



Access to Health Care Services: Perspectives from Patients with Mental Illness

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Nationwide

- National research estimates that 46% of Americans will have mental health issues during their lifetime¹
- The cost estimate for mental illness in the United States is around \$83 billion per year²

Missouri

- It is estimated that 10.5% of individuals in Missouri, suffer from either serious psychological or emotional distress³
- In 2009, Missouri hospitals reported:
 - 71,222 inpatient hospitalizations for mental health illness (19% increase compared to the year 2000)⁴
 - 64,689 ED visits for mental health illness (44% increase compared to the year 2000)⁴

Medical care for patients with mental health illness

- High risk of poverty, stigmatization and social isolation
- More likely to be misdiagnosed or under-diagnosed
- Increased risk for more complicated medical disease and worse outcomes^{5,6,7}

Mortality Associated with Mental Disorders: Mean Years of Potential Life Lost

Compared with the general population, persons with major mental illness lose 20-25 years of normal life span⁸

What are the Causes of Morbidity and Mortality in People with Serious Mental Illness?

- *While suicide and injury account for about 30-40% of excess mortality, about 60% of premature deaths in persons with schizophrenia are due to “natural causes”*
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Diabetes
 - Respiratory diseases
 - Infectious diseases

Access To Health Care

- An issue for all people with limited income
- Significantly lower rates of primary care
- Significantly lower rates of routine testing
- Very poor dental care
- Overuse of emergency department

Purpose of the study

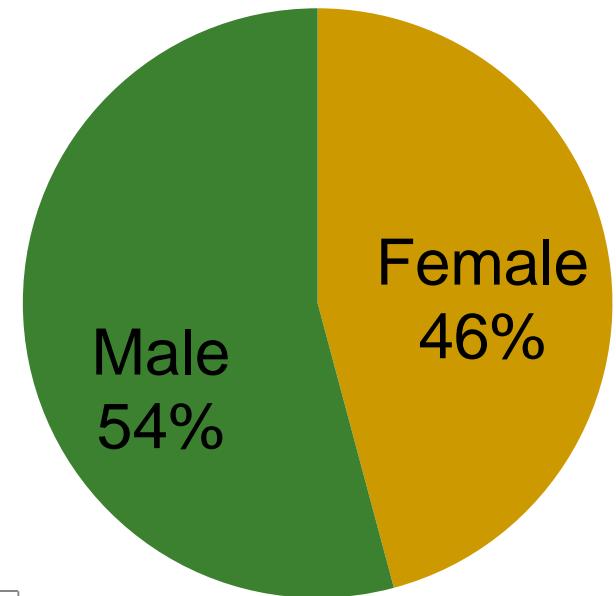
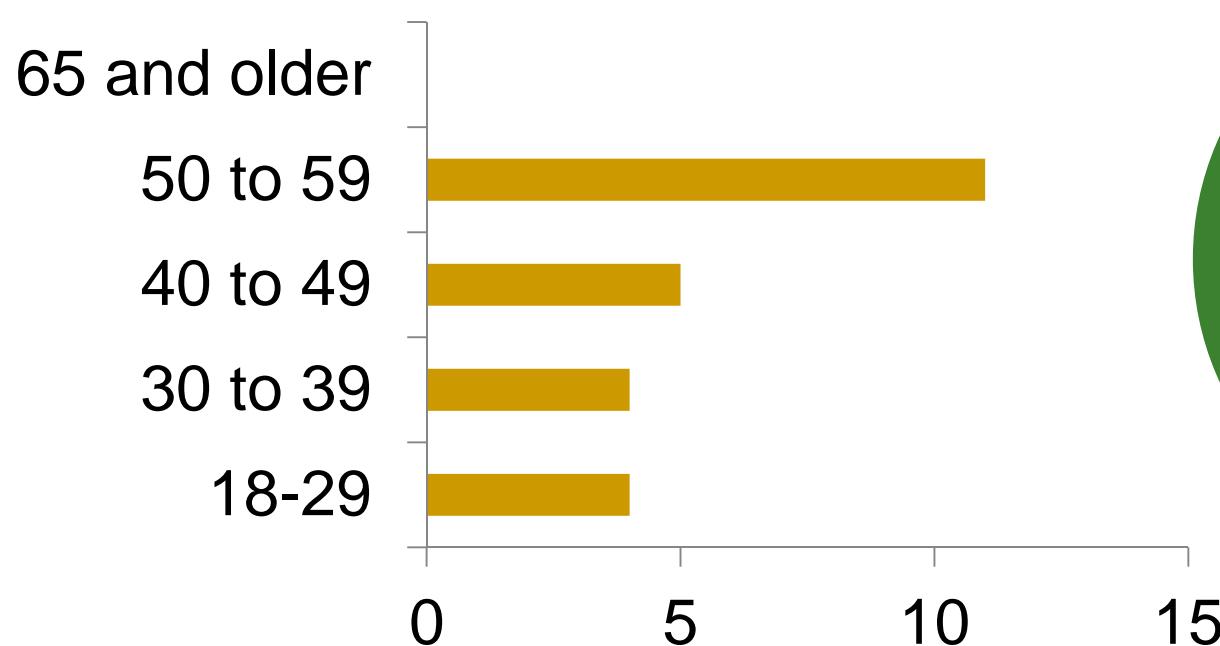
The purpose of the study was to:

