



**A**pproximately one in four young people are likely to be suffering from a mental health disorder at any one time<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that 75% of all mental health disorders commence before 24 years of age<sup>2</sup>, however, young people are the least likely group to seek help. In the UK, despite considerable financial investment in young peoples' services, it has been argued that 'young people continue to be consulted but not heard'<sup>3</sup>. This study by two CLAHRC fellows aimed to provide a systematic overview of what is known about young peoples' views of the mental health services available to them, and to assess the quality of UK literature studying this subject. The themes which emerged from the available evidence were used to inform service developments and research priorities in one Trust in the East of England.

### The research

Ten reference databases were searched for four concepts: young people, mental health services, attitudes derived from qualitative studies, and accessibility/uptake. The resulting titles were screened for studies relevant to the research aim. Papers were then excluded by criteria which included: those not published before 2000, not in the English language, not based in the UK, and with subjects outside the age range 12-25. The resulting studies were coded by two reviewers in order to describe the study characteristics and to elicit the key themes emerging.

### The results

The search process resulted in 31 studies for inclusion in the review. A descriptive analysis of these showed that studies mostly sought young peoples' views through interviews, focus groups or questionnaires. Settings included mental health settings and the general population. Subjects were mostly 17 or under, with only one study including young adults over 17 (the age of transition to care by adult services). Subjects were of mixed gender but few studies reported on ethnic diversity. The studies collectively reported the views of approximately 600 young people with experience of mental health services, and approximately 9,000 in population settings.

### Key themes

Four themes emerged about what factors facilitated contact with mental health services for young people. These included information about mental illness; what to expect from services, skilled therapists and workers; accessibility of services, including community based and outreach approaches; and interventions supporting young people in building self reliance and taking control of their own lives. Four themes emerged about what young people disliked and found unhelpful. These included stigma and prejudice, medicalisation of problems and over-reliance on medication, including poor experience of contact with professionals. Lack of

continuity of care including an over-intrusive need to repeat their story again and again, and a lack of knowledge about local services were also barriers.

### Conclusions

This systematic review found 31 studies which examined young peoples' views of mental health services. Areas found to be poorly addressed in the literature included the needs of young adults over 17 within adult services, and the needs of ethnic minorities, young men and looked after children. Information was a key issue for young people, and users of services had clear views about what they wanted, including continuity of care, choice of therapist, and location of treatment. Stigma and prejudice continue to be barriers to seeking help, and some young people report negative experiences of service contact.

### Impact and Recommendations

As part of this study, a working group was set up to study the numbers of young people accessing mental health services, as well as a young persons' public involvement group to inform future service developments. A multidisciplinary conference, which included young users of services, was held in the East of England to discuss young peoples' mental health needs and alternative models of service provision.

Recommendations were made to involve service users in service redesign, and to further research the needs of young people not well represented in the literature. It was recommended that youth-focussed workers are included within the adult team to improve awareness.

### References

1. McGorry, Purcell, Hickie, Jorm, Investing in youth mental health is a best buy. *Editorial MJA*:187:(7 suppl):s5-s7, 2007
2. Kessler et al, Prevalence, severity and comorbidity of 12 moth DSM-IV disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication, *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 62(6):617-627 2005
3. National Advisory Council 2010.