

Research Question: *What are the barriers to treatment for mental illnesses, specifically anxiety and depression, in undergraduate college students in the United States?*

Abstract

Mental illnesses are a prevalent health issue affecting over 43 million Americans annually. Examples of mental illnesses include anxiety disorders, depression, psychotic disorders, and substance use disorders. Since mental illnesses are identifiable and treatable, it is important to identify the key factors that influence the underutilization of mental health services in undergraduate college students in the United States. The different databases used in the article search process were CINAHL and PubMed database. Specific search terms were used to narrow down the number of articles, which include mental health services, (undergraduate) college students, and service utilization. Exclusion criteria limited the research to include peer reviewed articles in the United States from the past 10 years. Results from the literature review identified three key trends surrounding the utilization of mental health services by undergraduate college students. These factors include an overall underutilization of mental health services, portrayals of mental illness by the media and the public, and mental health literacy levels in students. First, research shows that a majority of college students do not receive treatment for mental illness. Second, students reported that the media often portrays mental illnesses in a negative fashion, but students still rely on the media for information on mental health. Lastly, levels of mental health literacy in college students are low, resulting in a lack of knowledge on mental illness, treatments, and acceptance.

Objectives

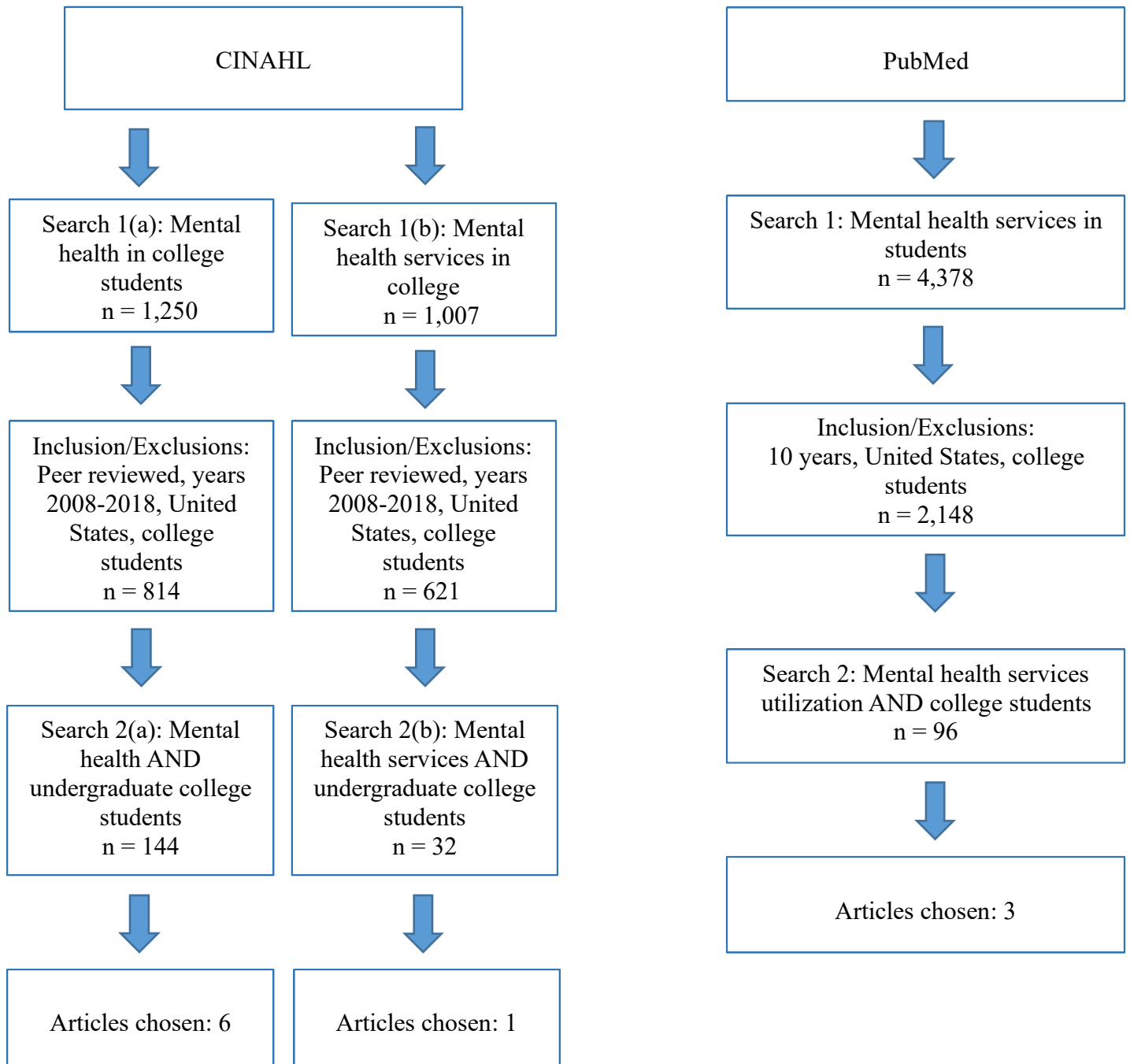
The purpose of this literature review is to explore the barriers to treatment and for mental health disorders and underutilization of mental health services in undergraduate college students in the United States. Specifically, this paper will analyze the underutilization of mental health services by college students, the media and the public's portrayal of mental illness, barriers to treatment, and the relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior.

