

Patterns and Disparities in Mental Health Treatment: A Four-Week Prescription and Counseling Study



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Key Finding

Individuals with anxiety/depression symptoms reported substantially higher counseling use (18.3%) compared to those without symptoms (5.9%). However, utilization levels suggest that many individuals experiencing symptoms may still not be receiving care.

Background

Mental health needs are increasing, yet many individuals still do not receive counseling or medication. Persistent unmet need highlights ongoing gaps between mental health needs and access to care.

Differences in treatment utilization across populations may reflect broader disparities in mental health service access and use (Meiselbach et al., 2024; Nagata et al., 2022).

Objective

This study examines patterns and disparities in mental health treatment utilization over a four-week period, focusing on counseling, prescription medication use, and unmet need across demographic groups.

Methods

This study used aggregated secondary mental health data reporting four-week treatment utilization estimates. Descriptive analyses were conducted to examine counseling and medication use across age, symptom status, and disability status.

Key Measures

Key measures included counseling utilization, prescription medication use, unmet need for counseling, and combined medication/counseling utilization.

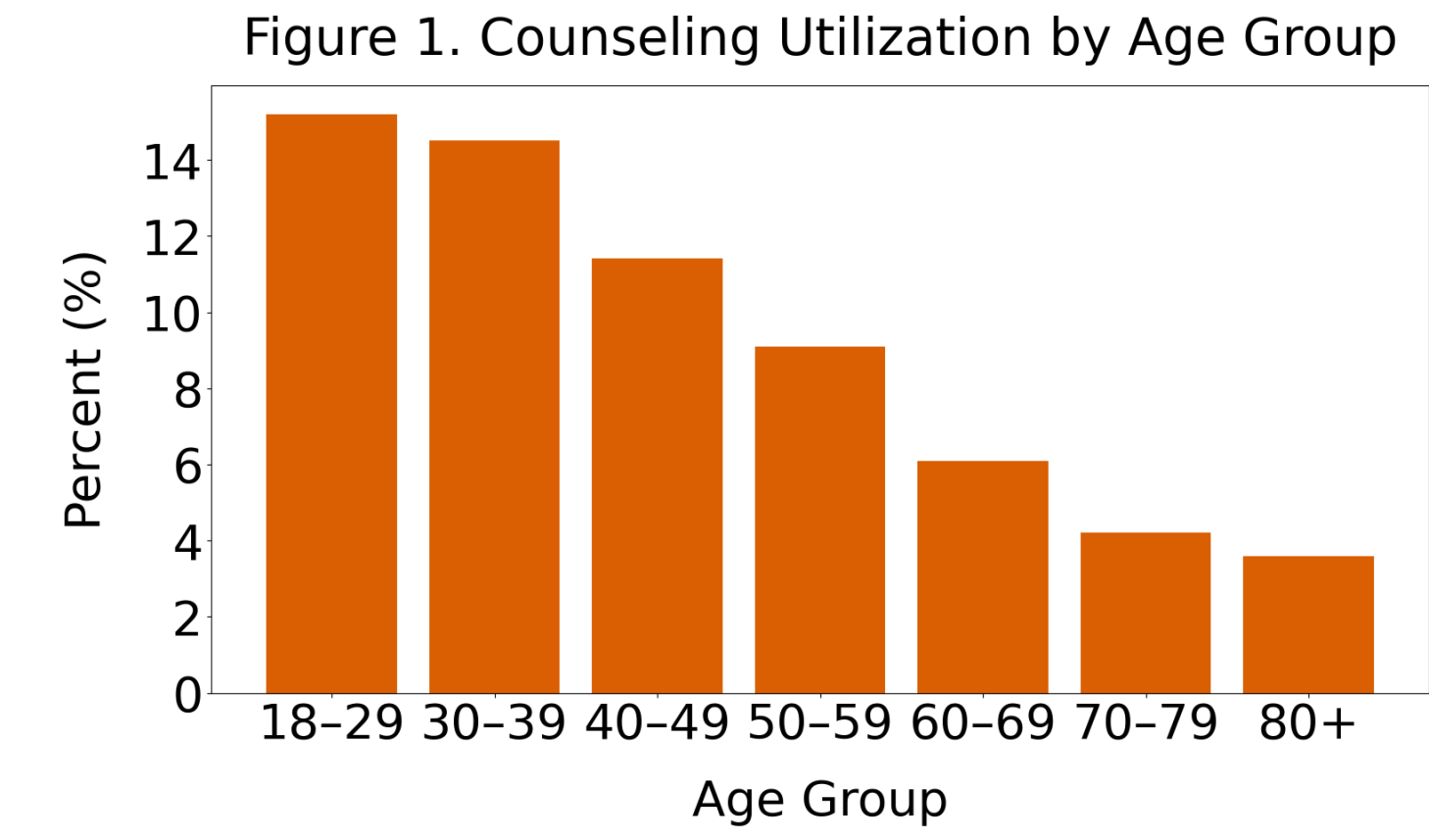


Figure 1. Counseling Utilization by Age Group
Counseling use decreases with age, with younger adults reporting the highest levels of use.

