

research snapshot

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Mental Health Initiatives Must Be Based Upon the Preferences of Young Adults

What is this research about?

Mental health literacy refers to a person's ability to recognize, understand and access support for mental health concerns. Previous research has not explored Canadian young adults' mental health literacy. Young adults have higher rates of mental health concerns compared to other age groups, but also experience lower rates in accessing mental health care. Thus, it is important to measure mental health literacy to address this gap.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers used data collected by the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH). The nationwide survey was held in 2006, with participants aged 18 years and older. Participants were interviewed over the telephone, through random digit dialing. Out of 1,004 Canadians interviewed, 123 were young adults aged 18-24 years.

Participants were asked to take part in a survey related to mental and emotional health. At random, they were presented with one of three fictional cases on a person suffering with depression, anxiety or schizophrenia. Following the case, the participant was asked about:

What you need to know:

Canadian young adults rely more on informal sources of support for mental health, particularly young men. Research and practice need to address young adult's distinct mental health literacy.

- Recognition and Knowledge: What mental health concern was presented in the case?
- Etiology: What were the possible external, biological and personal causes?
- Management: What were the best options for support? Why would a person decide not to seek help from a professional? (For example: medical, community and/or family support)
- Their age, gender, level of education, income, and country of origin.

The researchers used the survey data to compare mental health literacy between young adults and older adults aged 25-64. They also sought to observe differences between genders.

What did the researchers find?

Young adults and adults shared similar responses with regards to recognition and etiology. Both groups recognized the types of mental health concerns presented, and agreed on the factors that caused depression, anxiety or schizophrenia.

However, young adults differed in their beliefs about managing mental health concerns. Young adults were less likely to seek out professional care, or to believe that medication or psychotherapy could be helpful. Canadian young adults were more likely to seek support for mental health through informal sources, such as friends and family. This finding was particularly strong with male participants, who showed more interest in dealing with mental health concerns on their own.

How can you use this research?

Mental health practitioners should consider the distinct ways that young adults experience and manage mental health, as revealed in this research. Projects that seek to create more awareness about mental health concerns and access to mental health support should embed personal and community empowerment. The reliance on informal sources of help for mental health concerns by young adults should also be addressed in practice. For example, more support should be provided for self-help and peer support options for young adults.

About the Researchers

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Marcus and Westra are Research Partners with Mobilizing Minds: Pathways to Young Adult Mental Health, a knowledge mobilization research project that aims to develop, pilot test and share resources with young adults (and those who support them) to help them in making decisions about their mental health.

Citation

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