health care and to develop measures to facilitate access to psychological support.

Full List of Authors  
Sarah Benkirane, Marina M. Doucerain

## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Distinguish proximal and distal social norms and their differential influence on mental health help-seeking attitudes for a multicultural sample of immigrants.
2. Determine which aspects of help-seeking attitudes (psychological openness, help-seeking propensity, indifference to stigma) are associated with which social norms for a multicultural sample of immigrants.