Perspectives of Mental Health Disparities Between Urban and Rural Areas

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Mental Health Disparities

Introduction

        Mental health is much more prevalent than it ever has been. Individuals with mental health sometimes may not have the resources to help them, therefore, symptoms may worsen. Furthermore, individuals that live in urban areas may be prone to more resources surrounding mental health, rather than having less resources in rural areas. In fact, there is a significant gap in suicide rates amongst rural and urban areas, with rural suicide rates being nearly double the rates of urban areas, which has grown steadily since 1999 (Morales et al., 2020). There are many inequities and inequalities surrounding mental health resources, help, and treatment. Furthermore, lack of access and lack of resources feeds into the issue of mental health disparities. Additionally, individuals living in poverty and lower social-economic status areas tend to have higher levels of mental illnesses due to inequities and inequalities because of their financial situation, where they are located, and lack of treatment availability. When discussing mental health disparities, it is often understood that individuals from lower economic status or poverty may suffer worse outcomes of mental health due to the stressors caused by lack of resources, access to treatment, and costs of treatments. Overall, mental health disparities are a wide topic that is often overlooked because it is rarely seen as a serious concern. However, when looking at statistics, it is an extremely significant issue portrayed in our society with different levels of disparities in urban and rural areas. This paper aims to illustrate the differences in perspectives in urban versus rural environments and how those environments play key roles in mental health disparities.

Rural Areas

Mental health disparities are a serious issue in rural areas for many reasons. In fact, almost 20% of the US population live in rural areas, and those areas are faced with low access, availability, and acceptability of mental health services (McCord et al., 2012). Rural areas tend to have individuals of poverty of low socio-economic status, which has been argued to cause a hinderance in mental health services, inadequate housing, transportation, and lower rates of insurance (McCord et al., 2012). In addition, individuals from lower class areas or disadvantaged groups, like rural areas, are more prone to develop mental health or emotional disorders (Aneshensel., 2009). Rural areas tend to have individuals of lower social-economic status and more disadvantaged groups. Having lack of adequate care, lack of resources and poorer individuals that can't afford effective treatment deal with more stress in addition to their mental health illness. Rural areas tend to be less developed and isolated, causing a lack of resources and support of mental health treatment, creating an overall problem of mental health disparities.

Urban Areas

Urban areas tend to be much more developed than rural areas, as they are well known for the metropolitan or city atmosphere. Due to the city atmosphere, mental health is highly prevalent due to the loud city noises, higher crime rates, loneliness, homelessness, traffic accidents, and drug abuse (Okkels., 2018). Homelessness and high crime rates influence mental health significantly. Furthermore, individuals that are in the homeless population tend to resort to drug use, violence, and high crime because of mental health issues. Scholars are arguing that rapid urbanization is creating significant challenges with mental health issues due to the unstructured society, lack of resources for a large population, as well as rapid homelessness (Okkels., 2018). Individuals that are homeless do not or cannot get resources to help with their mental illnesses, creating larger stressors and mental health issues contributing to drug, alcohol

and criminal patterns of behavior. Furthermore, the rapid increase of urbanization has created a

significant affect on mental health through economic, social, and environmental factors

(Ventriglio et al., 2021). It has also been shown that there is a higher prevalence of mental

illnesses in urban areas (Ventriglio et al., 2021). In cities, pollution and less areas of green of

much more common than areas of rural atmospheres. Especially in larger cities like New York

City, pollution is a significant issue. Pollution, social disparities, as well as lack of contact with

nature or green areas are factors that scholars are recognizing as key components in affecting

mental health (Ventriglio et al., 2021). Like in rural areas, there is a significant lack of resources

for helping individuals with mental health. Furthermore, due to overcrowding and rapid

urbanization, urban areas are continuing with rates of mental health disparities, especially

amongst the homeless population.

Analysis of My Position

Mental health disparities are an issue that does not get the attention that is needed. There

are issues all over the United States relating to mental illnesses in both rural and urban

atmosphere. If you asked the average person where they think the most mental health issues

preside in, whether in urban or rural areas, my guess would be that majority of people would say

rural areas have worse conditions of mental health issues. Urban areas have challenges that many

don't think of when thinking about disparities in mental health and the causes of those

disparities, like criminal activity, drug or alcohol abuse and homelessness. Nearly 77% of the

total homeless population in the US is found to be in completely urban areas, with only 4% of

the total homeless population to be located in areas that are considered to be rural communities

(Henry & Sermons., 2010). It is estimated that approximately 25% of homeless individuals have

some kind of severe mental illness (Dickey., 2000).