1. Gain insight into the barriers facing patients with mental health illness in accessing health care services
2. Assess perceived quality of services received
3. Learn about resources that enable them to overcome unique challenges

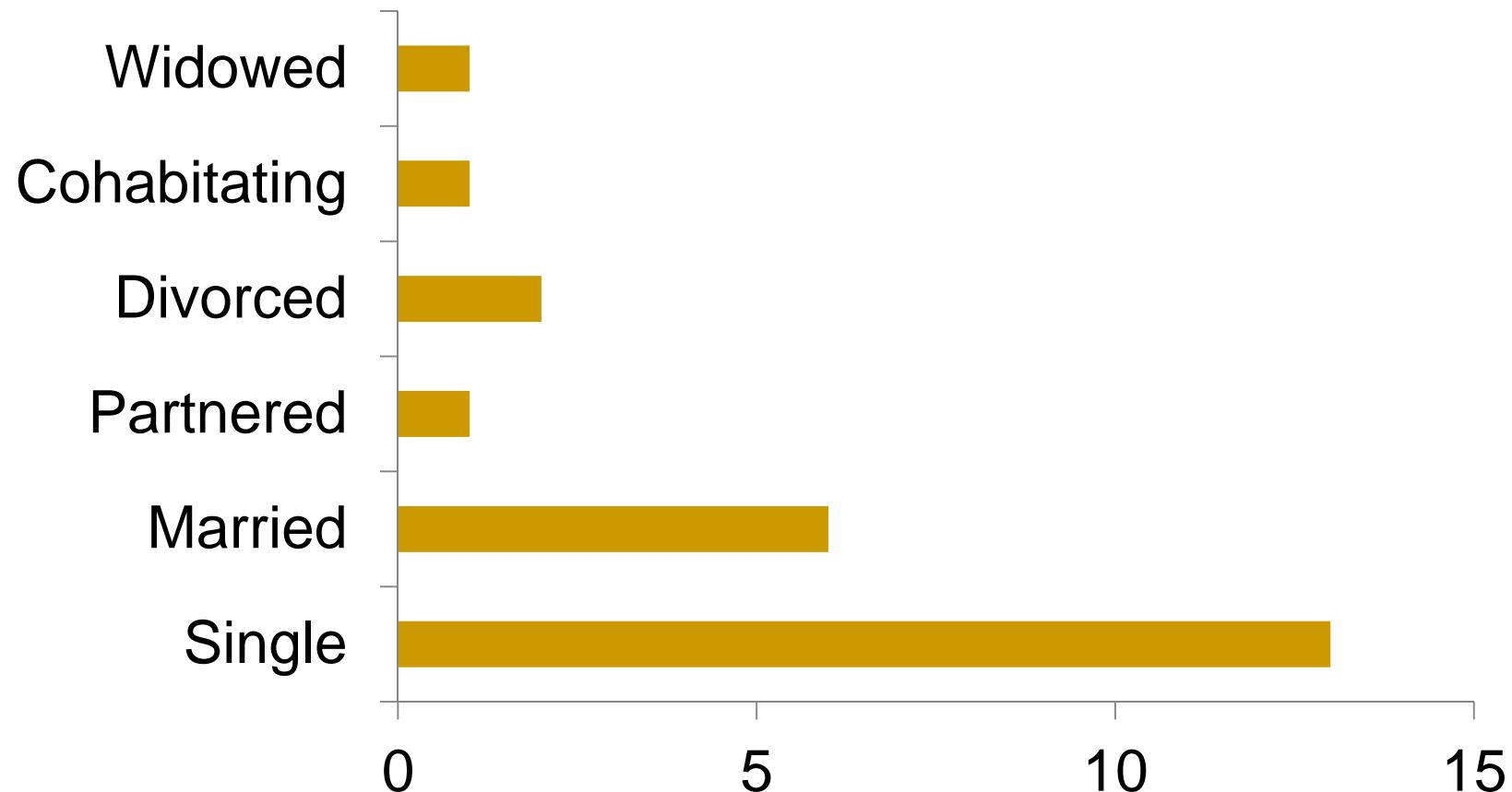
Methods

- Adult patients with an underlying mental health illness living in Missouri (N=25)
- Semi-structured interview guide and waiver of documentation of consent
- Given gift card for participation
- Interviews transcribed
- Content analysis

