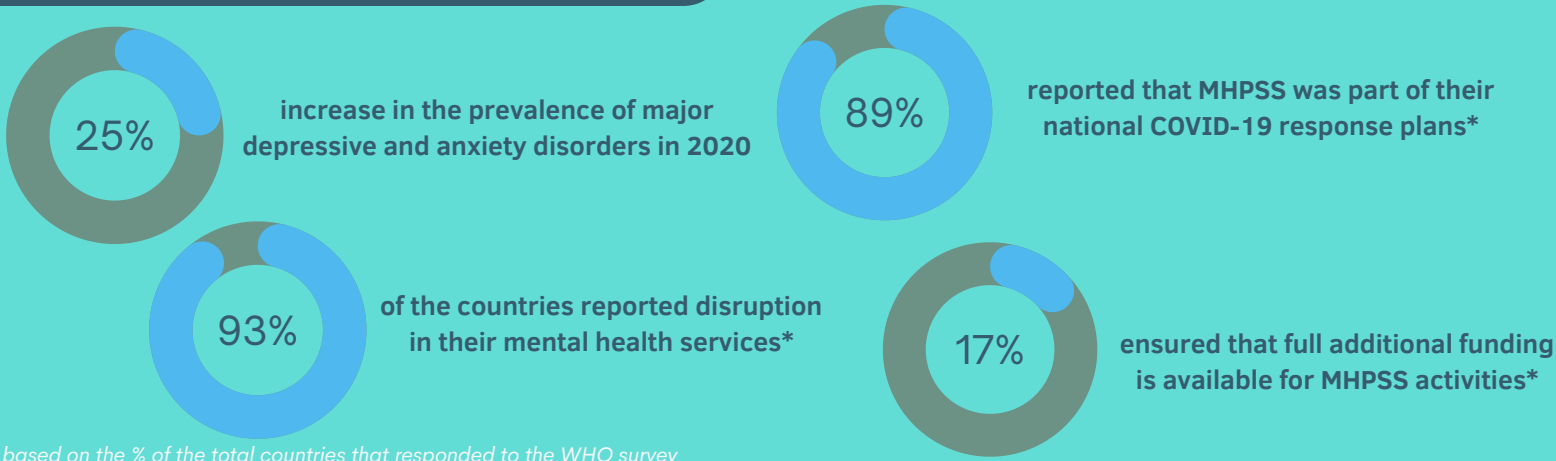


Challenges and Opportunities for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in the COVID-19 Response in Africa: A Mixed-Methods Study

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), WHO Regional Office for Africa & the Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean, West African Health Organization (WAHO), the East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC), and the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST)

Background: Mental Health during COVID-19

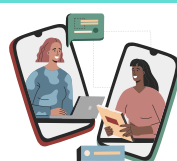


* based on the % of the total countries that responded to the WHO survey
 * The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental, Neurological and Substance Use Services: Results of a Rapid Assessment, World Health Organization (2020)

Methods



A web-based survey was sent to Ministries of Health (MoH) and WHO Regional and Country Offices in the African Union member states (55 countries)



In-depth interviews with key stakeholders from MoH, WHO, and civil society (17 interviews)

Results

To what extent were MHPSS activities* included in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic in African countries?

Responses were received from 28 out of the 55 African Union member states



* Based on recommendations from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak, IASC (2020)

What are the challenges and opportunities for MHPSS integration into the COVID-19 response?

Challenges

- The lack of political commitment and low prioritisation of mental health
- The lack of financial and human resources
- The lack of monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms
- Failure to apply lessons learned from previous emergencies
- Competing priorities in emergency situations

Opportunities

- Capitalising on the increased attention to mental health during COVID-19 to integrate it into emergency response plans and strengthen mental health systems in the longer term
- Sustaining multi-stakeholder coordination of MHPSS activities beyond emergencies
- Building regional networks to facilitate sharing experiences and learning between countries in the region
- Drawing from lessons learned in previous crises to inform the preparedness and response to future emergencies

Recommendations

Ensure that MHPSS components of the national emergency preparedness and response plan include:

Establish an MHPSS pillar as part of future responses to emergencies

Sensitize national leaders to the importance of MHPSS in emergency preparedness and response

Undertake an in-depth review of MHPSS components of the national response to COVID-19 and identify lessons learnt

Improve data and information systems in routine national mental health systems to improve this function during emergencies



Specific support for children and families



monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms



Multi-sectoral collaboration



Allocated resources to implement MHPSS components



Community engagement during response

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