

Title: The Gap between Science and Practice in Behavioral Health Care: Implications for Workforce Training based on a Regional Snapshot

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Background: US data show that one of every five young people in the general population will suffer from at least one mental disorder in a given year and fewer than half of youth with mental health illnesses receive treatment. Although there has been a rapid increase in knowledge about what interventions work for the majority of youth, a gap exists between the science and practice of behavioral health treatment.

Aims: To examine workforce implications of the needs, resources, and implementation of behavioral health best practices for children and youth in a diverse nine county region of Upstate New York.

Method: The current study was completed as part of a larger project in the 9- county region in Upstate New York. Surveys were distributed to Primary Care Providers, Mental Health Clinicians (Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social Workers, and Mental Health Counselors), and Higher Education Training Directors. Focus groups also were conducted which included urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Results: Findings included the following: 57% of mental health clinicians surveyed perceived “Lack of providers that provide evidence-based services” as a significant or very significant barrier to care. PCPs report that they generally do not feel prepared to handle mental health concerns or psychopharmacological medications. For instance, 40% agree and 2% strongly agree they are prepared to handle most of the mental health concerns.

Conclusions: Mental Health professionals and PCPs vary in their preparedness to deal with the widespread mental health needs of children and families. The findings suggest that all mental health graduate programs and primary care residencies need to set evidence-based assessment and treatment learning objectives, U.S. states need to require such learning for licensure and licensure renewal, and diverse organizations need to develop and evaluate easily accessible continuing education trainings for mental health clinicians and PCPs on new advances in evidence-based mental health care.

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