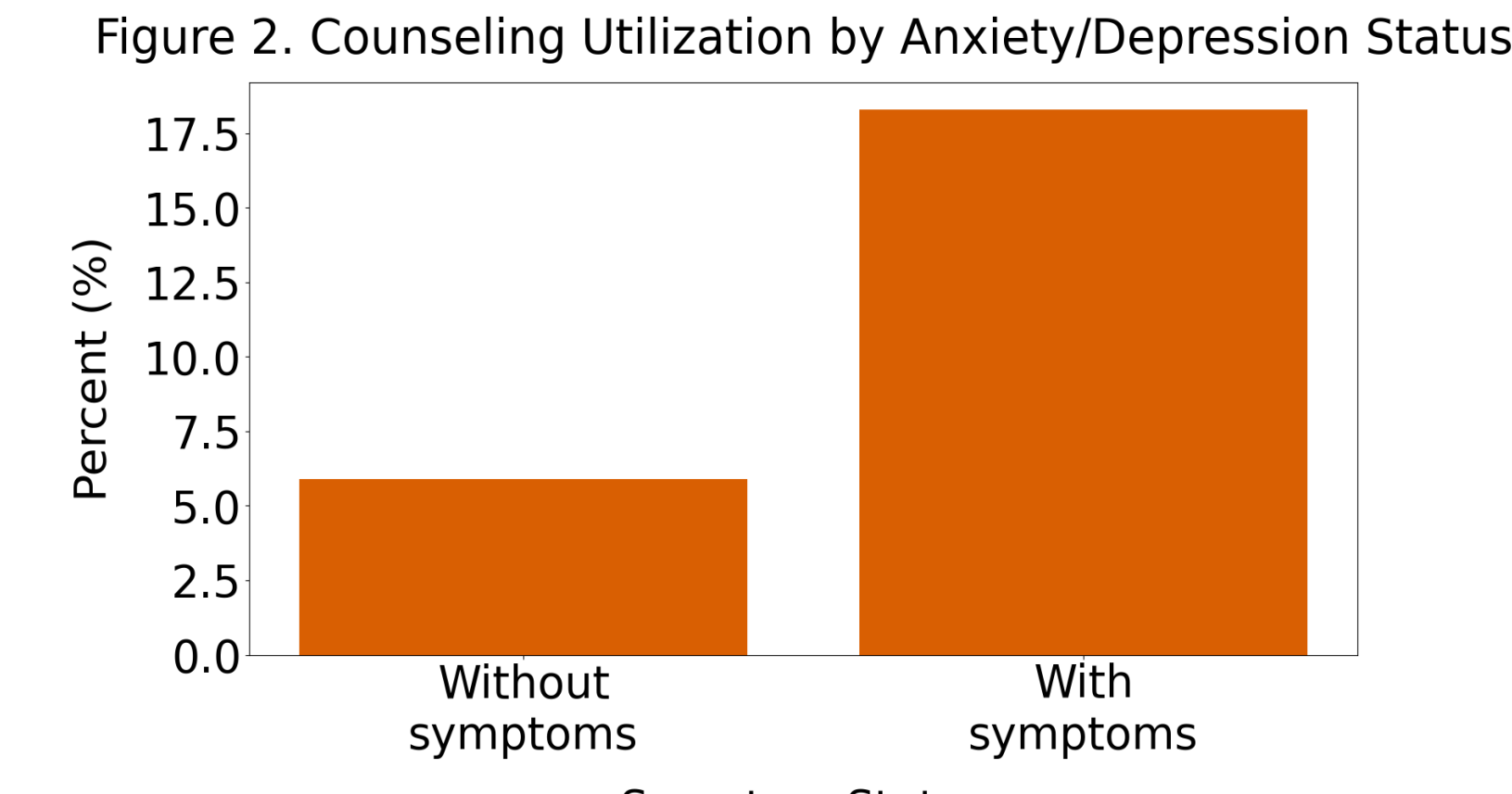


Figure 2. Counseling Utilization by Anxiety/Depression Status
Counseling use is higher among individuals with anxiety or depression symptoms.

