

Factors Influencing Public Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in the Togolese Population

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Abstract : The perspectives of the Togolese public towards mental illness were assessed, looking at religious affiliation, personal knowledge of someone with a mental illness, and education level as influencers. The goal was to observe which factors influenced most strongly the general public's attitudes towards mental illness. The Togolese population was surveyed within the context of mental health awareness workshops and involved college and university students, rural community members, and company employees. Taylor and Dear's Community Attitudes towards the Mentally Ill (CAMI) questionnaire was used to assess these influencers and includes four dimensions of community attitudes towards mental illness: authoritarianism, benevolence, social restrictiveness, and community mental health ideology (CMHI). Demographic questions were also included, tailored to the various realities of the Togolese population. These questions looked, among others, at religious, ethnical (region of origin within Togo), and educational background. It was found that religious affiliation and personal knowledge did not correlate significantly with changes in the four dimensions of the CAMI scale. It suggests that public perspectives towards mental illness might not be as associated with these variables as was previously thought. The dimensions, however, did correlate with themselves as was expected. Authoritarianism was associated positively with social restrictiveness, benevolence was associated negatively with social restrictiveness and positively with CMHI, and CMHI was associated negatively with social restrictiveness, indicating the CAMI did not suffer from reliability and validity issues when used with this population. Interestingly, level of education significantly impacted authoritarianism level, with higher education associated with a decrease in authoritarianism. This finding would support the notion that education is likely to provide access to a wide array of information as well as interaction with people from various backgrounds and situations. Providing increased awareness regarding mental health and illness in schools could be beneficial to favor the impact that education appears to have on public perspectives towards mental illness in Togo. Future studies could assess which mental health interventions in schools would be the most useful in Togo.

Keywords : CAMI questionnaire, cross-cultural psychology, stigma towards mental illness, West African psychology

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