

Assessing the Collaborative Care Needs of Psychotherapists in Ontario



Psychotherapy Matters



Survey Report:

Assessing the Collaborative Care Needs of Psychotherapy Providers in Ontario

Abstract

A survey conducted by Psychotherapy Matters demonstrated that psychotherapy providers reported needing more and better access to psychiatric services for their clients. This report illustrates the staggering lack of access to psychiatric care in Ontario.

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Assessing the Collaborative Care Needs of Psychotherapy Providers in Ontario

INTRODUCTION

To assess the needs of psychotherapy providers in Ontario, Psychotherapy Matters conducted an online survey focused on privately and publicly funded non-physician psychotherapy providers. The current mental health care system is fragmented and lacks integration, leaving many therapists and clinical professionals needing further support for their clients. These allied mental health professionals often do not work together. Furthermore, the private and publicly-funded mental health services are largely siloed off from each other.

Understanding what psychotherapy providers need allows for the development of better tools and platforms that meet those needs and ultimately improve mental health care for the public.

One of the ways to fill the gap in support of psychotherapy providers across Ontario is collaborative care, connecting the therapist to family doctors and psychiatrists. The focus on collaborative mental health care stems from extensive evidence in the literature that consistently finds improved clinical outcomes (Sunderji, Kurdyak, Sockalingam, & Mulsant, 2018) when care is provided by collaborating partnerships of primary care, psychotherapy providers and psychiatrists. Additionally, the collaborative care model has also demonstrated improved mental health and overall quality of life for clients (Woltmann et al., 2012). In a recent editorial, Sunderji et al. (2018) discussed the collaborative care model (CCM), concluding that, "CCM is a critical strategy to closing the current access and quality gaps in mental health care across the life span."

Access to psychiatrists is a significant issue. Individuals most in need cannot access psychiatrists or have to wait months, which prolongs illness and can exacerbate their problems (Sunderji et al., 2018). As the number of patients in need of psychiatric consultations increases, access to psychiatrists becomes even more challenging (Kurdyak, Zaheer, Cheng, Rudoler, & Mulsant, 2017).

The Psychotherapy Matters (PM) platform is dedicated to seamlessly linking the services of mental health practitioners and primary care providers. In the PM model, virtual psychiatrists (engaged in consultations and follow-up utilizing secure videoconferencing) collaborate with accredited psychotherapy providers creating teams of providers matched to patient needs. This allows patients to access the right psychiatrist through their preferred psychotherapy provider in conjoint sessions with the psychiatrist. Psychotherapy providers offer case management services as well as the labour-intensive and time-consuming psychotherapy treatments. Primary care providers have easy access to care for their patients by referral to PM.

Psychotherapy Matters leverages its technology and collaboration-based workflow processes to deliver integrated care. We have been able to reduce waiting times for psychiatrists to 2 weeks (or less), rather than months. The PM platform is patient-centred and designed to improve transparency, quality, customization (matching of services to needs) and efficiency.

This survey explored the current state of collaborative mental health care in Ontario from the perspective of the professional experiences and needs of psychotherapy providers without medical degrees. Surveyed psychotherapy providers included the regulated professionals listed in the Ontario Psychotherapy Act, 2007 (Registered Psychotherapists, Social Workers, Psychologists, Nurses, Occupational Therapists).

METHODS

PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

The total size of the population of psychotherapy providers in Ontario is not precisely known, with estimates ranging from 15,000 to 20,000 (based on College membership totals). The survey sample was limited to psychotherapy providers listed on Psychology Today. Psychology Today is a popular platform where mental health providers can advertise to reach new clients. At the time of the sampling, Psychology Today had a total of 4,544 psychotherapy providers listed on their online directory. We surveyed a sample of 1,148 psychotherapy providers, of which 10% responded (n=154).

Respondents to the survey did not differ significantly from non-respondents in this sample. From the 154 survey responders, the majority (53%) were registered psychotherapists or qualifying, similar to the 48% of registered psychotherapists from the 1,148 sample. A third of the respondents (29%) are clinical social workers, representational of 36% of clinical social workers in the sampled population. In both sampled population and the survey respondents, these were the two most prominent professional designations.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

