

A LINE ON LIFE

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Talk to Someone Who Can Help

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Recently the *American Psychological Association (APA)* hired an independent research company to do a phone survey to find out what people thought about psychological health and psychological services. The company interviewed 1001 Americans aged 21-65. Each respondent was a primary health care decision-maker for their household. Since they were decision-makers for their household, more were women (66%). Most (52%) were middle class, earning \$20,000-\$50,000. Of those who indicated their income, 25% were above \$50,000, and 15% were under \$20,000. The majority (63%) had at least some post-high-school education. Here are some results from this survey.

A large majority (84%) valued good psychological health. They "*understand the link between psychological health and physical health,*" and they "*agree that a person should spend time doing things to improve his or her mental and emotional health.*" In contrast, almost half (47%) wanted a better understanding of when to seek help from a mental health professional. Various factors were seen as important **barriers** to seeking help —

- lack of insurance coverage (84%)
- concern about cost (84%)
- lack of confidence in outcome (76%)
- not knowing how to choose the right professional (68%)
- not knowing when you need professional help (64%)
- Concern about time span of treatment (59%).

These were followed by concerns about the effect on their job or career (53%), others finding out (31%) and what these others would think (24%).

Three-quarters or more of the people would seek help for serious mental disorders like schizophrenia (93%), suicidal tendencies (87%), alcohol or drug dependency (86%), eating disorders (83%), depression or anxiety (80%), or problems their children are having (76%). However, fewer would seek psychological help with a chronic or serious physical disease, problems with marriage or divorce, difficulties in rearing children, the death of someone close to them, general stress, making life style changes, or problems at work.

Although 51% agreed that their family physician did a good job of meeting their *"emotional and mental health needs,"* 81% were more likely to use a *"physician who works with a psychologist."* Mental health professionals had been used by 43% of the households. (With some of the concerns mentioned above, this percentage may be low.) Almost half (49%) went to psychologists, while 38% chose psychiatrists, and 14% went to social workers. The remainder went to general therapists, various types of counselors, or other professionals. Of those who sought help, 74% were satisfied with the professional they had picked.

Rather than dispensing magical cures, mental health professionals only help you to help yourself.

How do you know when you need help? The APA offers several guidelines to help you decide. You should seek help when —

- you feel like you can't do it alone
- you feel trapped, like there is nowhere to turn
- you worry all the time and never seem to find answers
- the way you feel is affecting your sleep, your eating habits, your job, your relationships, your everyday life
- it's not getting any better.

Even if you want to get professional help, how do you find someone? Get information from those you trust. Ask your family physician, teacher, clergy member, or family and friends who know of various mental health professionals. If those sources fail, you can look in the **Yellow Pages** of your local phone book under *"psychiatrists"* (usually a subheading under *"physicians"*), *"psychologists"*, *"psychotherapists"*, *"social workers"* or *"counselors"*. The heading, *"Social Service Organizations,"* may give sources of help for more specific problems. If you call the APA (**1-800-964-2000**) or get them online at apa.org, they can lead you to state or local referral services for your area. Help yourself now by talking to someone who can help!