Methods

Searched Databases and Terms

To determine the barriers to treatment for mental illness in undergraduate college students, a literature review was conducted. The databases searched to discover articles relating to this topic were CINAHL and PubMed. CINAHL database contains the most respected nursing and allied health literature, covering topics such as health sciences, alternative medicine, consumer health, clinical innovations, and clinical trials (EBSCO, 2018). PubMed database contains information for both professionals and consumers surrounding treatment and prevention strategies for a variety of diseases and conditions (PubMed Health, 2018). The journals from which the articles used in this literature review originated consisted of *Social Work in Mental Health*, *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses*, *Med Care Res Rev*, *Journal of American College of Health*, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *American Journal of Health Education*, *Health Communication*, and *Psychiatry Res*. Additional information on specific search methods can be found in *Figure 1: Article Selection Process*.

Figure 1: Article Selection Process



Discussion

Overarching Findings

The overarching findings of the literature reviewed is that there is an issue of underutilization of mental health services by college students, and this is due to the media and the public's portrayal of mental illness, along with a lack of mental health literacy. Students have negative perceptions of mental illness, experience stigma surrounding treatment, and are unable to recognize the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Research has found that one in four college students receive their primary knowledge and perceptions of mental health from television and film, and these attitudes are directly influenced by public and media stigma of mental illness (Aguiniga et al., 2016). In addition, when young adults perceive stigma surrounding depression from close friends and family, they are less likely to seek treatment services (D'Amico, Mechling, Kemppainen, Ahern, & Lee, 2016). Both perceived and personal stigma have a direct influence on students' perceptions of mental illness, but personal stigma was found to be the best predictor of low help-seeking among college students (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

Mental health literacy was another key factor in barriers to treatment for mental illness in college students. The results of a study utilizing two different surveys, concluded that a majority of students are unaware of the symptoms and available treatments for anxiety and depression (Kim et al., 2015). As a result, the students reported higher levels of underutilization of services in conjunction with the low levels of mental health literacy (Kim et al., 2015). In addition, a second study observed that freshmen college students have some levels of mental health literacy, but one-third of students were unaware of campus services and another one-third refused to seek treatment (Pace et al., 2018).

The underutilization of mental health services by college students was the major overarching finding of this literature review. One study showed that only 39.4% of students with one of four mental health illnesses received treatment (Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015). In addition, 90% of students in a study reported never utilizing the campus-provided services for emotional distress (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008). The results of another study concluded that one-third of college students were unaware of available campus services, and the top two reasons for underutilization of these services were lack of time and knowledge (Yorgason et al., 2008).