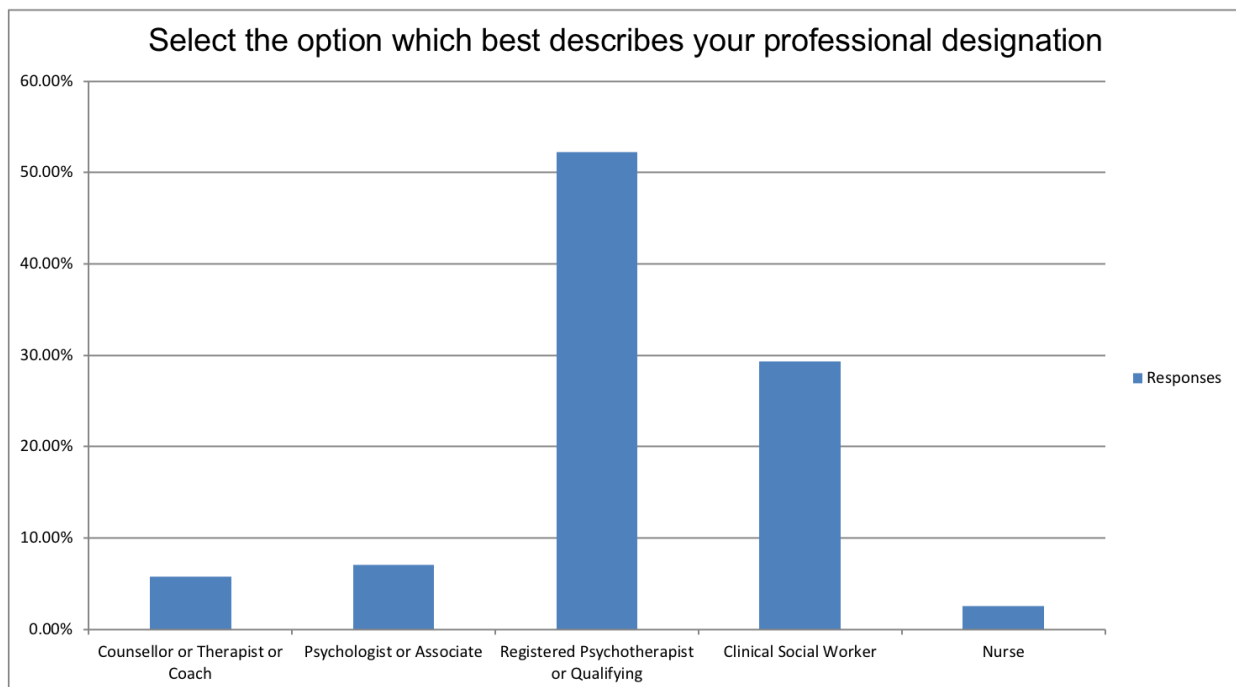
The survey was administered online using a survey platform (SurveyMonkey) between October 18th, 2019 and December 3rd, 2019. Psychotherapy providers were contacted individually via e-mail.

The initial version of the survey consisted of 18 questions, ranging in types from multiple-choice to agreement scales and dichotomous Yes/No questions. The final version of this survey consisted of 16 questions.

RESULTS

The first question concerned each respondent's designated professional affiliation. The answer range for this question consisted of six different professional designations (see Figure 1) – counsellor/therapist/coach, psychologist or associate, registered psychotherapist or qualifying, clinical social worker, occupational therapist and nurse.

Figure 1: Professional designations



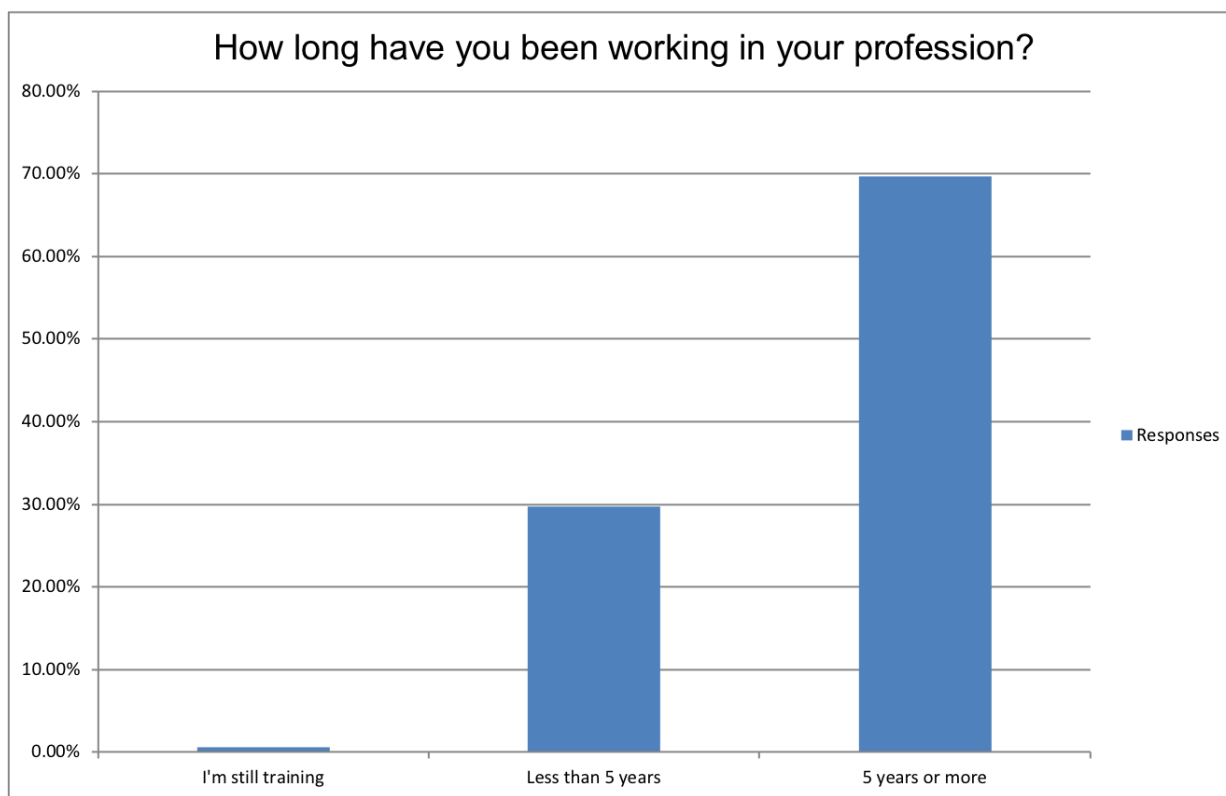
As illustrated in Figure 1 above, the majority of the respondents were registered psychotherapists or qualifying. Specifically, registered psychotherapists accounted for 53% of all 154 respondents, followed by clinical social workers at 29% of respondents.