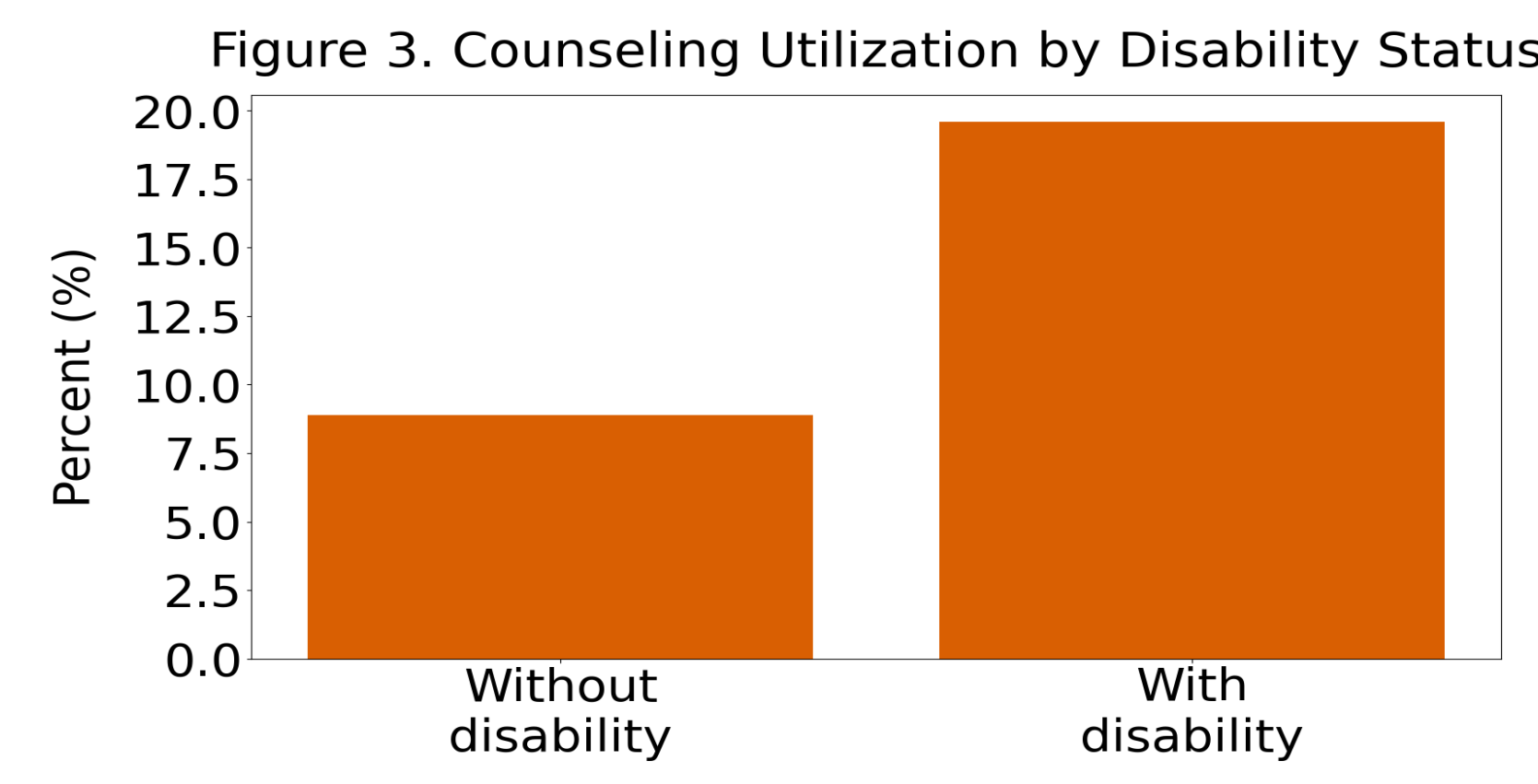


Figure 3. Counseling Utilization by Disability Status
Individuals with disabilities report higher counseling use than those without disabilities.

