

# Abstract

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This research project aimed to explore how parents understand the causes, symptoms, existing sources of support and treatment options for adolescent mental health needs, as well as how these factors are impacted upon by broader social norms and cultural beliefs systems. Six parents of adolescent children were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview format. A thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data. Four themes emerged relating to: 1) parental causal attributions 2) symptom identification, 3) treatment seeking and sources of support, and 4) socio-cultural beliefs and stigma. The findings obtained indicated that parental perceptions of adolescent mental health were framed by social norms and cultural belief systems. The stigmatisation of adolescent mental health significantly impacted on the ways in which parents managed adolescent mental health difficulties. As a result of the stigmatised beliefs, parents placed emphasis on avoiding any behaviour which could potentially expose their adolescent children's emotional difficulties. In this regard, parents adopted an unrealistic optimism regarding their adolescent children's susceptibility to mental health difficulties. The causes of adolescent mental health difficulties were attributed to controllable factors, which were external to the adolescent. Parents also significantly reduced the symptom severity and in most cases attributed concerning adolescent emotional behaviours to normal adolescent development. Parents seemed to have limited knowledge and awareness of adolescent mental health difficulties, which inadvertently facilitated a lack of support seeking behaviours and treatment utilisation by parents.