The remaining 18% of the respondents self-designated as either a counsellor/therapist/coach (6%), psychologist or associate (7%), nurse (3%) or other (3%).

The second question in the survey asked how long the participants had been working. These responses were reduced to two categories: less than five or five years or greater.

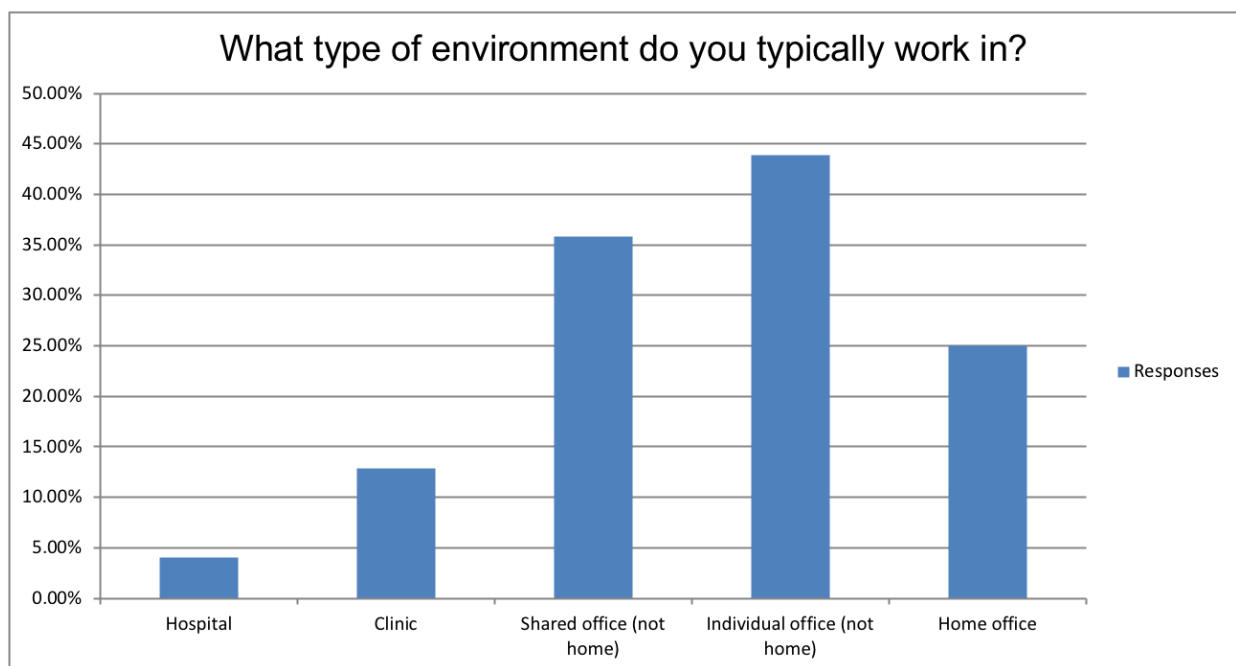
See figure 2.

Figure 2: Years in the profession



Of the 152 participants who completed this question, 70% (Table 2) have worked in their designated professions for five years or more, while 30% have worked in their professions for less than five years. Only one participant (0.7%) stated that they were still in their training phase.

Figure 3: The type of work environment of Ontario's psychotherapy providers



The majority of therapists work in an office setting, ranging from individual offices that were not home offices (45%) shared non-home offices (35%) and home offices (26%).

