KENYA PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

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Peer-Led Support Groups to Improve Depression, Anxiety, and Self-Esteem Among Teen and Single Mothers in Kisumu County, Kenya: A Longitudinal Multi-Site Study

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Background/Aims:
Teen and single mothers in Kenya face disproportionate mental health burdens, including elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Access to culturally responsive and sustainable support remains limited, particularly in resource-constrained settings. We evaluated the effectiveness of a peer-led support group intervention in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety and improving self-esteem among teen and single mothers in Kisumu County, Kenya.

Methods:
We employed a longitudinal, multi-site design across seven sub-counties in Kisumu County. Community members underwent a structured training to become peer facilitators and led support groups twice monthly for five months. Eligible participants were teen mothers (ages 14–19) or single mothers (ages 20–35) who screened positive for moderate-to-severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥15) or anxiety (GAD-7 ≥10). Participants were recruited through community outreach and local health services. Data were collected at four time points: baseline (pre-intervention), mid-intervention (after 5 sessions), post-intervention (after 10 sessions), and three months post-intervention. Validated instruments included the PHQ-9, GAD-7, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Perceived Social Support Scale, and Perceived Stress Scale. Linear mixed models were planned to assess changes over time. Ethical approvals were obtained from Maseno University, NACOSTI, and Duke University.

Results:
A total of 77 participants (mean age: 25 years) were enrolled from all seven sub-counties; however, due to logistical constraints, the intervention was only implemented in five sub-counties. At baseline, the mean PHQ-9 score was 21.7 (95% CI [19.9, 23.5]) and at endline, 21.2 (95% CI [19.5, 22.9]). For anxiety, the mean GAD-7 score decreased from 18.2 (95% CI [17.2, 19.4]) at baseline to 16.6 (95% CI [15.4, 17.9]) at endline. Full statistical analyses, including linear mixed models, are ongoing and will be presented at the conference.

Conclusions:
This study explores the potential of peer-led mental health interventions in low-resource settings. Preliminary findings suggest a modest reduction in anxiety symptoms, with minimal change in depressive symptoms. Further analyses will assess potential moderators and mediators of treatment response, as well as secondary outcomes including perceived stress, perceived social support, and self-esteem. At the conference, we will present finalized results and discuss policy and programmatic implications. Community-driven, culturally grounded peer support groups may represent a promising and scalable approach to address the mental health needs of adolescent and single mothers in Kenya.

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