

Impact of COVID-19 on mental health: A Case of Indigenous Ndebele women within Gwanda District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The worldwide pandemic of coronavirus (COVID-19) that shook the world in disturbing ways has impacted on women more than men in a multifaceted manner. The worst being an increase of mental health cases among women. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments across the world had to put their respective countries under lockdown measures. People were urged to stay at home, regularly wash their hands, and maintain social distance when out in public spaces. In Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone, but more disproportionately women. Such women constituted a larger percentage of people who lived with and were affected by mental health challenges and disorders. The COVID-19 pandemic led to mental health problems due to disease experience, physical distancing, stigma, discrimination and job losses. Health care workers, patients suffering from COVID-19 related illnesses and those suffering from other chronic conditions, children, youths and women experienced post-traumatic disorders, anxiety, depression and insomnia. Hence, the main purpose of the study was to explore the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of indigenous Ndebele women within the Gwanda district. The study employed a qualitative methodological approach and a descriptive case study design. It used purposive sampling to select fifty participants and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the research instruments. The findings revealed that indigenous Ndebele women within Gwanda district were dealing with great mental pressure, which caused an imbalance in their lives. It was also found out that the loss of control over the decisions and actions of women in African indigenous cultures due to patriarchal and cultural systems, impacted on their mental health. The conclusion was that COVID-19 heavily affected Ndebele women's mental health in Gwanda district. Given this scenario, it is necessary that sustainable intervention mechanisms are put in place to deal with mental health cases in general and help women with mental health challenges in particular during and after pandemics. The recommendations were that various advocacy strategies be used by the government especially local governments, since it is essential to include African indigenous women in recovery initiatives and ensure that critical resources are availed. The article fits into the theme of Women, COVID -19 and Mental Health in Africa: An

African Interventionist Perspective. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 on indigenous Ndebele women in Gwanda district mental health problems intensified. The types of mental health problems and strategies suggested assist various policy makers with ways of overcoming mental health problems.

Keywords: COVID-19, Gwanda District, Ndebele Indigenous culture, mental health