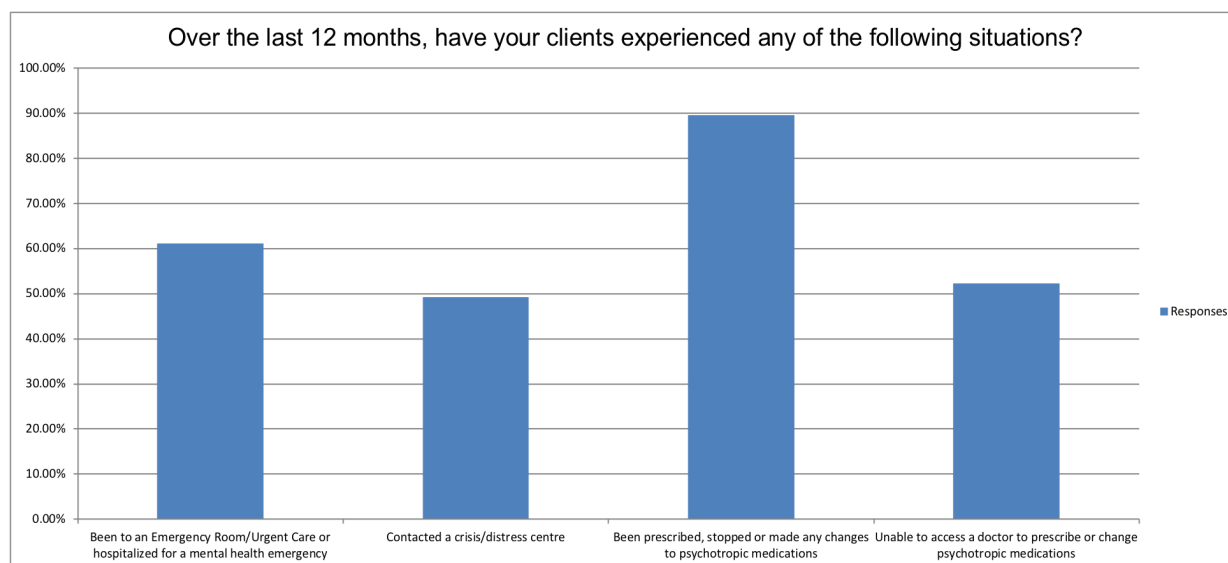
Clinic office settings are used by 12% of therapists, while 4% work in a hospital.

It should be noted that answers to this question were not mutually exclusive since therapists can work in multiple different settings.

The survey also looked at therapist-reported client clinical characteristics over the previous 12 months.

As summarized in Figure 4, responses ranged from "client has been to an emergency room or hospitalized for a mental health emergency," "the client has contacted a crisis/distress centre," "the client has been prescribed, stopped, made any changes to their psychotropic medications," and "the client was unable to access a doctor to prescribe or make changes to psychotropic medications." A total of 131 participants completed this question.

Figure 4: Client clinical characteristics



The majority (89%) of the clients have either been prescribed, stopped or made changes to their psychotropic medications. Moreover, 62% of clients had been admitted to the ER or were hospitalized in the past 12 months for a mental health emergency. Similarly, 50% of clients contacted a distress centre for a mental health-related concern. However, more than half (53%) were unable to access a doctor to prescribe or change their psychotropic medications.

Additionally, psychotherapists also mentioned that some of their clients experienced homelessness and trauma in the past 12 months; similarly, others were admitted to private outpatient trauma programs.

Therapists were also asked what proportion of their clients suffered from mental health conditions that might benefit from easy access to a psychiatrist.

Figure 5: Proportion of clients with mental health conditions that might benefit from a psychiatric consultation

