



More than 28% of people aged 20-29 experience a mental illness each year in Canada (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2013). This staggering rate of illness occurs at precisely the time in which youth are working towards increased independence in every aspect of their lives. Navigating options for housing and employment becomes more complex for youth with mental health needs. Often, they find difficulty locating and maintaining mental health supports necessary to successfully transition to adulthood.

The period from adolescence into early adulthood (known as emergent adulthood) is extremely important in terms of making life choices and establishing behaviours that have a major effect across the entire life span (Gaudet, 2005), yet recent demographic shifts in the country are revealing trends showing Canadians in this age group delaying traditional long-term adult milestones such as stable employment, marriage, and parenthood. Although the transition to adulthood remains poorly understood in psycho-social terms, what is clearly evident is that it is during this same timeframe that most adult disorders, such as anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder have their peak rates (Arnett, 2014).

Mental Health of Transition-Age Youth

There are disturbing trends for transition-age youth in Canada. The 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey (Butler & Pang, 2014) noted:

- Mood disorders were highest among youth aged 15 to 24 (8.2%),
- Rates of depression were highest among youth aged 15 to 24,
- Females and Indigenous youth had the highest rates of depression and generalized anxiety disorder, and
- Males had higher rates of substance use disorders with approximately 6.4% of males and 2.5% of females reporting symptoms.

Experiencing mental health issues in adolescence and young adulthood increases the risk for mental health disorders in adulthood (Malcarne, Hansdottir, & Merz, 2010).



Risk Factors to Mental Health among Emerging Adults

There are multiple known risk factors for emerging adults in Canada and these factors seldom occur in isolation. Early childhood poverty can set children on a developmental trajectory of poorer behavioural adjustment in emerging adulthood due to often unstable or chaotic and crowded households. Increased psychological distress in lifestyles predicated by low socio-economic conditions add to individual vulnerabilities, often resulting in achievement gaps, greater morbidity for all major chronic physical

diseases, even premature mortality (Evans & Cassells, 2016). Other groups of youth considered to be at higher risk of negative mental health outcomes in the transition to adulthood include Indigenous and minority youth, LGBTQ youth, some youth with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, and youth in care (Macleod & Brownlie, 2014).

Youth who are transitioning from care are among the most vulnerable in our society today. It is not surprising that a high percentage of the approximately 65,000 homeless youth in Canada have had some involvement with child protection services, including foster care (Rutman, Hubberstey, Feduniw, & Brown, 2007). Not only does the array of services and supports available to youth while in care disappear as they exit the foster care system, these youths must also cope with the long-term consequences of having been in less than optimal living conditions during their formative years; many of these youths have experienced abuse, neglect, and removal from their families (Perlman et al., 2014). Youth who "age out" of foster care often lack the necessary living skills, education, emotional well-being, social supports, and resources needed to prepare them for independent living at such a young age (Rutman et al., 2007). Insecure housing in emerging adulthood



threatens to push young people into pathways that lead to problematic adulthoods. For example, when youth who have been in foster care are tracked, about 41 percent have been in contact with the criminal justice system by age 21 compared to only 6.6 percent of the general population in the same age group (Adoption Council of Canada, 2010; Representative for Children and Youth and Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2009). The increase in mental health issues, addictions, and complex needs seems to be a result of inadequate resources or under-developed services. Mental health care agencies that have effectively redesigned services to meet the unique needs of these youth and that can address the social determinants of health have seen greatly improved access to services in their communities (Raising the Roof, 2006).

Impact of Mental Health Problems

The higher rates of unemployment among emerging adults (about 13%) is an urgent public health concern because the risk of clinical depression is higher among unemployed persons (Erk et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2015). Depression among unemployed emerging adults is also associated with stress. Delays in achieving developmental goals such as identify formation through the exploration of work opportunities exacerbate any pre-existing mental health concerns and contribute to the risk factors for mental ill-health. Transition-age youth who experience depression are more likely to have recurrent depressive episodes during the rest of their adulthood (McGee & Thompson, 2015). Early interventions may not only improve the negative effects of unemployment and depression among this age group but may also give rise to better mental health futures for them.



Addressing the Barriers



The mental health needs of transition-age youth must be addressed. Providing appropriate and timely services and supports to young people with mental health needs throughout the critical transition years increases their chances of becoming self-sufficient, contributing adults in society. Simultaneously, addressing barriers with appropriate, timely, and accessible services reduces the potential for long-term dependency on public systems and other negative consequences such as social isolation and suicide (Rutman et al., 2007).

The lack of coordination between public mental health systems and agencies, makes it difficult for transition-age youth with mental health needs to locate and qualify for services tailored to their specific needs. It is challenging to find services that address the broad needs of emerging adults that are inclusive of mental health treatment, vocational rehabilitation, employment, housing, peer support, and family psychoeducation (Evans & Cassells, 2016).

Youth with educational and career challenges, such as those with mental health needs, too often fall between the cracks of youth and adult systems or they are referred to arbitrary or inappropriate services based on considerations dictated by the system rather than the youth's wants and needs. During the complex transition from adolescence to adulthood, youth require services that address the interdependent spheres of social, behavioural, and family functioning and educational functioning and attainment (McGee & Thompson, 2015).



Recommendations:



- Design, fund, and appropriately advertise (e.g., pilot demonstrations that evaluate promising practices for this age group advertised through social media)
- Leverage federal and provincial funding sources to broaden the eligibility criteria for mental health services for transition-age youth.

integrated services across sectors (e.g., education, youth justice, mental health, child welfare). Detailing current capacities, needs, and expertise helps agencies make strategic decisions about ways to broaden their collective capacity and to identify service gaps and service overlaps.

Transition-age youth require a well-integrated continuum of mental health and addictions services that are accessible, culturally safe and appropriate, and developmentally suitable (MHCC, 2015). Silos of services need to be replaced with

- Provide braided funding streams that integrate funding across sectors including mental health and addiction services, vocational rehabilitation, and employment services with a dedicated funding envelope;
- Use Internet communication vehicles to improve both the availability and affordability of services and improved receptivity and knowledge of mental health care services. The creation of more validating, empowering, and socially integrated mental health care treatments is an effective way to increase help-seeking behaviours among young adults.

Many emerging adults face new and potentially stressful educational and work situations and are often inexperienced in their new roles. This combination can result in stress and mental health concerns. Youth with histories of adversity and disadvantage are particularly vulnerable to the stressors faced at this period in their development. Through collaboration across sectors and mental health/education/employment disciplines, a responsive and integrated system of care for transition-aged youth can be created. Canadian Certified Counsellors (CCCs) are qualified to provide counselling services to this underserved group.

About CCPA:

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) is a national bilingual association providing professional counsellors and psychotherapists with access to exclusive educational programs, certification, professional development, and direct contact with professional peers and specialty groups. CCPA promotes the profession and its contributions to the mental health and well-being of all Canadians.

CCPA provides a national certification program for professional counsellors, Canadian Certified Counsellors (CCC), that identifies to the public those counsellors who CCPA recognizes as qualified to provide counselling services in Canada. Obtaining the status of Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC) includes recognition of standards of professional preparation, continuing education, and a formal code of ethics. As a self-regulating body, CCPA provides advice and discipline for certified members on matters of professional conduct.

CCPA also has chapters organized around specific interests and practice areas to provide professional strength and satisfy the diverse needs of the counselling community. Four CCPA chapters directly supportive of youth-focused initiatives are: the Career Counsellors Chapter, the Post-Secondary Counsellors Chapter; the Indigenous Circle; and the Social Justice Chapter.

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