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Help-seeking Behaviors for Depressed Mood Among the Elderly in a Southern Taiwanese Community

Key Words

Elders
Help-seeking behavior
Depressed mood

ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to describe the help-seeking patterns and associated beliefs regarding depressed mood among community-dwelling elders in southern Taiwan. The data consisted of 210 interviews obtained from a community long-term care survey in 1995. The results revealed that more than 20% of the subjects who had ever felt depressed reported using informal resources (e.g., talking with someone or attending religious activities) to deal with depressed mood states. The most popular activities that subjects engaged in to alleviate depression were performing hobbies, talking with someone, praying, sleeping, and exercising. Only 16% of the subjects who felt depressed during the last 6 months said they "did nothing" to alleviate depression. None of the elderly reported use of mental health services to improve depressed mood. According to the results of bivariate analyses, only subjects' gender and depressed mood states were related to their help-seeking strategies. The 4 leading causes of depression as perceived by the subjects were physical problems, children's lack of filial piety, poor personal relationships, and low economic status. Implications for health promotion and future research direction are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Depression is a common mental health problem among the elderly. In Taiwan, the prevalence of depressed mood among community-dwelling elders is estimated to be much higher than the prevalence of depressive disorders, ranging from 16% to 31%.^{1,2} Accumulated evidence from previous epidemiological studies has revealed several risk factors for depressed mood/depressive symptoms among Western as well as Chinese elderly community residents, such as poor physical health status,³⁻⁵ poor self-care capacity,^{4,6} low economic status,⁷ and fewer social networks/less social support.^{4,5,7}

Many studies of help-seeking behavior among the elderly focus on physical disorders. Relatively little is known about the help-seeking behavior for depressed mood. Hoyt *et al.*⁸ used data from a panel study of 1487 adults and found that persons living in rural environments were less willing to seek mental health care. Henderson *et al.*⁹ studied 55 community subjects and found that most individuals (66.1%) with a moderate number of depressive symptoms did not seek professional assistance; no demographic differences were found between those who sought help and those who did not. Ray *et al.*¹⁰ found that perceived responsibility predicted the sources of help selected by those elderly who believed that their problems were medical, but not

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