



# Barriers and Facilitators to Mental Health Help-Seeking among Older Adults: A Systematic Review

Raghad Saeed, Rayan Sheik, Usra ElShaikh  
 Supervised by: Dr. Diana Alsayed Hassan, Tawanda Chivese

Department of Public Health, College of Health Sciences, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar College of Medicine, Qatar University

## Introduction

Mental health is a critical topic that should be addressed more often. On average, over 20% of older adults suffer from a mental disorder.<sup>7</sup> Despite this increase in mental health illnesses among older adults, they are very unlikely to seek mental health help.<sup>6</sup> Seeking help for mental health issues requires a person to reach out and to communicate their problems with mental health professionals in order to seek the help and support that they need.<sup>1</sup> The reluctance to seek formal mental health treatment can lead to adverse outcomes that can only result in the worsening of the individual's mental health status.<sup>9</sup> The main aim of this study is to systematically review and summarize quantitative literature on the barriers and facilitators that influence older adult's mental health help-seeking behaviors. Furthermore, this review also explores the prevalence of mental health help-seeking behaviors among older adults.

## Objectives

This research aims to systematically review and summarize quantitative literature on the barriers and facilitators that influence older adult's mental health help-seeking behaviors and explores the prevalence of mental health help-seeking behaviors among older adults.

## Methods

A systematic review guided by Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) was conducted. The review protocol was registered and published on PROSPERO having the following registration number: (CRD42021238853). The systematic search was conducted using four research databases with no language or place restrictions. The databases that were included were PubMed, Medline, EMBASE, ProQuest central, and Scopus. In addition, Google Scholar, article references, and relevant reviews were further searched and investigated to achieve a comprehensive search for any additional relevant publications. The search strategy used was based on synonyms of the primary search terms which included 4 main concepts: mental health, AND help-seeking, AND barriers, AND/OR facilitators. The studies were assessed independently by at least two authors using title/abstract for the selection of eligible studies using Rayyan system. Articles that were quantitative studies published during the period between 2015-2021, that address barriers and/or facilitators to mental health help seeking among older adults aged 65 years old or older and examining depression, anxiety, and psychological distress disorders were considered for inclusion

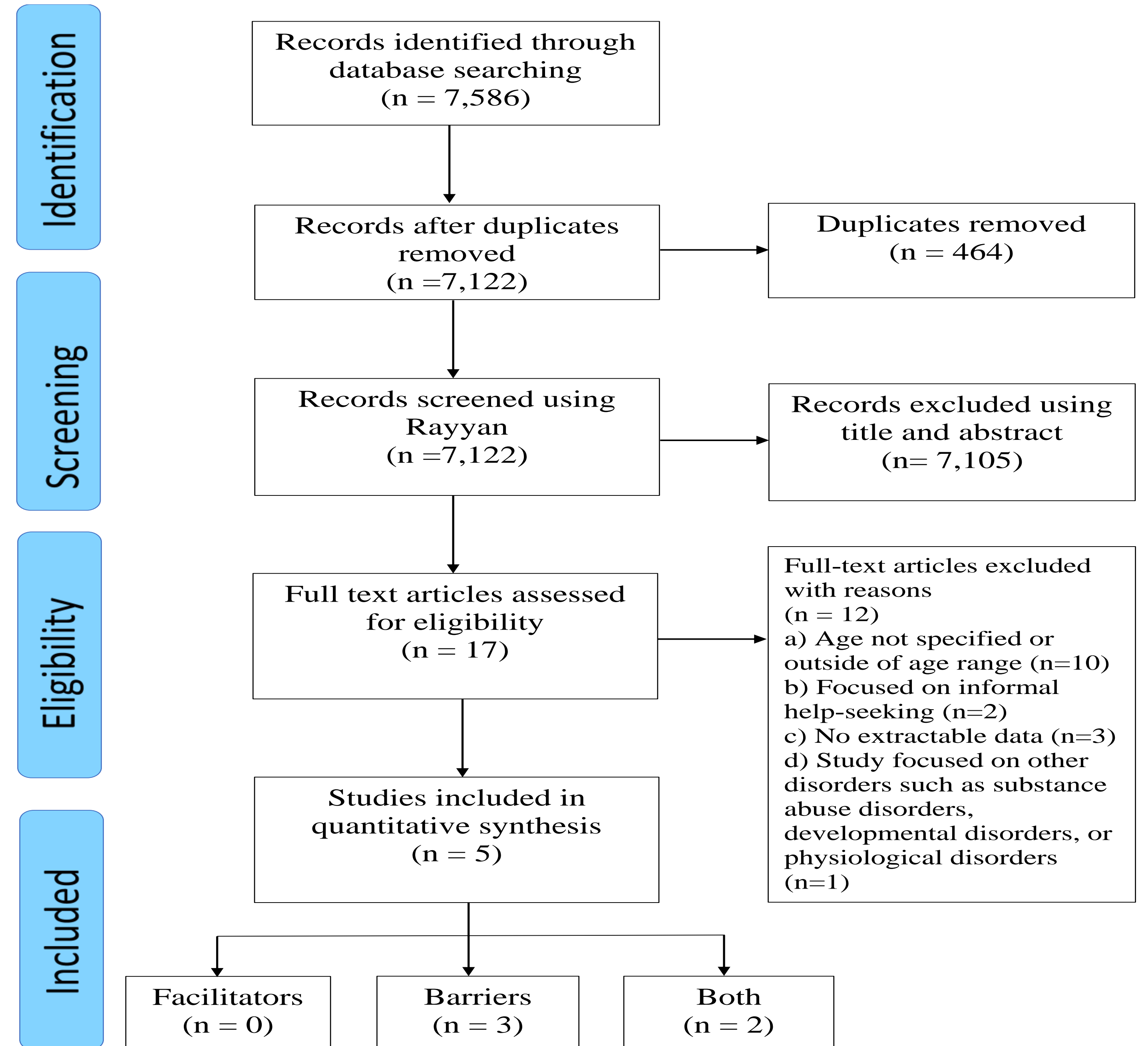
### Studies Screening and Selection:



