

Perceived Barriers in the Utilisation of Mental Health Services by Youth in Rural Communities

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Abstract : Access to high-quality mental health services is sometimes challenging, especially for underserved populations in rural areas, including racial and ethnic minorities, and those from low socioeconomic status (SES). Youth experience more mental health challenges which need to be attended to by mental health specialists. They present symptoms which range from mild to severe. Once they consult mental health services, the diagnosis is made, and the etiology of the condition is identified so that treatment can be prescribed. This study used a qualitative approach to understand the barriers preventing utilisation of mental health service for young people in rural communities. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with 5 youth aged 22-30. Thematic Content analysis was used where 10 main themes emerged and were grouped as follows: (i) Poor mental health literacy / Lack of awareness of available mental health services, (ii) Travelling long distances to reach services which becomes expensive, (iii) Lack of access to transportation, (iv) Parents' and teachers' poor/delayed detection youth problems, (v) Lack of qualified professionals in their region who specialize in youth mental health, (vi) Stigma and social exclusion towards youth who utilise mental health services, (vii) Increased time out of work or school, (viii) Belief that problems would go away without help, (ix) Misinformation about mental health problems, (x) Rural community factors such as gossip networks and social visibility. An awareness campaign needs to be conducted where youth are provided with information on mental health and available services. The co-existence of mental health and general health services is suggested as one way to reduce the fear associated with being seen entering a stand-alone mental health service. Mobile clinics which offer primary health care is imperative. It is also recommended that community and school-based interventions which aim at reducing the social stigma of young people with mental illness in rural communities be developed.

Keywords : barrier, mental health services, utilisation, youth

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