

# Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services by Migrant Youth



JUST SIX  
QUESTIONS  
RESEARCH  
SUMMARY

*“Youth who could benefit from but do not use mental health services are left to address troubling experiences as they interact with challenges that arise in their daily lives” (p. 1101).*

## 1. WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about the barriers to accessing mental health services experienced by migrant youth.

## 2. WHERE DID THE RESEARCH TAKE PLACE?

The study took place in a mid-size central city in Ontario, Canada.

## 3. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about migrant youth in Ontario. Research participants reported their ethnicities as Arab, Kurdish, Eritrean, Persian, Hispanic, African, and Pakistani, and countries of origin as Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Colombia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Austria, Congo, Palestine, and Ethiopia.

## 4. HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE?

Participants were recruited through posters in a local community development organization. **Individual interviews** were conducted with 30 migrant youth aged 16-22, and included the open-ended question, “What would stop you from talking about mental health stress?”

Upon completion of the interviews, the *group concept mapping method*, an approach that includes participants in the analysis of their data, was used by researchers. There are four steps to the group concept mapping method:

### a. Generation

Data is generated. This study generated *qualitative data* (describing qualities, characteristics, and processes) from the 30 individual interviews.

### b. Structuring

Data is reviewed to remove redundancies and edited for clarity. In this study, statements made by participants were reviewed and used to create a list of 52 unique statements. All participants were invited to sort the statements together. Twelve youth then met with researchers to complete the sorting; cards that contained individual statements were organized in groupings. The youth were told to group the statements “in any way that makes sense to you” (p. 1103).

### c. Representation

Data is grouped or organized in meaningful ways. *Multidimensional scaling* (visualizing levels of similarity across individual cases of a dataset) and *cluster analysis* (exploring naturally occurring groups within a dataset) were used to identify the recurring themes among the data in this study.

### d. Interpretation

The statements in each group are reviewed to ensure that they are similar, and a label is applied to the grouping to name the theme.

Ultimately, this method results in a “visual depiction of the responses and the degree to which they are conceptually similar. The resulting **concept map provides a visual representation of the process and product** [emphasis added]” (p. 1103).

## 5. WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS?

A concept map was constructed in answer to the research question. **Five key themes** emerged from this concept map:

### i) Fear of Being Misunderstood or Ignored

Migrant youth are hesitant about being vulnerable because they fear their experiences will not be understood or taken seriously. They also fear that their problems are not 'significant enough' to warrant time from a professional.

### ii) Desire for Confidentiality

Participants fear that confidentiality could be breached with the disclosure of information they share to the authorities or their parents. This fear and the belief that self-disclosure should be a two-way process influence a desire to keep their personal information private.

### iii) Lack of Trust and Lack of Understanding

Youth reported being unaware of available supports or services. They also want to be reassured that their safety is guaranteed, if or when they do disclose mental health stress.

### iv) Talking About It Is Not Appropriate

Participants are wary about the benefits of disclosure, as they have previously held cultural beliefs that sharing personal information with people outside of their family and community is unacceptable. They also indicate a preconceived notion that talking about mental health is unhelpful.

### v) Fear of the Disclosure Process

Negative past experiences make youth fearful of the disclosure process. Additionally, youth are worried about how someone might respond to their disclosure and how they would be perceived. They are also concerned about their ability to disclose due to a lack of confidence and potential language barriers.

## 6. WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER FOR YOUTH WORK?

The themes that emerged from this research study are important factors for youth workers to consider in improving the mental health of migrant youth and their **access to safe resources, supports, and services**.

Opportunities to **develop familiarity through a trusting relationship** would make approaching service providers less intimidating for migrant youth. However, service providers **need to be familiar with the young person's community, work to minimize their concerns, and provide reasonable expectations for the relationship**.

- 🔍 Finnigan, C., Brown, J., Al-Adeimi, M., & Al-Abed, R. (2021). Barriers to accessing mental health services by migrant youth. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 58(6), 1101-1111.