The Effects of Eastern versus Western Cultures on Women's Perceptions and Disclosure of Mental Illness

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Introduction

Mental illnesses and the stigma that surrounds them have caused societal unrest since the development of the modern human. However, there remain differences in the way individuals perceive mental illness, allowing various levels of stigma to arise. The focus of this research is to determine the contrast between the views of Western and Eastern cultures concerning mental health status - exploring how cultural expectations for women affect their perception, and disclosure, of mental illnesses. Understanding the underlying causes for stigma will better allow society to combat it, and ultimately, move past it.

Overview of Research

This research involves studies that examined societal expectations for Western and Eastern cultures, and experiments measuring the perceptions of mental illness from individuals with various heritages. Articles concentrating on the factors that influence one’s disclosure of mental illness were included, as well. These articles were collected and analyzed to determine the possible correlation between one’s cultural heritage and likelihood of mental illness stigma. Articles with specific focal points on women impacted by mental illness were also incorporated, in order to determine the effects gender roles may play in the perception and disclosure of such.

Results

This collection of research allows for strong distinctions to be made between Eastern and Western cultures concerning mental illness stigma. This is largely due to the societal traditions and standards present within Eastern cultures, towards all genders. However, in most Eastern cultures, women seem to feel more stigma on average, due to their predetermined place in society. Furthermore, though stigma is more prominent within Eastern cultures, it is still widely notable within Western countries, as well. There are different sources contributing towards stigma from all cultural aspects; this affects the likelihood of an individual to hold stigmatizing views, as well as the probability of individuals to disclose their mental health status.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine the cultural factors that impacted individuals’, specifically women’s, perceptions of mental illness. Through my research, I found that stigma is present throughout all cultures-Eastern and Western alike. However, Eastern cultures were found to be more expressive of stigma, due to their strict, traditional values for the members of their societies, especially women. This causes them to be less likely to seek treatment, or disclose their mental illness at all. Western cultures, however, are more likely to embrace, and thus, treat psychological ailments, due to the increased levels of social acceptance and available treatment options. Making these distinctions allows one to draw upon the correlations associated with mental illness stigma and cultural influences. Uncovering the principal reasons for the existing stigma will expose it directly, and create opportunities for populations to become educated on the realities of mental illness. This will allow for disorders of this caliber to be more widely accepted, and thus, cause the social stigma associated with them to eventually dissipate.