

Barriers to Accessing Primary Mental Health Care in Rural Communities

Sammy Smith

Introduction

Mental health is everywhere, causing both impairment in lifestyle and morbidity. In a rural setting, certain barriers make treatment of mental health disorders more difficult than that of an urban setting. Understanding these barriers to mental health treatment is important for the affective planning of adequate mental health services, so that resources are allocated appropriately and for the benefit of reducing the mental health burden in rural communities.

Research Question

What are the barriers to accessing mental health care in rural communities?

Findings

- Rural patients are likely to use primary care practices for all mental health needs. However, these primary care practices have many barriers in a rural setting, such as fewer mental health specialists, less access to required resources and constraints of time (Colon-Gonzalez et al., 2013).
- Depression screening is not generally included in primary care; this makes screening for mood and anxiety disorders all the more difficult. It's this lack of screening that is said to explain why 60% to 75% of mental illness in rural communities remain undiagnosed, (Colon-Gonzalez et al, 2013).
- Rural culture promotes independence and perceives self-reliance as a positive quality, (Colon-Gonzalez et al, 2013).
- Primary care practices in rural communities tend to focus on the somatic manifestations of mood and anxiety issues, rather than focusing on the fundamental mental illness because it is more acceptable to have an organic symptom compared to having a mental disorder, (Colon-Gonzalez et al, 2013).
- Those in rural communities prefer to handle the problem by themselves to avoid labels and self-stigma, (Andrade et al., 2014).

Recommendations

- Public campaigns could be created to increase public awareness of mental health illness and reduce stigmatisation, (Andrade et al., 2014).
- Increase education in mental health care and diseases. Education should also aim to identify categories of need and how primary care physicians should recognise and treat mental health disorders (Andrade et al., 2014).
- The recruitment of more mental health specialists to rural communities would be beneficial to the more complex patients so that they can receive needed effective care (Benzer et al., 2012).
- Consider integrating collaborative practice. Collaborative practice combines the skills of many different health professionals to work together in promoting mental health within communities, (Heath et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Barriers such as limited resources within rural primary care practices, low perceived need among patients with mental illness and stigmatisation all stand in the way of effective primary mental health care in rural communities. Suggested enablers to reduce these barriers are further education and awareness into mental illness and collaboration of health care professionals within the community. This research highlights the need to remove these barriers so that health professionals can work on improving access to primary mental health in rural communities for those who do not receive needed care.

REFERENCES:

- Andrade, L. H., Alonso, J., Mneimneh, Z., Wells, J. E., Al-Hamzawi, A., Borges, G., ... & Florescu, S. (2014). Barriers to mental health treatment: results from the WHO World Mental Health surveys. *Psychological medicine*, 44(06), 1303-1317.
- Colon-Gonzalez, M. C., McCall-Hosenfeld, J. S., Weisman, C. S., Hillemeier, M. M., Perry, A. N., & Chuang, C. H. (2013). "Someone's got to do it"—Primary care providers (PCPs) describe caring for rural women with mental health problems. *Mental health in family medicine*, 10(4), 191.
- Crotty, M. M., Henderson, J., & Fuller, J. D. (2012). Helping and hindering: perceptions of enablers and barriers to collaboration within a rural South Australian mental health network. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 20(4), 213-218.
- Heath, O., Church, E., Curran, V., Hollett, A., Cornish, P., Callanan, T., ... & Younghusband, L. (2015). Inter-professional mental health training in rural primary care: findings from a mixed methods study. *Journal of Inter-professional care*, 29(3), 195-201.
- Prins, M. A., Verhaak, P. F., Smolders, M., Laurant, M. G., van der Meer, K., Spreeuwenberg, P., ... & Bensing, J. M. (2010). Patient factors associated with guideline-concordant treatment of anxiety and depression in primary care. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 25(7), 648-655.

RATIONALE:

I chose to present my literature review in the form of a poster to enable effective transference of knowledge that will be both engaging and visually appealing to the reader. It provides the necessary summary of what is involved in the research so that the reader can view it at their own pace, (Ilic & Rowe, 2013). Posters are a visual medium that attracts the attention of the reader for long enough so that the intended message reaches those reading my research. I wanted to be able to visually communicate my ideas in a way that can reach a wide audience and give opportunity to express creativity. I based my poster on what message I wanted to portray, the type of people viewing my presentation and what sort of tone I wanted to set for my presentation. Overall, I wanted to present my research in a way that would be simple, attractive and interesting to all those viewing my work, (Gautam, 2015).

PECOT Model

After choosing my topic, ‘what are the barriers in integrating mental health care into primary health care’, I used (Schneider & Whitehead, 2013) PECOT model to improve and refine my research question.

PECOT category	Information relating to question	Explanation
Population	Rural Setting	The population of a rural setting have more difficulty in accessing adequate primary mental health services due to researched barriers.
Exposure (intervention)	Researching barriers to primary mental health care in rural setting	To discover said barriers and the reason as to why they stand to be such an issue.
Comparison/ Control	Comparing enablers to barriers	Working out what are the barriers to primary mental health care in rural settings and then compare and contrast that to what enables adequate primary mental health care in rural settings
Outcome	Finding out what needs to be done to eliminate barriers and promote enablers	So that there is awareness into why people in rural settings aren’t getting the mental health care they need due to said barriers.
Time	N/A	N/A

I refined my research question to ‘What are the barriers to accessing primary mental health in a rural community?’

References

- Schneider, Z., Whitehead, D. (2013). Identifying research ideas, questions, statement & hypotheses. In Z. Schneider, D. Whitehead, G. LoBiondo-Wood, J. Haber. (4th ed.). *Nursing and midwifery research methods and appraisal for evidence – based practice* (pp. 57-76). Sydney, Australia: Mosby.
- Ilic, D., & Rowe, N. (2013). What is the evidence that poster presentations are effective in promoting knowledge transfer? A state of the art review. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 30(1), 4-12.
- Gautam, S. (2015). Preparation and Presentation of an Effective Research Poster. *Asian Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, 5(2), 180-184.