

PARENTING FOR THE PROMOTION OF ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

Overview

Adolescence is a critical period of development, when one-in-five psychiatric disorders emerge. Anxiety, depression, and suicide are the most common. However, most children and youth in need of mental health services in Canada do not have access to them. There is limited information about education and support programs for parents of adolescents to promote their children's mental health, particularly among ethno-cultural populations. Moreover, the quality of studies focused on these programs is variable. An **environmental scan** was conducted to identify community-based programs across Canada oriented to assist the parents of adolescents in the promotion of mental health, as well as the challenges and areas for improvement of these interventions. Alongside, a **scoping review of the international and Canadian literature** on this topic was carried out. This Policy Brief presents the results and recommendations of both studies.

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Summary Findings

- **Narrow availability of programs.** Most of the published literature discusses programs in the USA. Our scan identified 47 parenting programs in Canada oriented towards ethno-culturally diverse communities; programs are limited in quantity, variety, and geographic spread.
- **Concentration of most programs in Central Canada.** Nonetheless, in cities with high cultural and ethnic diversity such as Montreal, the number of programs is scarce.
- **Limited diversity of programs.** Most programs integrate psychoeducational approaches. Support groups concerning mental health topics for parents and adolescents and original methods such as workshops, arts programs and relational strategies are used to connect with parents and adolescents and to advance inclusion.
- **Cultural distrust, stigma, and language are primary access barriers for ethnocultural families.** This includes family trauma and misconceptions regarding mental health that deter them from seeking help. Lack of available funds also interferes with program development, adaptation, recruitment, and evaluation.
- **Limited quality of research methods used by studies.** Lack of rigour (for instance bias in the selection of study participants) and unclear reporting of findings.
- **Improved communication and community engagement are essential to achieve positive effects.** Programs focused on strengthening the family unit and developing good parent-child communication contribute to youth mental health. Culturally appropriate programs are vital and emerge from community members/parents and service providers working together from the planning stage.

Recommendations

- **Expand the geographic distribution** of organizations that offer these programs to promote adolescent mental health among ethnocultural communities. Consider the regions hosting large numbers of immigrants and refugees.
- **Diversify methods** to approach ethnocultural parents and adolescents taking into consideration their culture, language, and knowledge about mental health.
- **Increase funding** for organizations and programs to allow for development, adaptation, and enhanced accessibility of services. This would facilitate the use of professional interpreters and skilled and culturally competent service providers that would confront some of the barriers identified.
- **Ensure cultural relevance** of health and social services through collaborative research designs and community-researcher partnerships.
- **Enhance the quality of the methods** used to evaluate existing programs, for instance, by means of using existing assessment quality tools.

Study details

The project involved (a) a scoping review of the global literature and (b) an environmental scan of community-based programs in Canada aimed at assisting parents from ethno-culturally diverse communities for the promotion of adolescent mental health. The scoping review combined a systematic search in bibliographic databases (PsycINFO and Web of Science) in April 2011 and updated in August 2015, with a hand search of studies. A total of 107 studies met the study criteria, and 18 of them focused on programs for the promotion of mental health aimed at parents of adolescents from diverse ethnocultural communities. The Downs and Black Checklist was adapted to assess the quality of these 18 studies (average quality score of 16 out of 28). Limitations of the review including those related to the search methods used, the diverse conceptualization of ethnocultural communities across studies, and the quality of the studies identified. The scan was executed through internet searches and results were classified by audience (ethnicity/culture and age group), geographical distribution and coverage, and program type. Information was gathered from structured phone interviews with the staff of the 47 programs identified, most of them in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, particularly in the Greater Toronto and Vancouver Areas.

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Publications

Ruiz-Casares, M., Kolyn, L., Sullivan, R., & Rousseau, C. (2015). Parenting Adolescents from Ethno-Cultural Backgrounds: A National Scan of Community-Based Programs. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 53, 10 – 16. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.03.021

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