

Barriers to Mental Health Treatment

Literature Review

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Access to mental health treatment in the United States is limited and underutilized. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2019), in 2017, only 42.6% of Americans aged 18 and older received treatment for their mental illnesses. Many factors prevent individuals from seeking mental health treatment, including distrust of medical professionals, limited facilities and providers, negative stigmas, and affordability (Tristiana et al., 2018). This literature review will assess qualitative research to determine the best evidence-based approach to maximize access and utilization of mental health treatment.

Barriers to Mental Health Treatment Utilization in Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, DC: A Qualitative Pilot Study

The purpose of this study was to explore obstacles preventing community members of an underserved, low socioeconomic area in Washington, DC, from utilizing mental health services (Ganz et al., 2018). The authors of the article work to determine why individuals within the community are not receiving mental health treatment and how they can improve utilization. Factors affecting treatment included personal, community, and physician-related issues. By assessing community member perspectives and opinions, the authors were able to narrow down common problems related to mental health treatment and usage.

Key Points

There are many barriers preventing access and utilization of mental health services. Participants stated that limited mental health facilities and providers within the community required individuals seeking treatment to perform long commutes to other areas within the city (Ganz et al., 2018). The National Council for Behavioral Health (2018) determined that 46% of Americans must travel over an hour to receive mental health treatment. The time commitment

necessary for a long commute is not practical for community members as many have prior responsibilities, and limited finances and free time (Ganz et al., 2018). Participants believed that if there were more services available within their community that did not require lengthy travel time, more individuals would be able to seek help. Lack of confidence in the medical system was another deterrent for receiving treatment mentioned. Participants believed that patient-provider relationships emphasizing trust, and the provider's willingness to listen to their concerns was essential for successful treatment. The stigma associated with mental health is another barrier to receiving treatment (Ganz et al., 2018). Participants cited feelings of embarrassment and shame related to their condition and were hesitant to receive treatment due to this. Participants suggested normalizing mental health topics by increasing community awareness and involvement and incorporating more in-depth mental health screening at primary care offices to encourage discussion.

Assumptions

By understanding the perspectives and needs of community members better, prioritization of needed change can occur to increase mental health service utilization. The authors argue that changes to the current system will improve the use of mental health services and clients' quality of life (Ganz et al., 2018). The authors believe that an increase in providers and facilities within communities that have a high prevalence of mental health disorders will make treatment more convenient and accessible. Hosting services and discussions related to mental health in places highly frequented by community members, such as churches and primary care offices, could increase access, decrease negative stigmas of mental health, and foster trusting supportive relationships. The authors also recommend community health campaigns focusing on normalizing mental health to reduce negative stigmas. Research supports this

concept indicating that mental health education interventions significantly improve attitudes about seeking mental health treatment and decrease negative perceptions (Kosyluk et al., 2016). The authors believe that the prevalence of mental health disorders within the community will remain high, and individuals will continue to live with decreased quality of life if change does not occur.

Deficit/Conclusion

There are many factors affecting utilization and access to mental health treatment. During this qualitative study, stigma, poor access to mental health facilities within the community, and mistrust of medical professionals were issues prevalently mentioned by participants (Ganz et al., 2018). The authors propose that improving the stigma associated with mental health, increasing access to providers and facilities, and promoting trust withing patient-provider relationships would encourage utilization. They believe that by addressing problems identified by community members, more individuals will begin to seek mental health treatment.

References

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