

## **Essay**

Dawn Opert

OPRNET001

PSY3011S: Clinical Psychology II

Katya Kee-Tui

2 September 2022

## Introduction

Depression is a serious concern in Africa, and it is necessary to have a clear idea about how countries across the continent are engaging with it, and what Interventions can be effectively deployed to minimise it's impact on the mental health burden. This essay will first discuss the prevalence of depression in African countries. Next, this essay will discuss what Interventions have been tested, whether they have been effective, and where they have been effective. The quality of the evidence for these Interventions will be analysed, before a final reflection will be made on the state of depression Interventions and possible future directions for research and policy makers.

Depression and anxiety are among the most common mental disorders globally, and cause a disproportionate amount of the global disability based healthcare burden, a major contributor to morbidity, and a contributor to lower standard of life (Chibanda et al., 2015; Chibanda et al., 2016; Doukani et al., 2021; Fernando et al., 2021; Lofgren et al., 2018; Lund et al., 2014).

Africa bears the brunt of the burden of common mental disorders, with countries across sub-Saharan Africa alone accounting for at least 19% of the global mental health burden (Lund et al., 2015). In specific countries, at least 16.5% of adults in South Africa present with a common disorder (Lund et al., 2014), and at least 30% of people attending primary healthcare facilities in Zimbabwe present with depression and anxiety symptoms (Chibanda et al., 2011; Chibanda et al., 2015).

Further, Africa has the highest rates of people living with HIV/AIDS, a population that is especially vulnerable to depression as compared to a general population, and the highest rate of people living with HIV related depression (Lofgren et al., 2018; Petersen et al., 2014). This is a serious problem because depression is strongly associated with lower rates of antiretroviral therapy adherence which is necessary for good management of HIV/AIDS (Lofgren et al., 2018; Lund et al., 2014; Petersen et al., 2014). On a similar front, depression severely affects young and expecting mothers, increasing the risk of complications during pregnancy, impairing caregivers' ability to create an environment suitable for a child, and limiting caregivers'

ability to cope with parenthood (Fernando et al., 2021; Nyatsanza et al., 2016).

Despite the high prevalence of depression and other common mental disorders across Africa, there is a serious lack of access to treatment and support (Chibanda et al., 2011; Chibanda et al., 2015; Chibanda et al., 2016; Doukani et al., 2021; Fernando et al., 2021; Lofgren et al., 2018). This is exacerbated by the fact that only half of African countries have a mental health policy to speak of (Lund et al., 2014; Lund et al., 2015), and most governments do not have the ability to allocate the necessary funds to implement one if they had it (Doukani et al., 2021; Lofgren et al., 2018). The general lack of resources and infrastructure for providing effective treatments means that there is an urgent need to develop interventions that work, that have lasting effects, and that can be deployed cheaply and efficiently (Doukani et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2014; Lund et al., 2015).

### **Interventions**

For an intervention to be considered evidence-based, it must be able to show that they can effectively reduce a measure of symptoms for the target disorder in a controlled trial (Cook et al., 2017). Most interventions that are studied in this way, and therefore fulfil this condition, are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and are manualized interventions (Cook et al., 2017; Shedler, 2018). Because manualized therapies tend to require a lower threshold of training in order to be implemented, they are particularly suited to fulfil the needs of African governments and health practitioners in bridging the treatment gap (Cook et al., 2017; Doukani et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2014).

Generally, most of the data on low-cost interventions for low and middle income countries comes from outside Africa, and while studies have been done more recently in Africa, they are almost all from sub-Saharan Africa (Lofgren et al., 2018). As expected, most of the readily available data is on CBT based interventions (Chibanda et al., 2011; Fernando et al., 2021; Lofgren et al., 2018; Lund et al., 2014). Out of all the articles reviewed, only Lofgren et al. (2018) presented data on interventions other than psychotherapies: six anti-depressant based interventions, a novel drug, an exercise

intervention, and three psychosocial interventions.

