

Mental Health Conditions and Their Risk Factors Among Women in Garissa County, Kenya

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Abstract : Gender-specific risk factors for common mental disorders that disproportionately affect women include but are not limited to gender-based violence, socioeconomic disadvantage, sociocultural factors and unrelenting responsibility for the care of others. The overall objective of this study was to assess mental health conditions and their risk factors among women in Garissa County, Kenya. The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research designs. The study participants were 100 adult women and 20 key informants from different sectors in the region. Data was collected using DSM-5 (PCL-5) and Kessler Psychological Distress, interviews schedule and focus group discussions. Analysis of quantitative data was done using univariate analysis, while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that about 60% of women presented with moderate to severe psychological distress (PD), while 53% presented with PTSD. Additionally, women who have undergone female genital mutilation had higher PTSD and PD scores. They also presented with low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, sex anxiety, avoidance of reminders and intrusive memories of the event, especially those who developed fistula. The risk factors for poor mental health outcomes include lack of awareness/knowledge of mental health, retrogressive cultural practices (child marriage and female genital mutilation), as well as beliefs about the causes of mental disorders. The study also established that people with mental illness are neglected, abused and stigmatized. Preferred treatment approaches include prayers and the use of witch doctors and traditional healers. The study recommends gendered and culturally responsive interventions geared towards increasing community awareness and knowledge on mental health, reducing stigma and improving mental-health-seeking behaviors for women and girls in the region. Supported by the Ministry of Health, the approach should be spearheaded by trained community lay counselors.

Keywords : women, mental health conditions, cultural beliefs/practices, stigma, poverty, psychological distress, PTSD

Conference Title : ICTMH 2024 : International Conference on Trauma and Mental Health

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : November 04-05, 2024