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Module: Introduction to Independent Research Skills

Module Code: BMH5019

Exploring Barriers to Mental Health Service Access Among Young Adults

Background and Rationale

Mental health difficulties are an important health and social care concern among young adults, yet accessing appropriate support can remain challenging. Research has identified inequalities in access to mental health services in the UK, with barriers occurring at individual, social and service levels (Lowther-Payne et al., 2023). Stigma, concerns about treatment, practical difficulties and experiences with services can influence engagement with mental health support (Sweetman et al., 2021). Research in England has also identified stigma, perceptions of primary care and relationships with healthcare professionals as factors influencing access to psychological support (Tunks et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding these barriers is important for health and social care professionals when considering how services can become more accessible and responsive.

Research Aim and Objectives

The primary aim is to map existing research examining barriers to accessing mental health services among young adults. Including:

1. Identify key barriers affecting young adults' access to mental health services.
2. Explore how individual, social and service-related factors influence access and help-seeking.
3. Identify gaps in the existing evidence and implications for health and social care practice.

Methodology / Scoping Review Framework

A scoping review will be conducted using the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), involving identification of the research question, relevant studies, study selection, data charting, and collation and reporting of findings.

My Research Question is What barriers affect young adults' access to mental health services?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies published in English within the last 10 years that examine barriers to accessing mental health services among young adults will be included. Peer-reviewed primary research and relevant review studies will be considered. Studies focusing exclusively on children, older adults, physical healthcare or populations unrelated to mental health service access will be excluded.

Data Collection and Analysis

A systematic search will be conducted using databases including PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science. Search terms will include "young adults", "mental health services", "access", "barriers", "help-seeking", "stigma" and "mental health literacy". Relevant data will be extracted and analysed using Aveyard's (2014) simplified thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, similarities and gaps within the evidence.

Expected Outcomes

The scoping review is expected to identify key individual, social and service-level barriers influencing young adults' access to mental health services. It is also expected to identify evidence gaps and potential implications for improving accessibility and engagement within health and social care practice.

Ethical Considerations

As this study will use existing published literature and will not involve human participants or collection of personal data, significant participant-related ethical risks are not anticipated. Academic integrity will be maintained through accurate representation of findings, appropriate citation and Harvard referencing.

(Word Count is 438)

References

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