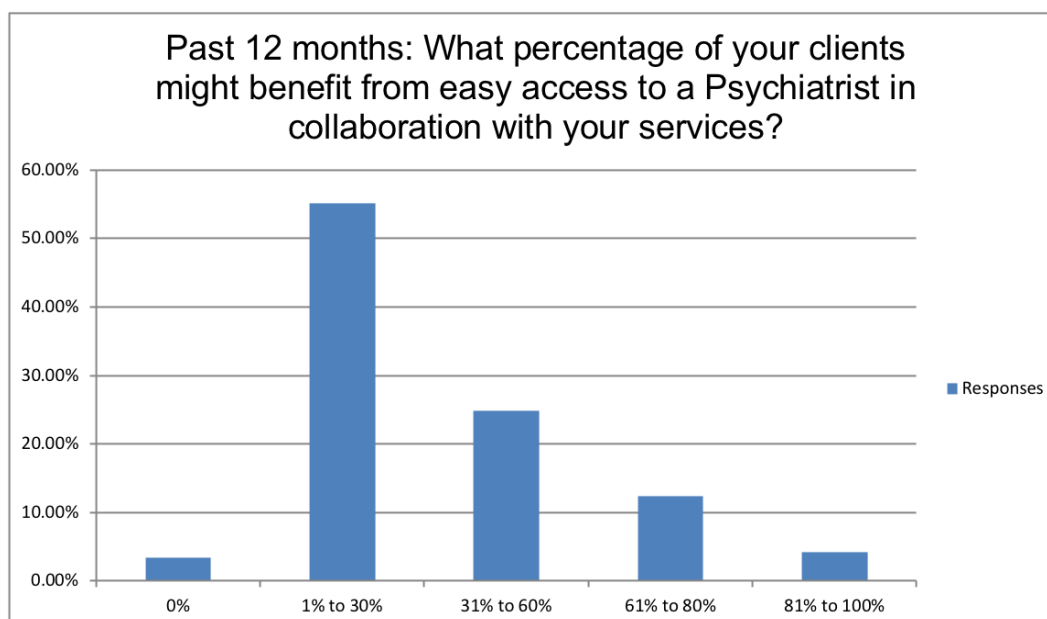
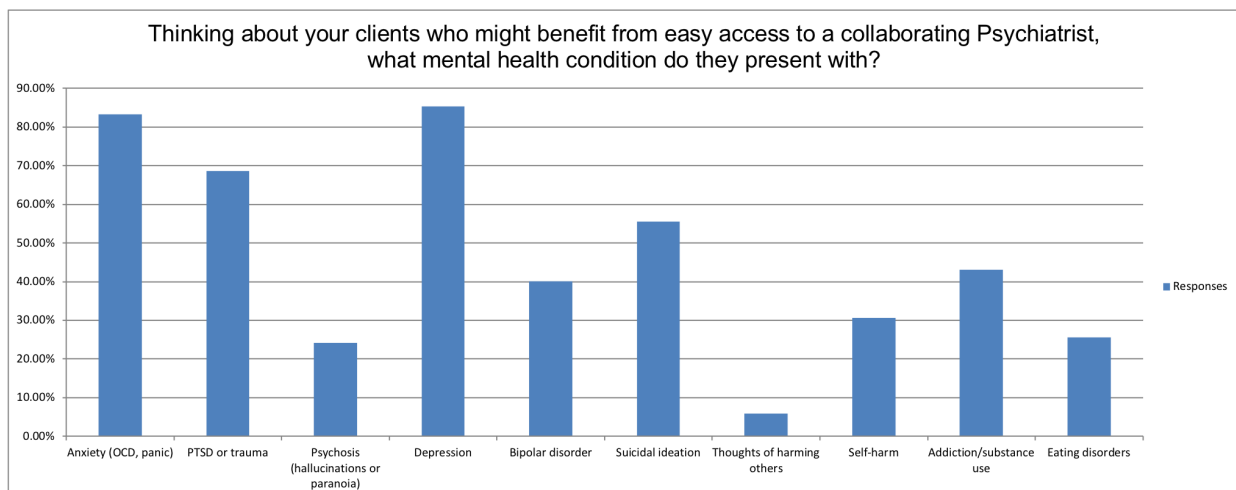


Figure 5 illustrates, most of the psychotherapists estimated that some of their clients might benefit from psychiatric consultations. Specifically, 55.6% of therapists said that up to 30% of their clients might benefit from psychiatric consultation.

Moreover, 25% estimated that over 30% and up to 60% of their clients might benefit from psychiatric collaboration; followed by 12% of providers who considered that between 61-80% of their clients would benefit from such collaboration and 4% of providers estimated that 81-100% of their clients would benefit from psychiatric consultations. Only 3.5% of the mental health providers stated that none of their clients need psychiatric consultations.

For those who stated that some portion of their clients might benefit from psychiatric collaboration, we inquired about the profile of mental health conditions experienced by these clients.

Figure 6: Mental health conditions of clients who might benefit from a psychiatric consultation. [Conditional]

