

Exploring the perspectives and experiences of health workers at primary health facilities in Kenya following training

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Date: 2013

Abstract:

BACKGROUND: A cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) of a national Kenyan mental health primary care training programme demonstrated a significant impact for health workers on the health, disability and quality of life of their clients, despite a severe shortage of medicines in the clinics. In order to better understand the potential reasons for the improved outcomes in the intervention group, the experiences of the participating health workers were explored through qualitative focus group discussions, as focus group methodology has been found to be a useful method of obtaining a detailed understanding of client and health worker perspectives within health systems. **METHODS:** Two ninety minute focus groups were conducted in Nyanza province, a poor agricultural region of Kenya, with 10 health workers from the intervention group clinics where staff had received the training programme, and 10 health workers from the control group where staff had not received the training during the earlier randomised controlled trial. **RESULTS:** These focus group discussions suggest that the health workers in the intervention group perceived an increase in their communication, diagnostic and counselling skills, and that the clients in the intervention group noticed and appreciated these enhanced skills, while health workers and clients in the control group were both aware of the lack of these skills. **CONCLUSION:** Enhanced health worker skills conferred by the mental health training programme may be responsible for the significant improvement in outcome of patients in the intervention clinics found in the randomised controlled trial, despite the general shortage of medicines and other health system weaknesses. These findings suggest that strengthening mental health training for primary care staff is worthwhile even where health systems are not strong and where the medicine supply cannot be guaranteed