

Abstract

Psychiatric disorders and symptoms are common worldwide. However, cultural differences in symptom manifestation and knowledge of psychiatric terms and concepts represent a challenge to accurate clinical assessment. Our previous youth surveys revealed higher rates of psychotic experiences in Kenya compared to several other countries, suggesting culture may influence psychosis risk assessment survey results. The goal of the present investigation is to evaluate understanding of general mental health related terms and concepts and specific items from the Structured Interview for Psychosis-Risk Symptoms (SIPS), a commonly used psychosis risk assessment instrument. Six focus groups were conducted in Nairobi, Kenya and surrounding areas with young adults from the community, university and secondary school students, and mental health professionals. Analysis of the information obtained from participants indicated that adolescents and young adults in Kenya were aware of mental illness in their communities, but had very limited knowledge of the meaning of specific psychiatric disorders and symptoms. Many believed that the cause of mental illness was spiritual in nature. These results suggest that in order to obtain accurate reported rates of psychiatric symptoms, assessment of Kenyan adolescents and young adults requires elaboration of assessment questions and use of simplified terms