Abstract:

Chinese are less likely to use mental health care than other ethnic groups in the Netherlands, yet present more serious symptoms at the first consultation. However, the reason for these differences is unknown because of the scarcity of research. This doctoral research sets out to shed light on mental health care utilisation among this group. It further examines the adequacy of Dutch mental health care services for them.

Results show that the Chinese studied regarded Dutch health care as their primary method of managing general and mental health problems. The beliefs they expressed about mental illness did not seem to differ from those current in the West in ways that would form a major barrier to seeking help from mainstream services. Although cultural differences were observed which might create barriers to mutual understanding between health professionals and Chinese care users, they were not such as to prevent Chinese from accepting and benefiting from Dutch health care. The results of this research suggest that the main barriers have to do with practical factors, e.g. low Dutch proficiency, lack of knowledge of the health system, or language and communication problems. Other barriers include lack of cultural sensitivity among professionals and the failure of the health system to take steps to overcome these problems.

The study also showed that Chinese in the Netherlands form a heterogeneous group in terms of their origins, migration patterns, socio-economic status and levels of integration. Service providers and policy makers should take the diversity of the Chinese group into account and pay more attention to issues such as communication barriers, knowledge of the health care system, attitudes of professionals and discrimination.