



A general review of community based comprehensive mental healthcare in African context

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Abstract

This paper provides a general overview of community based mental healthcare concept in African context. The study draws on existing literature on the issue specific to African context but also add literature from other contexts such as Western countries. The key feature highlighted by the review of existing studies in African context is that mental healthcare requires involvement of community, respect to local culture, and consideration of other factors such as religion. Furthermore, the study also discussed the role of technology in delivering mental healthcare service to community.

Keywords: Mental Health, Community, Challenges, Africa, Developing Country.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, mental health is a challenging phenomenon for public health experts and policymakers. The mental health issue is rising among the kids and young individuals due to various factors such as over-reliance on technology, smart phones, pandemic, and so on. The issue needs a thorough investigation and attention from health policymakers. In the present study, we will discuss the mental health from a developing nation perspective, its relevance, and implications based on community based interventions. The issue is important as many developed countries such as USA and Europe are also facing the challenge of mental health.

For example, Mongelli, Georgakopoulos, and Pato (2020) while reflecting on the mental health, stated that there is big gap in mental health care and minority population is more effected by this issue. They further stated that the challenges for mental health in USA include expensive and inadequate medical insurance coverage across the population, lack of community-based interventions, and inequality in access and availability of mental health. A recommendation of their study was that availability of universal global mental health and healthcare workforce training about mental health can overcome some of these challenges.

Another dimension of mental health problem is that it is affecting more to the young individuals (McGorry et al., 2022). This is because the youngsters are more feel isolated,

more inclined to use technology, and has less resources to their disposal to address the mental health challenge. Based on the general trend and the mentioned challenges, we focus our attention to digital technology which also has a potential to provide partial solution to the inadequate mental health availability to large population. We also focus on the community based comprehensive mental health intervention as a possible solution to address mental health challenges.

The community based mental health is a rising trend in most developing nations. The community based mental health is found to be increasing and effective as reported by Keynejad, Spagnolo, and Thornicroft (2022). Their study showed that for mental health problems, community based intervention is more effective. The study was significant as it empirically showed the effectiveness of community based mental health intervention and its effectiveness in developing context. Another relevant study was by Edge, Degnan, and Rafiq (2020) which investigated the community based mental health among the African-Caribbean communities in UK. The findings based on the culturally adapted family intervention (CaFI) showed that community based mental health intervention is suitable and effective especially for marginalized groups.

Another relevant study was by Keynejad, Spagnolo, and Thornicroft (2022) which focused on various types of interventions and training programs implemented in primary health care and community-based healthcare settings. They utilized mostly secondary sources for data collection and analyzed vast literature. They found that most of the community based mental health studies are from the African context which shows that Africa is leading in the community based mental health initiatives. Most of the studies they reviewed showed positive outcomes of such initiatives. Another study by Keet et al. (2019) discussed that for effective community-based mental health initiatives, there should be a focus on public health focus and effective interventions. Thus, overall, we can say that community based mental health initiatives are found more in African context, need a more integrated approach, and careful planning and execution.

Next we discuss that how the mental health care is evolved in African context. The first study we want to mention is by Truter (2023) who stated that in African context, the mental health is evolved which changed the role played by traditional healthcare providers and institutions. They reported that with the changing dynamics of community based mental health initiatives, the mental health become more accessible and culturally appropriate. Their study based on the review of the literature, emphasized on some points including training and education, communication and supervisory structure, formalizing roles and improving leadership, and improving infrastructure and redirecting resources. They stated that by engaging in these practices, the community based mental health can be made more effective.

As we are discussing the community based health initiatives, we also want to discuss the culturally appropriate healthcare initiatives which we discussed briefly earlier. In the context of mental health, any intervention should be culturally appropriate and this point is highlighted by several studies. For example, study by Wrights (2021) in Southern Malawi showed that an initiative which was health surveillance assistants were effective due to their acceptability in local culture. Similarly, Sorsdahl et al. (2021) investigated the integrated model of Western Cape, South Africa where mental health counseling is added with chronic diseases services. The study shows that less availability of psychological and psychosocial limitations counseling remains a challenge. The recommendation of the study are that there should be a hybrid approach tailored towards each facility. Another relevant study is Puffer and Ayuku (2022) which propose a community-embedded model suitable for African situation. The study proposes that mental health interventions should be offered in community-based settings and should be administered by lay providers. In general, in African

context, there is more emphasis on community-based mental health interventions which emphasize the role of local culture in the health delivery process for this important aspect.

In other parts such as US, the community based mental health is also rising. For example, study by Sheth et al. (2021) investigated the mental health needs assessment for forced migrant communities in a metropolitan area of US. The study shows the importance of mental health service and its community driven delivery approach for the sensitive community of migrants. The study is also significant since it shows the importance of such approach in marginalized portion of the population. Another study by Gilmore et al. (2022) emphasize the barriers associated with providing mental health care to autistic adults. It focuses on the issue of how mental healthcare system should address the subtle challenges of acceptance and reach in various parts of the society.

Below we provide a detailed overview of community based mental health models as applied in various African countries. A starting point is a meta study conducted by Carra et al. (2022) which provided an overview of the such practices. The key findings are that hospital admissions are reduced as a result of key interventions such as early intervention service, case management, and caregiver-directed intervention. The study is relevant to African context and make discussion related to resource limited context. A relevant study is by Ryan et al. (2020) focused on the comprehensive community mental health program in Benue state, Nigeria. As per this program, the health extension workers and community psychiatric nurses who are properly given training in the subject provide mental health care service using mental health clinics. The program biggest number of beneficiaries are psychosis and epilepsy patients. The study highlight the importance of scaling up the mental health delivery service using the community and low-resources settings. Another study by Sodi et al. (2021) analyzed the mental health policy and system preparedness in response to COVID-19 in selected countries. The study shows that the selected countries have limited resources and readiness for mental health issues during the pandemic. The study concludes that mental health policies and service delivery infrastructure requires improvement to handle future challenges. A study by Ongeru et al. (2021) also relevant as it use the case of Kenya which utilized the social media. Accordingly, the use of social media platforms for enhancing awareness and providing peer support shows that social media can be successfully used for providing mental health at some initial level.

In African context, another key factor is role of NGOs who are important contributor in providing healthcare service to public. Most NGOs focuses on general health but there are specific NGOs offering mental health in African context. Some studies highlighted the role of NGOs such as Chen and Johnson (2022) work showed that NGOs are offering a holistic mental health care by offering advise as well as leisure and community engagement activities for individuals. Some relevant issues are community acceptance and the role of religious communities which may not be accepting the role of NGOs due to various reasons. This approach is different from Western world where mental health is often focuses on individual clinical and psychiatric service.

Overall it can be concluded that mental health service in Africa which taking account of local culture and community engagement is effective. It certainly need improvement as many African countries struggle with lack of adequate physical resources and trained professionals in mental healthcare which require intervention from the government and society. Furthermore, it can also be noted that mental health care providers also utilizing the technology to deliver the service which is improving the service quality. From this general analysis, we can also conclude that for mental health care to be effective, there is a need for a comprehensive mental health care.

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