Perspectives of Post-Secondary Students on Community Mental Health Services

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Abstract

Introduction: The primary objective of our study was to identify trends and determine patterns in the opinions of post-secondary students regarding the community mental health services. The study was carried out by a team of 3 students from the Research Analyst Postgraduate Program at the Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Toronto. The study commenced in October 2017 and was concluded by April 2018. It was approved by the Program Coordinator who is a designated member of the Humber College's Research Ethics Board.

Methods: A mixed-method approach was adopted with an online survey ($n = 185$), two focus group discussions and four semi-structured interviews serving as primary tools for data collection. Post-secondary students in the Greater Toronto Area, between the ages of 18-29, were eligible for the study.

Results: The descriptive findings revealed students' preference for the peer support services over all other service types. The focus-groups and interview participants had expressed diverse opinions and had highlighted pros and cons of the online and the in-person counselling services. Although majority (79%) of the students surveyed were aware of the mental health services on their campus, the qualitative analysis revealed their disillusionment with the promotion & the accessibility of the services. Moreover, our quantitative analysis indicated statistically significant variation in the students' perspectives on the mental health services based on academic background and sex.

Conclusion: Post-secondary students in the Greater Toronto Area expressed varying opinions, level of awareness on, and approach towards the mental health services. Our study can serve to inform college/university administrations, and policymakers about the necessity to conduct a broader need-based assessment and evaluation of student perceptions and concerns with regards to the mental health care system. Further evaluation of the observed trends and patterns may help in the development of more effective mental health programs.