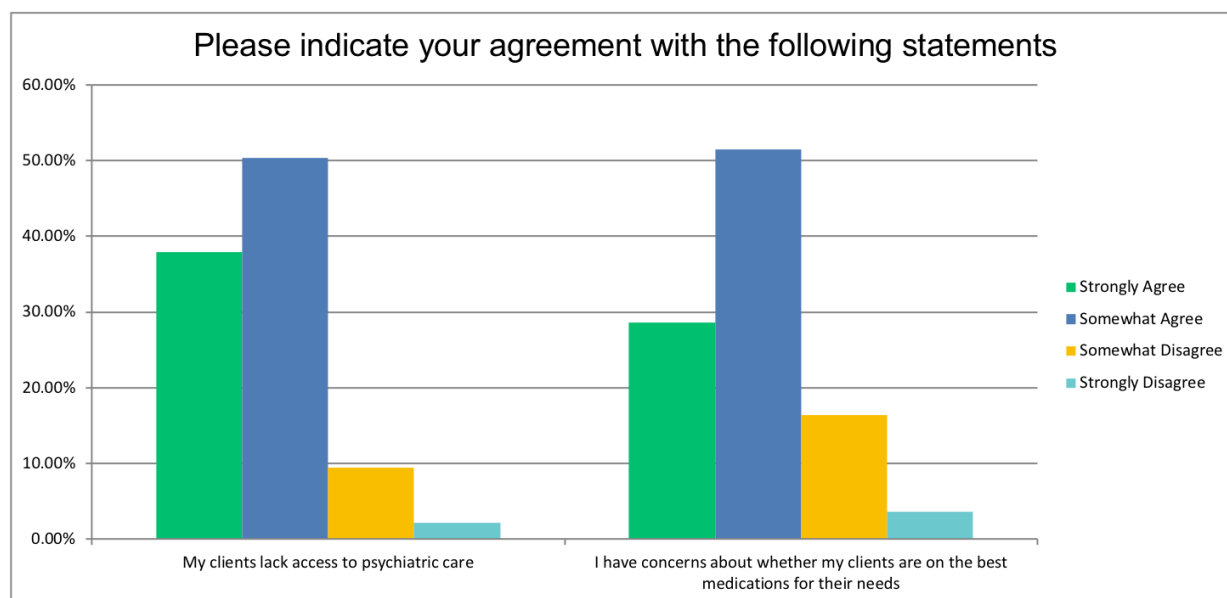


Conditions described ranged from depression (85%) to anxiety, including OCD and panic disorder (83%), to PTSD/trauma (69%) and suicidal ideation as being the most common mental health conditions among clients. Followed by addictions/substance use (42.5%), bipolar disorder (40%), self-harm (30%) and psychosis as well as eating disorders (25%).

Moreover, participants also stated that 5.2% of these clients also presented with thoughts of harming others. Conditions such as ADHD, dissociation, borderline personality disorder, complicated grief, traumatic brain injury and varied comorbidity contributed 8.2% of the responses.

Therapists were asked whether they thought their clients lacked access to psychiatric care and if they had concerns about whether the medications their clients were taking were a good fit for their conditions.

Figure 7: Agreement with statements: "My clients lack access to psychiatric care" and "I have concerns about whether my clients are on the best medication."

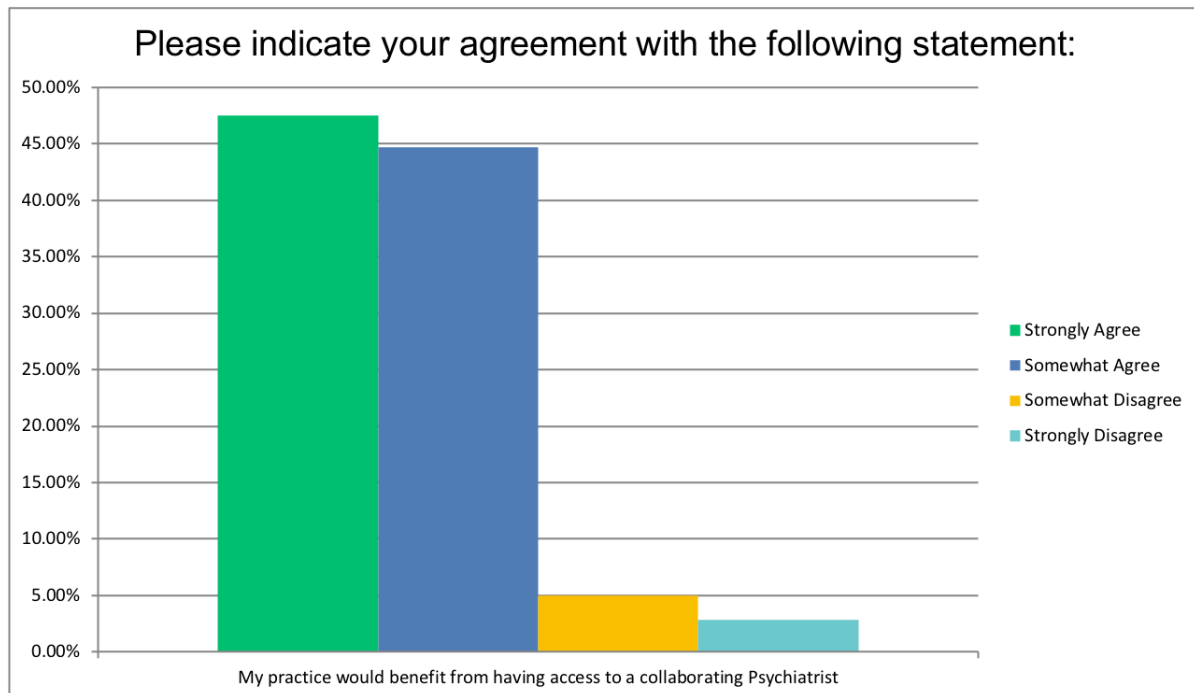


On a scale range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, results show that most (89%) psychotherapy providers recognize that their clients lack access to psychiatrists – 39% strongly agree, and 50% somewhat agree (see Figure 7) – while only 11% disagree with that sentiment.