Mental health plays a significant role in the social health of individuals and society. All

areas, both rural and urban, have different factors contributing to different levels of mental health

disparities. Mental health is extremely prevalent, especially in areas with individuals of poverty,

homelessness, and lower socio-economic status (Aneshensel., 2009). Mental health is a topic that

is highly underestimated, and society has a strong lack of knowledge surrounding mental health,

due to it being such a normal illness to have. It is often not considered that severe mental health

is much more prevalent than what society portrays it to be. Through this paper, it has aimed at

understanding the role of mental health disparities, looking through different lens' and

perspectives surrounding rural and urban areas to gain an understanding of the differences in

factors contributing to mental health disparities in different areas.

Evidenced Based Interventions

With mental health becoming highly prevalent in today's society. There have been

disparities in many different areas. With the lack of resources that are available to individuals

with mental illness, unfortunately these individuals engage in criminal activity and eventually

deal with the police. Given that the police are not appropriately trained to adequately help

individuals suffering from mental illness, most police officer interactions unfortunately end in

either injury, death, or the incarceration of these mentally ill individuals.

The CIT training program is a 40-hour course that enhances training for officers to supply

them with adequate training on how to deal with crises involving mental health individuals (CIT

Center, n.d.). This training gives officers an understanding of what mental illness is, changes

their perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes for the better (CIT Center, n.d.). In addition, the

training offers de-escalation training to officers to help reduce use of force amongst police

officers towards mentally ill individuals (CIT Center, n.d.). Furthermore, the training involves

scenario-based training to allow offers to use the skills that they have acquired through the

course and implement the skills in real life scenarios (CIT Center, n.d.). The training also gives

resources to officers to supply individuals with mental health treatment instead of sending

individuals with mental illness to jails in prison, which is know as the diversion of jails and

prisons (CIT Center, n.d.). The training attempts to bridge the gap between criminal justice

professionals and mental health professionals to allow for better results for the police

departments to have on mentally ill individuals. Franz & Borum (2011), conducted a longitudinal

study to evaluate the CIT programs impact on the diversion of jails and prisons for mentally ill

individuals (Franz & Borum, 2011). The study found that the CIT program had measurable

success with have only 22 arrests in 2001, when there were 296 calls involving a mental health

crisis (Franz & Borum, 2011). In addition, the study also found that in 2005 that number changed

to 0 arrests with 307 calls involving a mental health crisis (Franz & Borum, 2011). With that, it

shows there was a measurable decline in the arrest rate of mentally ill individuals by police

officers with the implementation of the CIT program (Franz & Borum, 2011). Furthermore,

another study conducted by Olivia et al. (2010), stated that the Memphis Police Department,

which is the department to first implement the CIT program due to a fatal incident involving a

man with mental health issues armed with a knife being fatally shot by police officers, reported

that there was a significant decline in the arrest rate and a decline in the amount of individuals

being sent to jail or prison with mental illness (Olivia et al. (2010). Steadman et al. (2000),

supports the CIT program and reported that through all of the departments in their study, found

that all the departments had severely lowered arrest rates of mentally ill individuals with the

implementation of the CIT program (Steadman et al., 2000). Olivia et al. (2010), published a

study evaluating use of force with the implementation of the CIT program, it concluded that the

program has a huge positive effect on use of force from officers towards individuals suffering

from severe mental illness (Olivia et al., 2010). Furthermore, the same article found that the

Memphis Police Department report a large decline in injuries of both mentally ill individuals and

police officers since implementing the program (Olivia et al. (2010). Moreover, Bonfine et al.

(2014), released a study evaluating the results of the CIT program on police officers'

perceptions, attitudes, understanding of mental illness, and stereotypes relating to mental health

(Bonfine et al., 2014). The study concluded that the implementation of the CIT program can be

positively impactful upon police officers' attitudes, perceptions, understanding of mental illness

and stereotypes to mental health (Bonfine et al., 2014). Bonfine et al. (2014), also found that the

CIT program is rated more positively by officers and officers have reported that the positive

impact of their attitudes, perceptions, and understandings have improved safety for all parties

involved, yet another positive impact of the CIT program (Bonfine et al., 2014).

