

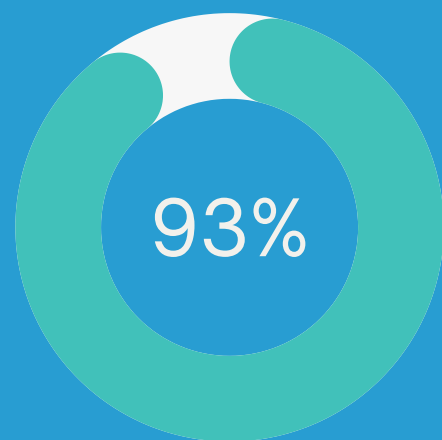
Challenges and Opportunities for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in the COVID-19 Response in Africa: A Mixed-Methods Study

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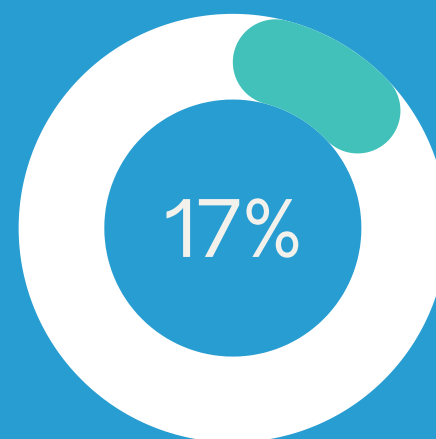
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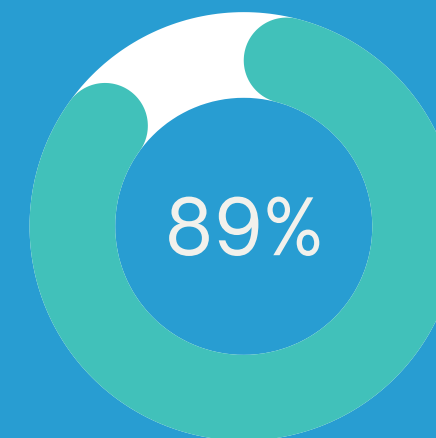
Background: The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health Services



of the countries reported disruption in their mental health services*



ensured that full additional funding is available for MHPSS activities*



reported that MHPSS was part of their national COVID-19 response plans*

* % of the total countries 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)



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



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

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)

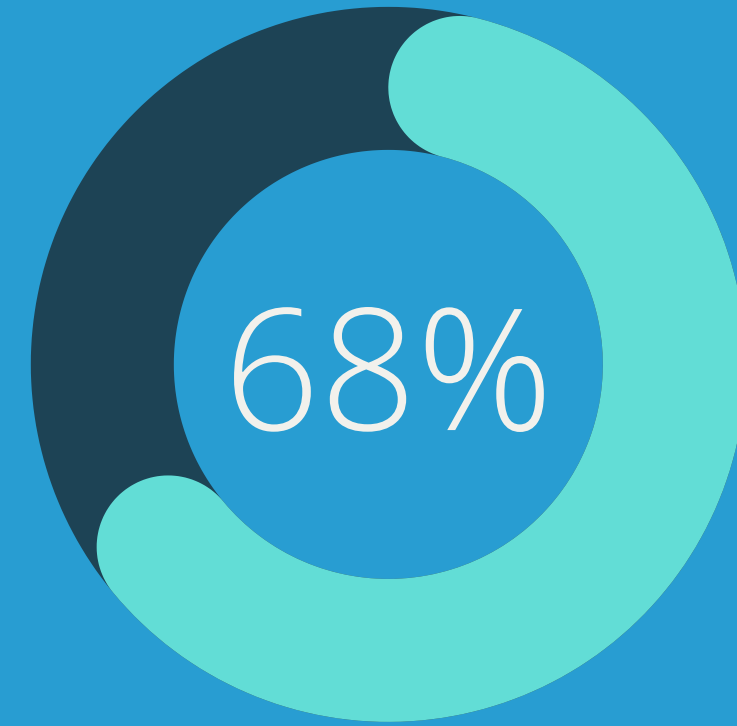


In-depth interviews with key stakeholders from MoH, WHO, and civil society (17 interviews)

Results



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



of the countries implemented less than 50% of the recommended MHPSS activities*

* Based on recommendations from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings



Most implemented MHPSS Activities*



Establishing MHPSS coordination group



Developing an MHPSS strategy



Developing protocols for funerals

Least implemented MHPSS Activities*



Establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms



Developing activities for children

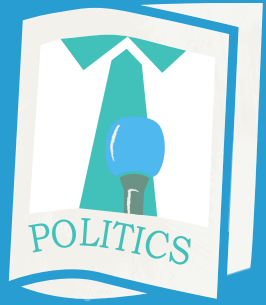


Implementing the developed MHPSS strategies

* 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)



Challenges



The lack of political commitment and engagement

Low prioritisation of mental health within emergency response structures



The lack of available and sustainable funding

The lack of monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms

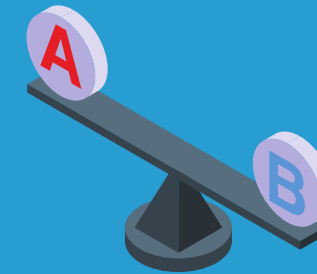


Human resources challenges (e.g. Availability, training, and underpayment)



Failure to apply lessons learned from previous emergencies

Communication challenges (e.g. poor telecommunication infrastructure)



Competing priorities in emergency situations

Opportunities

Capitalising on the increased attention to mental health during COVID-19

Promoting MHPSS integration in emergency response

Integration of mental health in routine services and strengthening mental health systems in the longer term

Sustaining multi-stakeholder coordination of MHPSS activities beyond emergencies

Drawing from lessons learned in previous crises to inform the preparedness and response to future emergencies

Engaging communities and people with lived experience to improve the MHPSS services provided and address the stigma

Building regional networks to facilitate sharing experiences and learning between countries in the region

Better public understanding of mental health following the pandemic

Recommendations

Establish an MHPSS pillar as part of future responses to emergencies

Sensitise 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

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



Specific support for children and families



Feasible monitoring, evaluation, and reporting framework



Multi-sectoral collaboration



Allocated resources to implement MHPSS components



Community engagement during response

Acknowledgement

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References

- World Health Organization. The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental, Neurological and Substance Use Services: Results of a Rapid Assessment; World Health Organization: Geneva, Switzerland, 2020
- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak, IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. 2020.

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