May 10th, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

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

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Barriers to Mental Health Service Access Among Women at a Large Public University
Auburn Beebe and David Fischer
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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.1,2
• In particular, college women show a significant need for mental health services3,4.
• Though most universities provide free mental health counseling services, many students are unaware or reluctant to use those services5,6.
• Many factors contribute to this reluctance such as lack of knowledge about services and perceived stigma5,6.
• 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”7 in the last 12 months and 50.6% reported “overwhelming anxiety” at some point in the last 12 months1.
• The MIT Mental Health Task Force found similar results, while also measuring the percentage of students who accessed on-campus counseling services2:

MIT Student Need for Counseling vs. Usage of Counseling

(After Mental Health Task Force, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Respondents Reporting Emotional Problems*</th>
<th>Respondents Using Mental Health Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Emotional problems defined as severe enough to interfere with daily functioning

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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