

Facilitators and Barriers to Interdisciplinary and International Collaborations in Mental Health Promotion

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Background: Mental health is determined by many interacting bio-psycho-social factors. Interdisciplinary collaboration is needed to address both the individual and structural determinants of mental health. Although there are increasing efforts to build interdisciplinary mental health programs and services, progress varies within and across nations. Research on interdisciplinary practices suggests that varying levels of expertise, inconsistent access to training, and institutional practice create barriers and impede progress.

Aims: A key goal of Linking Hearts, a multidisciplinary Canada-China implementation project to promote mental health, is to examine the facilitators and barriers in expanding interdisciplinary mental health services in Jinan, Shandong China.

Proposition: We provide an overview of mental health care systems in Canada and China. Additionally, we outline the existing challenges and opportunities in establishing interdisciplinary mental health practices in Jinan and identify areas of knowledge exchange that may strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. We also share how interdisciplinary collaboration is embedded in each stage of the implementation research program, including project conceptualization, planning and evaluations, day-to-day operations, and knowledge translation.

Results: The project has fostered collaborations among professionals in epidemiology, social work, nursing, psychiatry, psychology, and student counsellors. Each discipline approaches the topic of student mental health with different assumptions, understanding, and preferred solutions. In addition, the project has engaged non-healthcare providers including professors, student leaders, and stakeholders. The broadened perspective enriches, contextualizes, and optimizes the project's intervention and project plan. Challenges and mitigation strategies are shared, from trust-building to overcoming communication barriers to bridging divergent perspectives to circumventing structural barriers.

Implication: Successful interdisciplinary collaborations require thoughtful planning and effective engagement. Despite challenges, diversity of expertise in team members are essential in navigating dynamic and complex issues to ultimately build an interdisciplinary mental health system that can promote holistic mental health.