



Barriers to the early identification & intervention of early psychosis among young rural males



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The literature shows that a lengthy duration of untreated psychosis has been recognised amongst young rural males. Early psychosis has been described as a cluster of symptoms marked by: hallucinations and delusions; thought disorder; and cognitive impairment and it is more prevalent amongst young males than young females. A significant discrepancy of duration of the length of untreated psychosis has been identified between rural and urban communities. This discrepancy has far reaching consequences for young rural men at a significant transitional developmental phase in their lives.

This study, conducted in rural communities in northern New South Wales, sought to understand the lived experiences of young rural males and their families in regard to emergent mental health problems, in an effort to recognise the barriers to earlier identification of early psychosis, and its timely treatment.

A qualitative research study was conducted which utilised an interpretive phenomenological analytical framework. Seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted following a media and snowballing recruitment strategy. Data analysis was conducted utilising thematic analysis. The major finding of this research was the identification of the early help seeking patterns of both the young men with emergent mental health problems and their families. A seven stage process was described whereby families are identified as possessing established skills as helpers. These skills are amendable for inclusion in the collaborative care planning for young men in rural communities.

Rural nurses are well positioned in the clinical spectrum to identify emergent mental health problems in the rural settings and to engage with young rural men usefully. They are rural community assets who have dual roles of nurse and resident community member in rural communities which provide them with a platform to enable early identification and intervention of young rural men and their families with emergent mental health problems.

This research contributes to the nursing and mental health literature, and has identified specific factors which influence the duration of untreated psychosis amongst young rural males. It has provided insight into the social discomforts and the unpredictable course of emergent mental health problems plus it has exposed the burden that is faced by parents who struggle to find help for their sons. Finally, it has highlighted the limitations which exist within rural health systems to adequately communicate mental health promotion messages to rural families and communities, and the failure to sufficiently invite young rural men to engage in early interventions treatment.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Rhonda's interest in researching was sparked during her previous role as Clinical Nurse Specialist in Hunter New England Health where she was the Early Psychosis Project Officer for the Northern region of HNEH. The research project commenced as part of the RRCBP and has led to Rhonda's recent award of a Masters of Nursing (Hons) at the University of New England. Rhonda is now a Lecturer in Mental Health Nursing at UNE, and continues research and practice development collaborations with her colleagues in HNEH. She is involved in a number of other research projects. She is currently embarking on a PhD.



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