



Prevalence and associated correlates of common mental disorders among first year health professions students at the University of Zimbabwe

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Background

- University education imposes significant psychological distress especially in undergraduate graduates
- Students in the health professions have considerable higher degrees of psychological morbidity
- Common mental disorders (CMD) are depressive and anxiety disorders

Problem statement

- Persistent CMD impacts on:
 - quality of life
 - academic performance
- Need to document the burden and risk factors for persistence of CMD
- Help to raise awareness and inform treatments

Research questions

1. What is the prevalence of CMD among first year health professions students?
2. What are the factors associated with CMD among first year health professions students?

Objectives

- To determine the prevalence of CMD among first year health professions students at the University of Zimbabwe
- To determine factors associated with CMD among healthcare students at the University of Zimbabwe

Methodology

- **Study design:** Cross-sectional survey
- Depressive symptoms were measured using PHQ-9
- Anxiety symptoms were measured using GAD-7
- Substance use measured using ASSIST
- **Participants:** All consenting first year students were recruited in the first week of the second semester in February 2018

Ethics

- Ethical clearance (JREC 150/17)
- Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ/A/2213)
- Students with elevated depression, anxiety and substance use scores referred to Student Health Services at the University clinic

Results

- 341, (60% female) students responded
- Mean age was 20 years (SD 1.13).
- Median scores for depression and anxiety were 5 ($Q_1=3$, $Q_3=9$) and 4 ($Q_1=2$, $Q_3=8$) respectively.
- Using a PHQ-9 cut-off of 10, 23% were depressed and on the GAD-7, 19.33% had anxiety.
- Alcohol was the most commonly used substance (68.98%), followed by tobacco products (7.53%) and cannabis (7.23%).

Results

- Females (28%) were significantly more depressed than males (18%) ($p=0.03$).
- Students who reported lacking food ($p=0.01$), social support ($p=0.002$) and difficulties in paying fees ($p=0.03$) had more anxiety symptoms.

Discussion

- Prevalence of depression and anxiety was 23% and 19% respectively.
- Higher than depression prevalence (16%) and same for anxiety (19%) reported in the US (Mousa, Dhamoon, Lander, & Dhamoon, 2016).
- Also concordant with the 15.6% for depression reported in South Africa (Pillay et al., 2016).

Conclusion

- These results contribute to the understanding of the risk factors for psychological morbidity among health professions students in Zimbabwe.

Acknowledgements

- The project is supported by Fogarty International Center through the UZCHS PERFECT Program

Thank you!