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2022

Adjusting Mental Health Services: Insights from the Voices of Transition-Aged Youth

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Recommended Citation

Jaber, L., & Voth, J. (2022). Adjusting Mental Health Services: Insights from the Voices of Transition-Aged Youth. Retrieved from <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/184>

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Adjusting Mental Health Services: Insights from the Voices of Transition-Aged Youth

Many transition-aged youth (18–24 years old) do not seek support from formal mental health services. This mixed-method study explored current barriers and facilitators to help-seeking within this age group during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants residing in southwestern Ontario were recruited from community and postsecondary education settings to diversify sample characteristics and maximize the generalizability of findings. The quantitative phase of the project consisted of an online survey ($N = 101$) to assess how the pandemic impacted aspects of participants' lives, including their mental health and relationships, and explore intention and barrier domains of help-seeking. The qualitative phase involved follow-up interviews with a subsample of participants ($n = 15$). Storied experiences were analyzed using codebook thematic analysis framed by the help-seeking process model (Rickwood et al., 2005). Results offer insight into the types of mental health challenges young adults experienced throughout the pandemic. Participants shared detailed accounts of internalized and externalized stigma as well as having faced notable barriers to accessing support services. Implications of this work include practical strategies for adjusting mental health support service delivery for a traditionally hard-to-engage target population.