

Use and provision of mental health services in cosmopolitan informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract:

OBJECTIVE: The study aimed to investigate the types of mental illnesses treated by traditional healers, and their methods of identifying and treating mental illnesses in their patients.

METHOD: In urban informal settlements of Kibera, Kangemi and Kawangware in Nairobi, Kenya, we used opportunistic sampling until the required number of traditional healers was reached, trying as much as possible to represent the different communities of Kenya. Focus group discussions were held with traditional healers in each site and later an in-depth interview was conducted with each traditional healer. An in-depth interview with each patient of the traditional healer was conducted and thereafter the MINIPLUS was administered to check the mental illness diagnoses arrived at or missed by the traditional healers. Quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS while focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were analysed for emerging themes. **RESULTS:** Traditional healers are consulted for mental disorders by members of the community. They are able to recognize some mental disorders, particularly those relating to psychosis. However, they are limited especially for common mental disorders.

CONCLUSION: There is a need to educate healers on how to recognize different types of mental disorders and make referrals when patients are not responding to their treatments