

Psychological Practice in Rural Settings: At the Cutting Edge

At-a-Glance: A combination of factors – close-knit relationships, mental health stigma, and privacy concerns – make getting and providing mental health care more challenging in rural areas. Despite these obstacles, use of technology and awareness of rural issues have provided more opportunities than ever for people seeking mental health treatment.

Key Findings

- Educational programs often assume graduates will practice in urban or suburban settings, so training about rural issues is often overlooked.
- Small populations, close-knit relationships, limited geographic areas, and stigma prevent people in rural areas from reaching out for help with mental health issues.
- Online mental health delivery is gaining popularity and is helping more people in rural and remote locations access care.
- To help reduce the stigma of mental health care, on-staff professionals are a part of an overall health care team and act as behavioral consultants.
- Professionals working in rural areas need to be able to serve a wide range of needs and recognize physical, somatic, or atypical symptoms of mental health issues.

Put It into Practice

- Collaborate with community leaders and other health care professionals to build trust within the community.
- Share service locations with general health care providers to give consumers more privacy when accessing services.
- Integrate mental health care with other health professionals' services to protect consumers' privacy.
- Be both technologically and professionally competent if providing online services.

- Engage with professional organizations to educate peers and advocate for consumers' unique needs.

More about this Research

This study also explored the use of technology to provide continuing education and further the expertise of practitioners working in rural areas. Using remote learning saves travel time that professionals could be using to help consumers. Distance education options also allow students to do their practicum in rural settings. Rural practitioners are encouraged to collaborate with researchers in order to expand awareness of issues unique to the setting.

Learn More

Riding-Malon, R., & Werth, J. L. (2014). Psychological practice in rural settings: At the cutting edge. *Professional Psychology*, 45(2), 85-91.

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