

Youth report improved wellbeing as result of tailored mental health services

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Dr. Elizabeth Osuch (left), clinician-scientist at Lawson Health Research Institute and associate professor at Western University's Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, and Justin Arcaro (right), first author on the study and a former MSc candidate at Schulich Medicine & Dentistry and research associate at Lawson. Credit: Lawson Health Research Institute

In a new study from Lawson Health Research Institute and Western University, researchers partnered with youth receiving care at the First Episode Mood and Anxiety Program (FEMAP) at London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC) to better understand personal perspectives on care and treatment outcomes. The study found that patients experienced lasting improvements in managing their symptoms and improvements in academics, work performance and relationships, and they reported that these benefits involved being empowered by feelings of self-acceptance.

The study included 22 [patients](#) from FEMAP, a novel outpatient mental health program at LHSC that provides [treatment](#) to 'emerging adults,' ages 16 to 25, with emotional concerns that fall into the categories of mood and anxiety symptoms. Treatment at FEMAP takes a patient-centred approach and the research involved looking at what is meaningful and valuable to patients during their care journey.

"The transition from adolescence to adulthood is challenging. FEMAP employs an innovative model of care tailored to the needs of this complex population," said Dr. Elizabeth Osuch, a clinician-scientist at Lawson, associate professor at Western University's Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry and medical director at FEMAP. "By engaging patients in a reflection of their experience, we can learn how effective the program is from the patient perspective."

Participants shared their experiences through open-ended interviews with Dr. Osuch's research team. Interview transcripts were collected and analyzed to determine common themes around treatment and outcomes. These themes were then presented back to the research participants for validation.

The study found that treatment led to development of coping strategies to better manage symptoms. Research participants credited these strategies for better functioning in academics, careers and personal

relationships. Challenges in these areas are common among emerging adults and are often stressors that lead to youth seeking mental health care.

Participants characterized their treatment at FEMAP as an important investment in their mental health and wellbeing, and credited a collaborative partnership with their care provider for keeping them engaged in treatment. They appreciated the ease of accessing treatment at FEMAP where they could receive care from a psychiatrist, social worker, addictions counsellor, family counsellor and a psychologist, depending on their needs.

The research found that the complexities of treatment were initially frustrating to patients as they were seeking an "easy fix" to their mental health concerns, but they ultimately appreciated that mental health recovery is a journey. They valued that care providers partnered with them to set long-term treatment goals, choose the best treatment options and provide support both during and between appointments.

"Patients may prefer FEMAP over other [mental health services](#) because the care is tailored to emerging adults," said Justin Arcaro, first author on the study and a former MSc candidate at Schulich Medicine & Dentistry and research associate at FEMAP. "There's an important balance between recognizing emerging adults' personal autonomy and their need for comprehensive support."

Study results demonstrated that through treatment at FEMAP, patients realized they are not alone in their mental health journey which led to improved self-acceptance and self-compassion. Participants reported feeling empowered to create meaningful changes in their lives.

Participants also discussed the decision to seek mental [health](#) care in the first place. Many struggled with the decision of whether or not treatment

was needed. "This shows a need for targeted campaigns to help emerging adults distinguish between normative feelings and those that indicate a need for help," said Dr. Osuch.

This study also aligns with other research projects at FEMAP that suggest a need for targeted education campaigns about [mental health care](#) as a process with solutions that are not necessarily quick or easy. The research team highlights the importance of these findings in informing future funding decisions and policy around [mental health](#) care for emerging adults. The findings emphasize the need for quick engagement with a trusted care provider and an integrated treatment team that can partner with patients to support them while enhancing independent growth and self-acceptance.

The study, "Emerging adults' evaluation of their treatment in an outpatient mood and anxiety disorders program," is published in *Emerging Adulthood*.

More information: Justin A. Arcaro et al, Emerging Adults' Evaluation of Their Treatment in an Outpatient Mood and Anxiety Disorders Program, *Emerging Adulthood* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/2167696818777339](#)

Provided by Lawson Health Research Institute

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