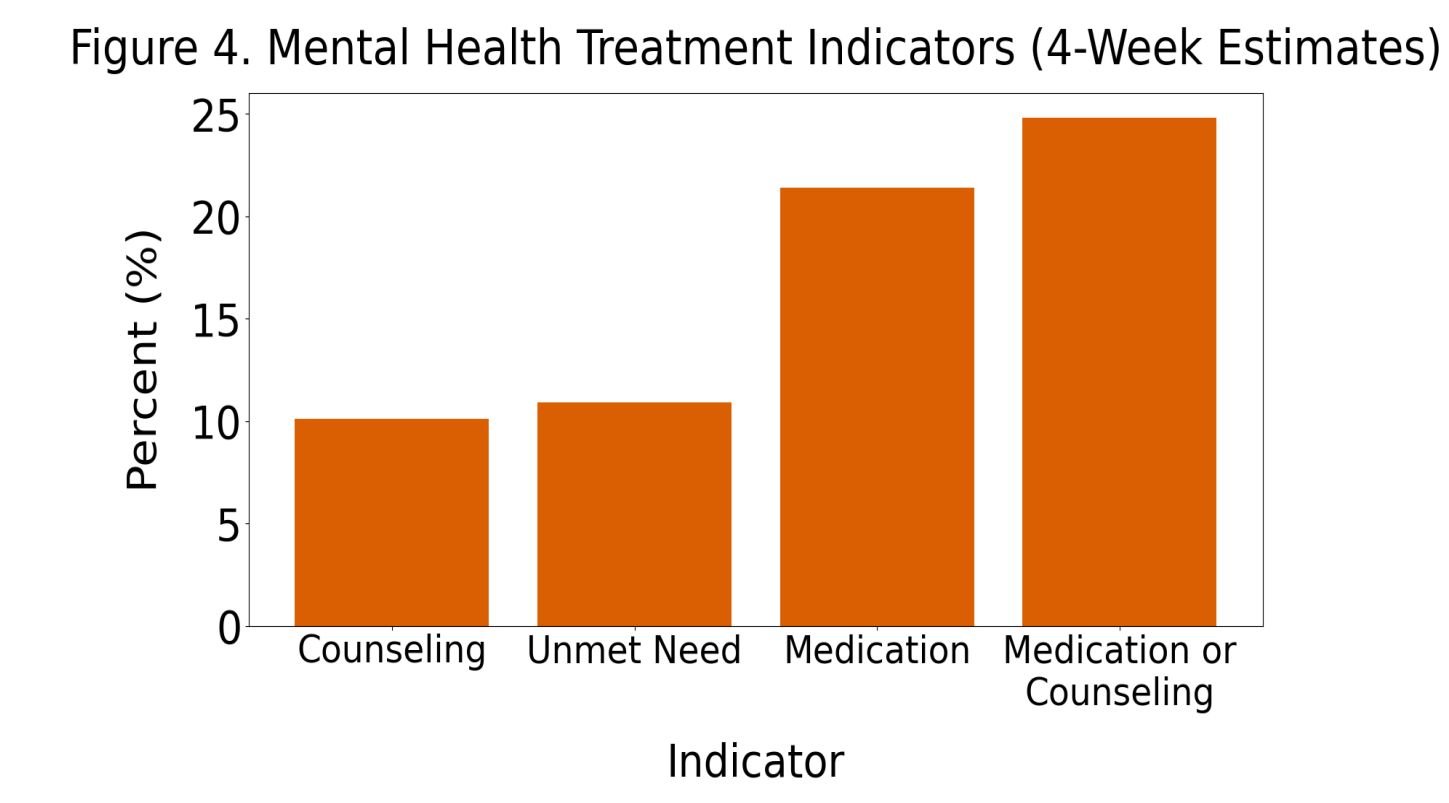


Figure 4. Mental Health Treatment Indicators (4-Week Estimates)
Medication use is higher than counseling use, while unmet need remains substantial.

Public Health Implications

These findings highlight the importance of improving access to counseling services and reducing structural barriers to care. Expanding mental health infrastructure and strengthening targeted interventions may help address treatment gaps among higher-need populations.

Limitations

The findings are limited by the use of aggregated rather than individual-level data, which prevents causal interpretation. In addition, the results reflect a four-week reporting period and may not fully capture variation across subgroups.

Conclusion

Mental health treatment utilization differs across populations, and unmet need for counseling remains a significant public health concern. Improving equitable access to mental health services remains critical for reducing treatment gaps.

Future Research

Future research should examine individual-level factors associated with mental health treatment access and utilization across diverse populations.

Results

Overall Treatment Patterns

Overall counseling utilization was 10.1%, while unmet need for counseling remained slightly higher at 10.9%. Medication use was reported by 21.4% of individuals, and 24.8% reported using either medication or counseling services.

Symptom and Disability Status

Counseling use was highest among individuals with symptoms of anxiety or depression and among those with disabilities.

Age Differences

Counseling utilization decreased across older age groups.

Discussion

Mental health treatment utilization varied across demographic groups, with higher counseling use among populations reporting greater mental health need. Despite higher utilization among these groups, unmet need for counseling remained substantial, suggesting persistent barriers to accessing care.