Additionally, there was an 80% agreement with a professional concern over whether their clients were on the best medication for their specific conditions.

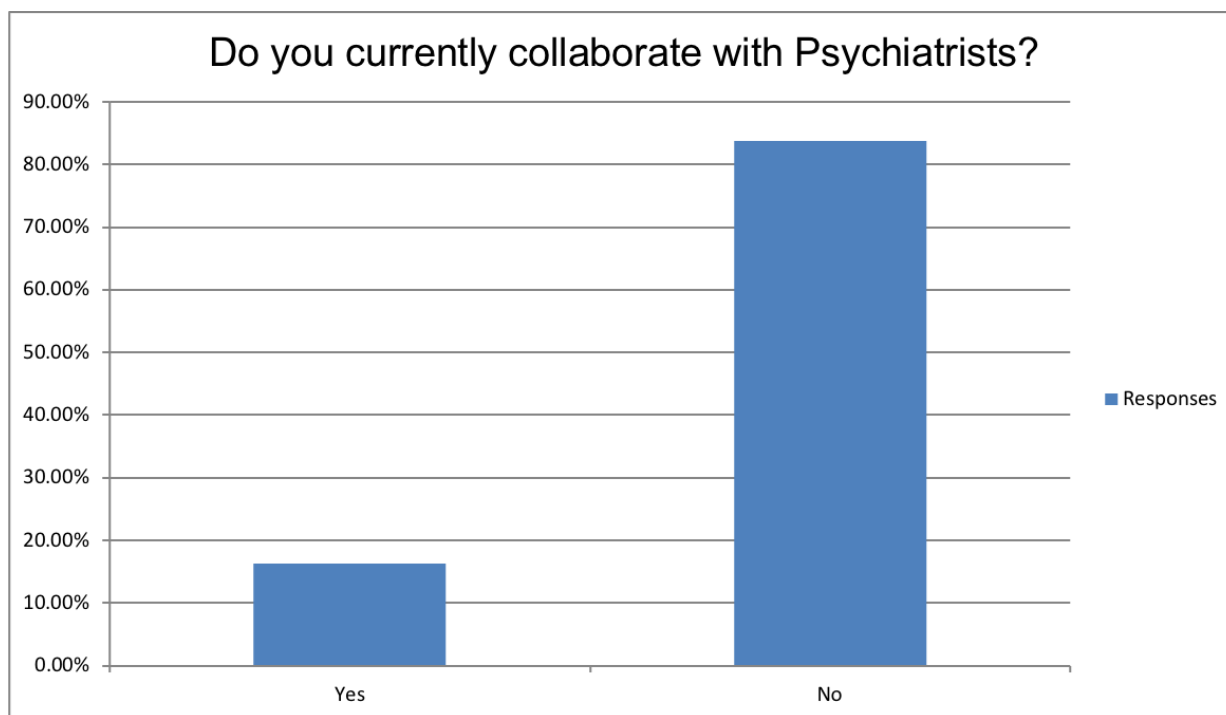
The majority (92%) of the 138 respondents agreed with the statement that their practice “would benefit from having access to a collaborating psychiatrist,” with only 5% stating that they somewhat disagree and 3% stating that they strongly disagree with that sentiment (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Agreement with statement: “My practice would benefit from having access to a collaborating psychiatrist.”



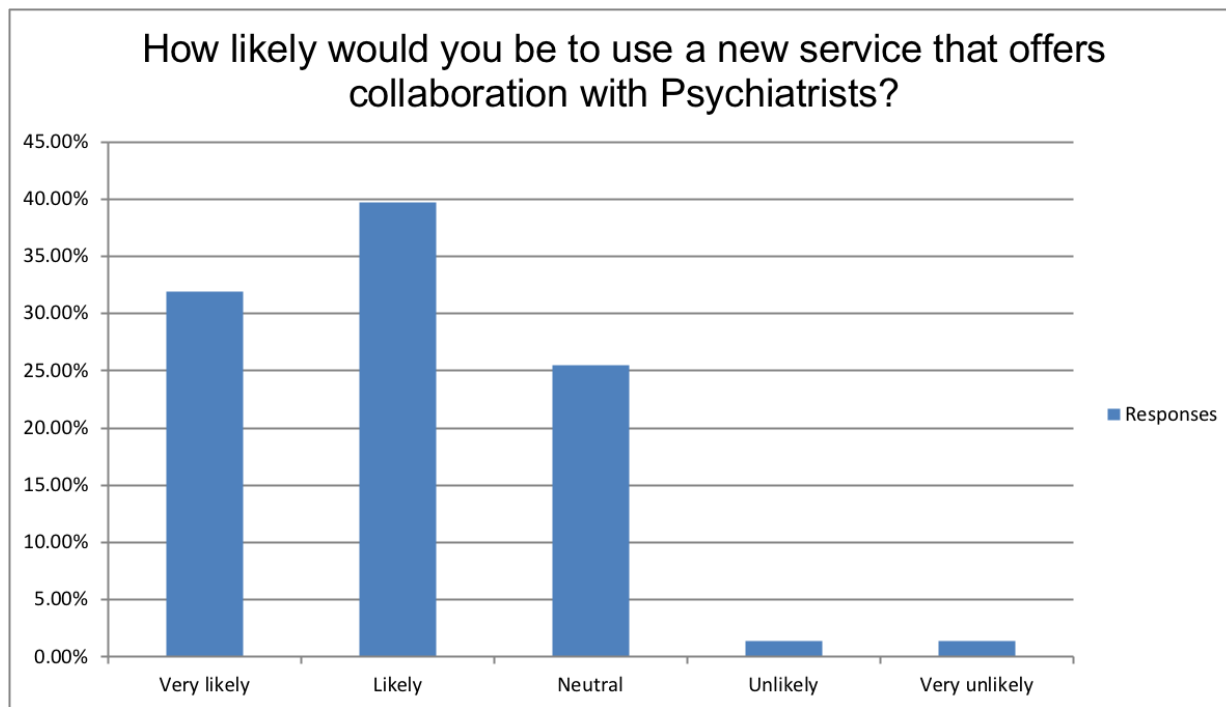
Despite wide agreement among psychotherapy providers that there is a real need for collaboration with psychiatrists, results show that the majority (83%) of mental health professionals surveyed do not currently work or collaborate with psychiatrists.

