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Health care professionals' perspectives on physical activity within the Ugandan mental health care system

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Mental Health and Physical Activity, Volume 20, March 2021, Pages 100377

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Highlights

- Physical activity is perceived important by mental health care workers in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Physical activity can reduce stigma towards mental health.
- Physical activity could improve social connectedness.
- Limited time to engage with patients due to heavy workloads is a constraint.

Abstract

Background

Mental health care systems in Africa are faced with a high burden of mental disorders. There is need to explore evidence-based, scalable interventions to compliment the “traditional” health care system. Physical activity (PA) can augment the effectiveness of existing programs. However, little is known about the perspectives of health care professionals on PA. Understanding this is key to implementation.

Methods

This was a qualitative exploratory study based on 13 key informant interviews among experienced health care professionals working at Butabika National Referral and Teaching Hospital, Uganda. Data was analyzed through content thematic analysis.

Results

Participants reported PA benefits were: improved individual competences and

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monitoring capacity, human resource challenges and a focus solely on pharmacotherapy were among the most reported barriers to application of PA in management of mental health problems.

Conclusion

Despite the high level of understanding of PA among health care professionals, PA promotion largely depends on implementation of strategies to deal with community and health systems barriers. Although patients need to be empowered to deal with their individual barriers, greater support and action is needed by policy makers. Public health programs should support PA through community engagement and social re-integration programs. The government should promote a holistic mental health care perspective and provide adequate infrastructural and human resources to support PA in the existing primary and mental health care systems.

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Keywords

Physical activity; Exercise; Stigma; Community

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