
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Canadians of South Asian Origin Project Background

What is the aim of the study?

Culturally Adapted Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Canadians of South Asian Origin¹ is a project that aims to develop a specialized form of psychotherapy, specifically for South Asian populations living in Canada. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based psychological treatment, which this project will culturally adapt with the hope of improving mental health outcomes for South Asian Canadians affected by anxiety and depression.

Why is this study necessary?

- South Asians make up the largest racialized group in Canada. About 1.6 million individuals, or five per cent of the Canadian population, identify as South Asian.
- South Asian Canadians are affected by higher rates of mental health problems. Anxiety and mood disorders are higher among South Asian Canadians compared to other Canadian populations.
- Depression is more prevalent among South Asian women as compared to other women living in Canada.
- South Asian Canadians are up to 85 per cent less likely to access mental health services.

What is (CBT)?

CBT is an evidence-based psychological treatment that has been proven to help people with mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. It focuses on changing people's negative thoughts and beliefs, which can improve unhelpful attitudes and behaviours.

Why culturally adapt CBT?

- CBT is an evidence-based practice developed in a western context.
- When culturally adapted, CBT can improve mental health outcomes for immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural, and racialized populations, such as South Asian Canadians.
- Adapting CBT will improve access for South Asian populations to effective, culturally-appropriate mental health therapy.
- This is an innovative research project. It will be the first study to develop and test culturally adapted CBT for South Asians in North America.

¹ Note: the population for this project does not only include Canadian citizens, but also immigrants, refugees, and newcomers who do not have Canadian citizenship.

How will CBT be culturally adapted?

- Community members will be important contributors for this study.
- South Asian Canadians with lived experience, caregivers, community leaders, and mental health professionals will be consulted.
- Consultation findings will be used to adapt a standardized CBT manual and develop guidelines for culturally adapted CBT.
- Therapists at partner agencies in Vancouver, the Greater Toronto Area, and Ottawa will be trained to use the new guidelines, testing its acceptability and effectiveness with South Asian populations impacted by anxiety and depression.

Which agencies are involved?

With funding from Health Canada, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and the Mental Health Commission of Canada are collaborating with well-respected community agencies from across Canada, who will be essential in project implementation:

- Moving Forward Family Services (Vancouver)
- Punjabi Community Health Services (Greater Toronto Area)
- Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre, hosted by Somerset West Community Health Centre (Ottawa)