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[J Trauma Stress](#). 2020 Apr;33(2):137-150. doi: 10.1002/jts.22456. Epub 2019 Nov 7.

Barriers and Facilitators to Help-Seeking for Individuals With Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review

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PMID: 31697863 DOI: [10.1002/jts.22456](#)

Abstract

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) brings with it diagnostic symptoms that can be debilitating and persist for years. Left untreated, PTSD can have far-reaching and damaging consequences for the individual, families, communities, and society at large. Although early detection and intervention are recognized as key to the effective treatment of PTSD, many individuals who suffer from PTSD do not seek essential health services. The aim of the present study was to identify the barriers and facilitators to help-seeking for individuals with PTSD, based on existing literature. A systematic review, modeled on the Joanna Briggs Institute methodology for systematic reviews, examined studies cited in PsycINFO, Medline, Embase, CINAHL, and PILOTS published from January 1980 to January 2019. Eligible studies measured barriers and facilitators to help-seeking for adults with PTSD. Two reviewers independently screened citations, and double data extraction was exercised. Of 2,391 potentially relevant citations, 21 studies, published between 1989 and 2018 and based in six countries, were included. Seventeen studies focused on military as a target population. We identified 10 principal barrier and facilitator themes: trauma-related; treatment; therapist or provider; knowledge; access; health care system; sociocultural environment; values, beliefs, and priorities; past experiences; and medical care needs and illness burden. In identifying prominent barriers and facilitators to help-seeking for individuals with PTSD, this review highlights opportunities to inform policies and programs that promote PTSD knowledge and recognition, reduce public and personal stigma, improve access and quality of care, and encourage support for patients and families living with PTSD.

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