Barriers to Mental Health Service Access among Women at a Large Public University

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**Abstract**

- College students are dealing with serious mental health issues, and represent an important population to access when providing mental health services. 
- In particular, college women show a significant need for mental health services.
- Though most universities provide free mental health counseling services, many students are unaware or reluctant to use those services.
- Many factors contribute to this reluctance such as lack of knowledge about services and perceived stigma.
- This study seeks to add to the existing body of literature on college student mental health by identifying barriers to mental health service access at a large public university, while uniquely focusing on the special mental health needs of collegiate women.

**Guiding Questions & Methods**

- This study will be guided by six main research questions:
  1. At what rate do students use on-campus counseling services at Portland State?
  2. Is there a disparity between the number of students who feel they could benefit from using on-campus counseling services and the number who actually access the services?
  3. What barriers prevent students from accessing on-campus counseling services?
  4. Is there a gender disparity in the rates that men and women feel they could benefit from on-campus counseling services?
  5. Is there a gender disparity in the rates that men and women actually use on-campus counseling services?
  6. Do students prefer seeking counseling services off-campus over on-campus?
- The study will use an anonymous, online survey tool to assess perceived need for services, usage of services, and barriers to use.

**Supporting Research**

- The American College Health Association (2011) found that in a sample of over 100,000 U.S. college students, 31.1% reported feeling “so depressed it was difficult to function” in the last 12 months and 50.6% reported “overwhelming anxiety” at some point in the last 12 months.
- The MIT Mental Health Task Force found similar results, while also measuring the percentage of students who accessed on-campus counseling services:

**MIT Student Need for Counseling vs. Usage of Counseling**

![Graph showing MIT Student Need for Counseling vs. Usage of Counseling](graph)

**Sources**


**Looking Ahead**

- After securing IRB approval, data collection will begin.
- Next, the data will be analyzed to determine if there are gender disparities in counseling-seeking and what barriers might be preventing women from utilizing on-campus counseling services.
- Finally, this data will be made available and can inform efforts to increase accessibility of on-campus counseling services for those who need them.

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