One of the key themes across these interventions was testing interventions that could be delivered by minimally trained lay healthcare workers (LHWs) already deployed in the field. Almost every single one of the psychotherapy interventions followed this approach (Abas et al., 2016b; Chibanda et al., 2011; Chibanda et al., 2015; Chibanda et al., 2016; Doukani et al., 2021; Fernando et al., 2021; Lofgren et al., 2018; Lund et al., 2014; Nyatsanza et al., 2016; Petersen et al., 2014). Lofgren et al. (2018) also reported on three anti-depressant interventions delivered by LHWs.

The reason given for this approach is that LHWs are already deployed across primary healthcare clinics, and can therefore cheaply and efficiently deliver interventions that act as a preventative measure for serious mental disorder that would otherwise require (costly) hospitalization (Abas et al., 2016b; Doukani et al., 2021; Fernando et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2014). Nyatsanza et al. (2016) also suggested that LHWs provide a built-in way to ensure interventions are localized to and respect the cultural context where they are being delivered.

Looking at some of the individual interventions, the *Friendship Bench Project* has by far the most data out of any of the reviewed interventions. Three trials are reviewed here (Chibanda et al., 2011; Chibanda et al., 2015; Fernando et al., 2021), the project is one of the oldest interventions tested in an African context (Abas et al., 2016a; Chibanda et al., 2011; Fernando et al., 2021). extensive evaluation of the project's development.

### Quality of Evidence

One of the most salient limitations of many interventions studies is that the strict conditions of evidence gathering do not map onto their practical, real world applications by their very nature (Doukani et al., 2021; Kazdin, 2014; Shedler, 2018). However, none of the interventions discussed targetted depression alone. Rather, some interventions targetted depression alongside other common mental disorders (Abas et al., 2016b; Chibanda et al., 2011; Chibanda et al., 2015; Chibanda et al., 2016; Doukani et al., 2021); depression specifically tied to living with HIV/AIDS (Lofgren

et al., 2018; Petersen et al., 2014); or otherwise targetted peri- and post-natal depression (Lund et al., 2014; Nyatsanza et al., 2016). This means that the studies might not be as generalizable to other contexts, because the effect of the interventions are not isolated to depression. However, real-life people live complex lives. As established above, the prevalence of depression is high in African countries. Furthermore, the link between depression and the other facets of peoples' lives is intricately linked. The bi-directional relationship between poverty and mental illness is very well supported (Lund et al., 2010; Lund, 2012; Ridley et al., 2020; Wahlbeck et al., 2017). People living with HIV/AIDS are also more likely to develop depression (Lofgren et al., 2018).

### **Reflection**

## References

- Abas, M., Bowers, T., Manda, E., Cooper, S., Machando, D., Verhey, R., Lamech, N., Araya, R., & Chibanda, D. (2016a). 'opening up the mind': Problem-solving therapy delivered by female lay health workers to improve access to evidence-based care for depression and other common mental disorders through the firendship bench project in zimbabwe. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 10(39), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-016-0071-9>
- Abas, M., Bowers, T., Manda, E., Cooper, S., Machando, D., Verhey, R., Lamech, N., Araya, R., & Chibanda, D. (2016b). 'opening up the mind': Problem-solving therapy delivered by female lay health workers to improve access to evidence-based care for depression and other common mental disorders through the friendship bench project in zimbabwe. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 10(39), 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-016-0071-9>
- Chibanda, D., Bowers, T., Verhey, R., Rusakaniko, S., Abas, M., Weiss, H., & Araya, R. (2015). The friendship bench programme: A cluster randomised trial of a brief psychological intervention for common mental disorders delivered by lay health workers in zimbabwe. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 9(21), 7. <https://doi.org/1186/s13033-015-0013-y>
- Chibanda, D., Mesu, P., Kajawu, L., Cowan, F., Araya, R., & Abas, M. (2011). Problem-solving therapy for depression and common mental disorders in zimbabwe: Piloting a task-shifting primary mental health care intervention in a population with a high prevalence of people living with hiv. *BMC Public Health*, 11(828), 1–10. <https://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/11/828>
- Chibanda, D., Weiss, H., Verhey, R., Simms, V., Munjoma, R., Rusakaniko, S., Chingono, A., Munetsi, E., Bere, T., Manda, E., Abas, M., & Araya, R. (2016). Effect of a primary care-based psychological intervention on symptoms of common mental disorders in zimbabwe: A randomized clinical trial. *JAMA*, 316(24), 2618–2626. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2016.19102>