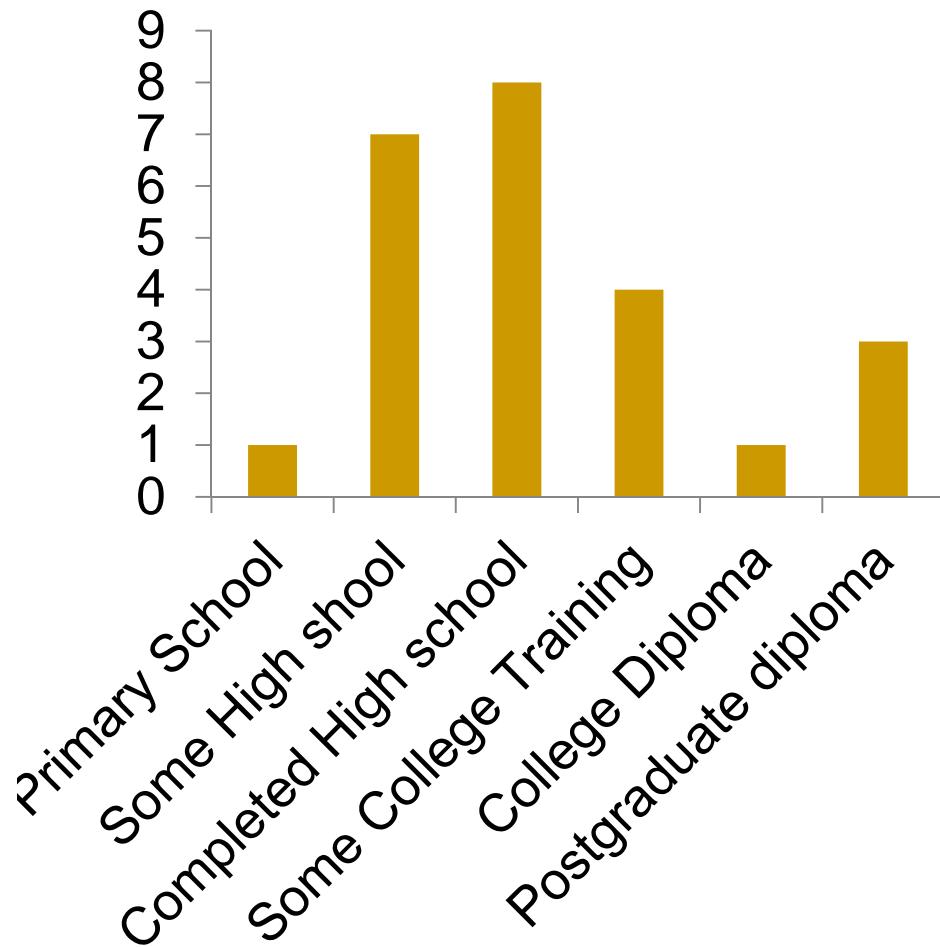
Age Group



Relationship Status

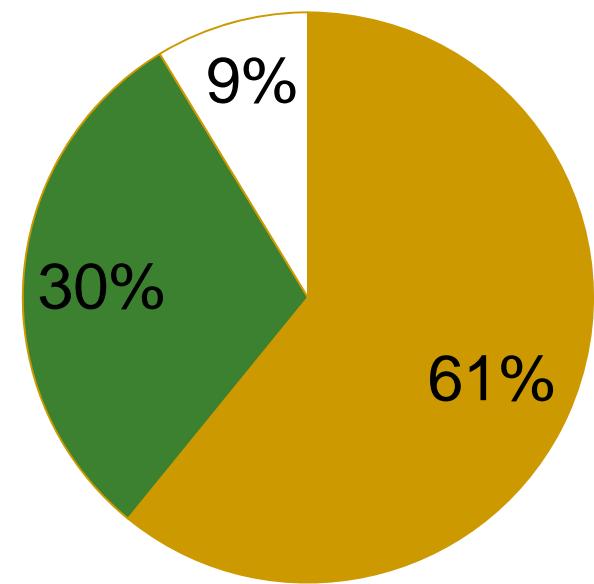


Highest Level of Education



Household Size

- 1-2 members
- 3-5 members
- More than 5 members



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Main health issues

- Diabetes
- Stress
- Poor nutrition
- Tobacco
- Substance abuse
- Cancer
- Heart disease
- Dental problems and gum disease

Perceived barriers to accessing health care services

- Categories of barriers:
 1. High cost of health care services
 2. Difficulty accessing the health care system
 3. Negative perceptions of system fairness
 4. Transportation difficulties
 5. Communication difficulties
 6. Social isolation

High cost of health care services

- ❑ Considerable out-of-pocket expenses and co-payments
- ❑ Lack of health insurance, underinsurance
- ❑ Lack of dental coverage

“ I had impacted teeth when I first moved here and my sister got me into her dentist, he pulled it and then he told me it was going to be \$1,200 just to replace this one tooth with a temp and I couldn’t afford to go back though. I could pay \$400 and that was it.

..... I still owe them \$1,200. How am I going to pay that, I don’t have that.....Anyway, I feel bad that I owe people money. “

Difficulty accessing the health care system

- Lack of information about services available
- Lack of skills and resources to effectively use the system
- Lack of understanding of what they are entitled to receive through their insurance

Difficulty accessing the health care system

- Lack of a primary care provider
- Long waiting times for doctor's appointments
- Use of the emergency room or free clinics for health care services
- Perceptions of system unfairness

Perceptions of system unfairness

“ People look down kind of look down on you, oh you can wait when you have Medicaid, because Medicaid don’t pay all their bills. Medicaid only pays a portion.....”

Perceptions of system unfairness

“There are certain things Medicaid will not cover, like oral surgery. No dentistry what so ever I’ve three teeth that are so bad in my mouth. Diabetic, that stuff is poisonous going into my system and Medicaid won’t pay for it. No matter how much my doctors call and be like look this has to be done.”

“ I got to...have two toenails that have to be removed. They’re covering the surgery to cut the lumps out of my feet, why not take my nails the same time. They are causing pain, they are causing infection. I am a diabetic, your feet are very important. ”