Figure 9: Current collaboration with a psychiatrist.



Of all survey respondents, 72% stated that they were either very likely (33%) or likely (39%) to use a service that offers collaboration with psychiatrists (see Fig. 10).

Figure 10: Likelihood of using a service that offers collaboration with psychiatrists.



DISCUSSION

The current survey found that Registered Psychotherapists (or Qualifying) and Clinical Social Workers are the two most prevalent professional designations in our sample. Additionally, the survey indicates that the majority of the participants work full-time and have been working in their respective professional designations for five years or more. This is particularly pertinent to the representational validity of the survey findings for more seasoned professionals.

It appears that most therapists work in an office setting, including shared office space or from their own homes. Psychotherapy providers often work independently and without the support of a collaborative community. Some of the therapists work as on-site critical response providers, which requires flexibility and prompt access to psychiatric consultations.

In assessing the needs of psychotherapy providers, it is crucial to understand the range of client profiles they serve in terms of acuity and complexity. For instance, we found that almost all of the therapists (96%) indicated that some portion of their clients needs psychiatric consultation, with the majority estimating up to 30% of their clients need ongoing access to a psychiatrist. Such findings are corroborated by the report that 62% of clients have been admitted to the ER for a mental health condition in the last 12 months, and 50% have contacted a distress centre for their mental health conditions. However, about half of the providers (53%) stated that their clients could not access a doctor for their psychotropic medications. Despite the need for collaboration and support for therapists, most providers surveyed (83%) stated that they do not currently work with psychiatrists.

The vast majority of mental health professionals seem to be aware of the gap in collaborative care and agree that their practice would benefit from better access to psychiatrists. Moreover, 71% of therapists are willing to consider new or existing platforms that introduce a collaborative model that also improves access.

The current mental health care system is fragmented and leaves psychotherapy providers without the additional support they need to help clients who present with more complex conditions. Offering a service that emphasizes collaboration and supports therapists could help bridge these gaps and improve access to psychiatric care and the quality of mental health care in general.

CONCLUSION

This online survey of psychotherapy providers in Ontario found:

- Amongst psychotherapy providers, there is a significant lack of access to collaborative psychiatric care
- Psychotherapy providers often practice without support from a collaborative mental health care community
- There is a substantial portion of clients seeing therapists who would benefit from additional psychiatric assessments and follow-up
- Mental health care professionals acknowledge the need for collaboration with psychiatrists and family doctors and are willing to consider services and platforms that offer to address these needs.

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Psychotherapy Matters

Psychotherapy Matters is a virtual care system that connects therapists and their clients with psychiatrists and family doctors. We support recovery through invaluable psychiatry consultations delivered by caring and dedicated psychiatrists in collaboration with psychotherapists.

When clients require psychiatric intervention, lack of access to the right care can stall their progress and impact their therapeutic progress. That's where Psychotherapy Matters comes in. Our easy, collaborative solution provides security, shares decision-making, and manages risk for more challenging client cases. Clients benefit from receiving a diagnosis, medication recommendations or monitoring, and psychotherapy – without having to leave their therapist's circle of care.

Since launching in 2014, we have consulted on more than 1400 patient care cases and supported over 300 therapy practices in our network. When clients and therapists need a village of support, Psychotherapy Matters brings one right to their desktop, tablet, or mobile device.

For more information, visit www.psychotherapymatters.com or email us at help@psychotherapymatters.com