## References

- Aguirre Velasco, A., Cruz, I. S. S., Billings, J., Jimenez, M., & Rowe, S. (2020). What are the barriers, facilitators and interventions targeting help-seeking behaviours for common mental health problems in adolescents? A systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 20(1), 293. doi:10.1186/s12888-02002659-0
- Anderson, K., Wickramariyaratne, T., & Blair, A. (2017). Help-seeking intentions for anxiety among older adults. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 23(5), 489-495. doi:10.1071/PY15185
- Blais, R. K., Tsai, J., Southwick, S. M., & Pietrzak, R. H. (2015). Barriers and facilitators related to mental health care use among older veterans in the United States. *Psychiatric Services*, 66(5), 500-506. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201300469
- Brenes, G. A., Danhauer, S. C., Lyles, M. F., Hogan, P. E., & Miller, M. E. (2015). Barriers to Mental Health Treatment in Rural Older Adults. *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 23(11), 1172-1178. doi:10.1016/j.jagp.2015.06.002
- Chai, Y. H., Tong, S. F., & Wahab, K. B. A. (2021). Intention to seek professional help for depression and its associated factors among elderly patients in tenkera health clinic, Melaka, Malaysia. *Medical Journal of Malaysia*, 76(1), 61-67.
- Mackenzie, C. S., Scott, T., Mather, A., & Sareen, J. (2008). Older adults' help-seeking attitudes and treatment beliefs concerning mental health problems. *The American journal of geriatric psychiatry : official journal of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry*, 16(12), 1010-1019. doi:10.1097/JGP.0b013e31818cd3be
- Mental Health: Strengthening our Response. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-healthstrengthening-our-response>
- Sorkin, D. H., Murphy, M., Nguyen, H., & Biegler, K. A. (2016). Barriers to Mental Health Care for an Ethnically and Racially Diverse Sample of Older Adults. *J Am Geriatr Soc*, 64(10), 2138-2143. doi:10.1111/jgs.14420
- Speerforck, S., & Schomerus, G. (2020). [Social milieu: A relevant concept for a better understanding of stigma and help-seeking?]. *Nervenarzt*, 91(9), 785-791. doi:10.1007/s00115-020-00927-8

## Results



Key barriers:	Key facilitators:
The main reported barriers were stigma, cost, and negative beliefs about the effectiveness of mental health counseling. Three studies (n=3) have reported stigma as a barrier; two studies showed that stigma accounts for 53.7% of the total participants who had it as a barrier. Cost was the most significant reported barrier to seek mental health help with OR = 3.90 and 95% CI (1.68-9.05). High level of education was significantly reported in both studies. one of the studies has mentioned that tertiary level of education has the highest statistical significance with OR (95% CI) = 4.95 (1.38-17.76)	The main reported facilitators were positive prior experience to mental health services, high level of education, and high income. Only two studies have reported facilitators to mental health help seeking. <sup>3,5</sup> Previous positive experience was reported as a high significant factor to seek mental health help with OR = 3.90 and 95% CI (1.68-9.05). High level of education was significantly reported in both studies. one of the studies has mentioned that tertiary level of education has the highest statistical significance with OR (95% CI) = 4.95 (1.38-17.76)

Prevalence of mental health help-seeking					
Study year	Country	Number of people to seek help	Number of total population	of willing to seek help	of total population
Anderson 2017	Australia	86	105		
Chai 2021	Malaysia	161	210		

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the key barriers to seeking mental health services are stigma, high cost, and perceptions on the effectiveness of treatment. The key facilitators were high income, a high level of education, and a prior experience to seeking mental health services. It is very important to take these barriers and facilitators into consideration in order to increase the rates of mental health services utilization. Campaigns can be done to combat these barriers and increase help-seeking rates among the older adult population. More research needs to be done on the facilitators to seeking mental health services since they are under-researched.