Rural-Urban Differences in Access to Mental Health Care Facilities in the United States

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BACKGROUND
- One in five adults and one in six youths experience mental illness each year.
- Approximately 7.7 million US rural residents (20.5% of rural adults) have any mental illness in 2020.
- Despite the similar prevalence of mental illness between rural and urban residents, rural-urban disparities in access to care have been well documented.
- Yet, literature on rural-urban differences in access to mental healthcare in the US has used various definitions to construct rurality, access and mental healthcare.

OBJECTIVE
- To synthesize historical evidence on the extent of rural-urban variations in accessibility to mental health facilities in the U.S.

METHODS
- A systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines.
- Librarian-content expert identified key search term criterion applied.
- Search criterion was limited to articles that are written in English, peer-reviewed, those published in the U.S., those pertaining to rural-urban differences, access to mental health facilities, distance to facilities, travel time to facilities and geographic proximity.
- Non-U.S. studies, non-relevant workforce studies, studies pertaining to telehealth, and emergency medicine were excluded.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

FINDINGS

CONCLUSION
- Persistent rural urban disparities in travel distance to accessing mental health care exist.
- Rural residents face substantial heterogeneity in accessing mental health care.
- It is essential to incorporate geographic proximity to explore rural mental health initiatives.

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