However, taking a step back, we should not be worried about developing an intervention

for the aftermath of what can be resulted from mental health issues, but rather find interventions

to alleviate mental health issues at the root of the cause. The "WellTrack Boost" app designed to

help individuals assess and work on their own wellness and health is an intervention that could

help with the root cause of mental health issues. There are many parts of the app including an

assessment, therapy, tracking your progress, and connecting with possible mental health

resources. This app works to help with mental health issues and attempts to allow individuals use

this app to understand their own mental illness and find ways to help themselves with alleviating

their mental health issues. Typically, with mental health apps, they tend to lack features that keep

their clients engaged (Chiauzzi & Newell, 2019). With the "Welltrack Boost" app, it has been

noted that the services provided by this app use positive reinforce towards working with mental

health issues and certain features, like their Wellness Assessment, are great tools to understand

an individual's own mental health (Welltrack Boost, n.d.). Longwood University has already

implemented this app upon students, faculty and staff at the University (Longwood, 2023). This

app implemented by Longwood's CAPs program, has shown numerous support by many

different people and organizations (Longwood, 2023). Furthermore, its evidence-based tools

have been seen to be extremely effective and efficient to everyone who has used it (Longwood,

2023). This asynchronous app, allows its clients to use the app without having to fear about their

identity being revealed (Longwood, 2023). It is easy to use, self-guided, and a largely interactive

way to care for your own mental health (Longwood, 2023).

Implementing My Plan

With the "Welltrack Boost" app having lots of positive results and feedback, it could

have strong results over the Farmville area. It would be implemented as a free app accessible to

everyone, whether they have a personal phone, personal computer, or access to a computer. This

app would be very similar to the "Welltrack Boost" app. To begin implementing this app to help

individuals with mental illness, there would be multiple emails and flyers sent out via mail or

internet to all citizens in a nearby area. Furthermore, these flyers would be posted throughout the

town of Farmville. All citizens would have to do is either search the program up in a search

engine on a computer or search the program up in the app store. Research shows that mental

health apps can have a positive impact on communities and individuals as shown above.

As shown above, with Longwood being able to implement the app, my similar app would

be implemented fairly easier and to a wider audience. Having this app implemented in Farmville,

to all of its citizens and residents, will add to the available mental health resources available to

them. There is a strong lack of resources in helping with mental health issues, the app would be

beneficial, as it is online, asynchronous, which is beneficial, especially in a rural environment

like Farmville. In addition, my similar app would allow for features that could enhance mental

health treatment with face-to-face options as well as the asynchronous option. This would allow

individuals to choose whether they want to talk to someone or if they want to help themselves

with the resources that the app offers. Furthermore, implementing this app across the community

of Farmville could reduce stress amongst faculty, staff, students at Longwood University, as well

as citizens, public safety agents, and other local retail owners that may be struggling alone as

well. Even if individuals in the community do not have access to the internet, they are welcome

to use local public libraries and friends or family's internet. My plan for implementing this app

would be over about a 2-year span to allow for individuals to test it out, ensure the app it

working to its full potential, as well as adding any necessary features that it may be missing that

could enhance it clients use and their mental well-being.

Conclusion

Having an app to support individual to seek and track help using resources of tracing

systems, therapy help, and a wellness assessment could create a large positive result when

looking at the outlook of the issue of mental illness in the future. Individuals suffering from

mental illness could be more likely to engage in an app, as it would be asynchronous, and your

identity could stay concealed. Having a concealed identity while getting help could influence lots

of individuals who have a fear of being stereotyped, judged, or embarrassed for seeking mental

health help when they need it the most. Facing stereotypes, being judged, and facing

embarrassment often makes mental health worse for individuals. Furthermore, having an app

would cause individuals to not have to worry about finding local resources that are scarce, as

seen above in urban and rural environments. Moreover, having an online app is a resource that

all individuals could use whether they live in an urban environment or a rural environment.

Implementing this app in Farmville, Virginia, a mostly rural environment, could influence more

places to implement such resource.

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