

Improving Adolescent Utilization of Mental Health Services in Community-Based Settings

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Introduction

Purpose: The purpose of this evidence-based practice is to research barriers to the utilization of services adolescents face when seeking help for mental health challenges in rural areas and suggest practical solutions how to overcome these barriers.

Introduction: It has been found that “almost one in seven young people meet diagnostic criteria for a mental health disorder” (Radez et al., 2020). While the scope of adolescent mental health conditions is still being discovered, researchers studying behavioral health differences in urban and rural pediatric patients identify that “40-80% of children with mental disorders do not receive the care they need” (Watanabe-Galloway et al., 2017). Promise Community Health desires to improve the utilization of mental health services among the adolescent population in order to provide treatment for widespread conditions that affect adolescents, particularly anxiety and depression (S. Van Ruler, personal communication, September 2, 2022).

Clinical Question: In rural adolescent populations, what are the barriers to receiving care for mental health disorders, and how are these barriers addressed to effectively treat the population within this setting?

Definitions

Adolescents: Persons 10-17 years of age

Anxiety: Excessive worry and apprehensive expectations, occurring more days than not for at least six months, about activities or events, including work or school (Arnold, 2022)

Community-based: Patient-directed organizations that serve populations in a specific community with limited access to health care (Baldwin Family Healthcare, 2021)

Depression: A mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest (Mayo Clinic, 2018)

Mental Health: The field of medicine concerned with the maintenance or achievement of well-being and adjustment (Dictionary.com, 2022)

Mental Health Services: Therapy, counseling, prescribed medications, rehabilitation centers, and behavioral health programs

Rural: Small communities or towns on the outskirts of larger cities and suburbs

Abstract

A literature review was done between September 2022 - November 2022 to determine what Promise Community Health can do to increase adolescents' utilization of services for mental health challenges in rural areas. Ten articles were reviewed focusing on the barriers adolescents face when seeking treatment for mental health conditions. Five main barriers for adolescents in rural areas attempting to utilize treatment for mental health were identified. The purpose was to develop strategies to address these barriers so Promise can reach rural adolescents within their community.

Methods

Hundreds of articles on different databases were considered before selecting ten strongest articles from May 2014 to October 2021. CINAHL, ProQuest, and PubMed databases were utilized using and key words and phrases such as mental health services, utilization, adolescents or young adults or teenagers, barriers, telehealth, rural, community-based, rural, access, counseling, and mental health treatment. The Johns Hopkins appraisal system (JHN Evidence-Based Practice Model) method was used to appraise the level and quality of evidence of the literature reviews and studies.



Results

Research indicated that there are five main barriers to adolescents utilizing mental health services:

- A lack of available resources/mental healthcare providers
- A lack of knowledge surrounding mental health
- Stigma
- Logistical issues (transportation, cost, hours of operation, etc.)
- Negative past experiences

Proposed Intervention

We believe that education will have the largest impact on increasing the utilization of mental health services within the adolescent population. Specifically, an educational seminar held within local schools to educate both staff and students on:

- Resources available within the area
- Prevalence of the most common mental health conditions as well as their signs and symptoms
- Healthy coping mechanisms



Conclusion

Promise Community Health identified a need for increased utilization of their mental health services for struggling adolescents in their rural community; a literature review identified the barriers to seeking mental health treatment and how to best address them.

By implementing mental health education seminars for local schools, adolescents and staff will be empowered to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health disorders as well as utilize strategies to form healthy coping skills.

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