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“...when I was younger, they had me on medicine for ADD. It was Ritalin and it ate the enamel off my teeth. So they’re all gone, so...and I haven’t found anybody that takes Medicaid.”

Understanding the importance of insurance

“ One of my pills alone each month is \$670. I pay two bucks. I mean there are good things on Medicaid and then there other things that aren’t so good.”



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Communication difficulties

- Poor health literacy skills among some people with mental health illness may create additional challenges
- Low health literacy will impact how easy or difficult will be for the patient to navigate the health system
 - Access certain health care benefits
 - Help seeking
 - Adhere to medical treatment

Communication difficulties

- Importance of communicating in plain language
- Willingness to treat and follow up
- Time spent with providers
- Positive perceptions of case managers

Communication difficulties

- Providers sometimes struggle to understand the nature and importance of physical symptoms in patients with mental illness
 - Symptoms and worries not taken seriously
 - Attributing some of the physical symptoms to symptoms of paranoia, hallucinations, delusions, etc

“ I knew that there was something seriously wrong with my right side. I had to push the fact that there is something wrong with my side. I was told they thought it was a bruise. It turned out it was cancer, a tumor, and it wasn’t fully diagnosed until June, and I started getting chemo in August. Now, a year ago, October is when I was feeling this pain, that’s how long it took me to get a diagnosis.“

Social isolation

- Social relationships are important for anyone in maintaining health, but for the mentally ill it is especially important
 - value contact with family
 - rely on family members for support, like transportation, daily living arrangements

Strategies that might make a difference

- Obtaining a “medical home” – a primary care provider responsible for overall coordination
- Medication adherence
 - just as important for non-mental health meds
 - Brown Bag medications reviews
- Assisting in scheduling and keeping medical care appointments
- Transportation coordination strategies

Final thought

Findings may help policy makers, providers, and researchers understand that people with mental illness need a integrated approach to care management that deals with both the medical needs and the mental health needs—giving each equal priority.

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