- Cook, S., Schwartz, A., & Kaslow, N. (2017). Evidence-based psychotherapy: Advantages and challenges. *Neurotherapeutics*, *14*, 537–545.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13311-017-0549-4>
- Doukani, A., van Dalen, R., Valev, H., Njenga, A., Sera, F., & Chibanda, D. (2021). A community health volunteer delivered problem-solving therapy mobile application based on the friendship bench 'inuka coaching': A pilot cohort study. *Global Mental Health*, *8*(e9), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2021.3>
- Fernando, S., Brown, T., Datta, K., Chidhanguro, D., Tavengwa, N., Mutasa, B., Chasekwa, B., Ntozini, R., Chibanda, D., & Prendergast, A. (2021). The friendship bench as a brief psychological intervention with peer support in rural zimbabwean women: A mixed methods pilot evaluation. *Global Mental Health*, *8*(e31), 1–9.
- Kazdin, A. (2014). Evidence-based psychotherapies i: Qualifiers and limitations in what we know. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *44*(4), 381–403.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246314533750>
- Lofgren, S., Nakasujja, N., & Boulware, D. (2018). Systematic review of interventions for depression for people living with hiv in africa. *AIDS and Behavior*, (22), 1–8.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-017-1906-3>
- Lund, C. (2012). Poverty and mental health: A review of practice and policies. *Neuropsychiatry*, *2*(3), 213–219. <https://doi.org/10.2217/NPY.12.24>
- Lund, C., Alem, A., Schneider, M., Hanlon, C., Ahrens, J., Bandawe, C., Bass, J., Bhana, A., Burns, J., Chibanda, D., Cowan, F., Davies, T., Dewey, M., Fekadu, A., Freeman, M., Honikman, S., Joska, J., Kagee, A., Mayston, R., ... Susser, E. (2015). Generating evidence to narrow the treatment gap for mental disorders in sub-saharan africa: Rationale, overview and methods of affirm. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, *24*, 233–240.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796015000281>
- Lund, C., Breen, A., Flisher, A., Kakuma, R., Corrigall, J., Joska, J., Swartz, L., & Patel, V. (2010). Poverty and common mental disorders in low and middle

- income countries: A systematic review. *Social Science and Medicine*, (71), 517–528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.04.027>
- Lund, C., Schneider, M., Davies, T., Nyatsanza, M., Honikman, S., Bhana, A., Bass, J., Bolton, P., Dewey, M., Joska, J., Kagee, A., Myer, L., Petersen, I., Prince, M., Stein, D., Thornicroft, G., Tomlinson, M., Alem, A., & Susser, E. (2014). Task sharing of a psychological intervention for maternal depression in khayelitsha, south africa: Study protocol for a randomized controlled trial. *Trials*, 15(457), 1–11. <http://www.trialsjournal.com/content/15/1/457>
- Nyatsanza, M., Schneider, M., Davies, T., & Lund, C. (2016). Filling the treatment gap: Developing a task sharing counselling intervention for perinatal depression in khayelitsha, south africa. *BMC Psychiatry*, 16(164), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-016-0873-y>
- Petersen, I., Hancock, J., Bhana, A., & Govender, K. (2014). A group-based counselling intervention for depression comorbid with hiv/aids using a task shifting approach in south africa: A randomized controlled pilot study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, (158), 78–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.02.013>
- Ridley, M., Rao, G., Schilbach, D., & Patel, V. (2020). Poverty, depression, and anxiety: Causal evidence and mechanisms. *NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH*, (27157), 1–47.
- Shedler, J. (2018). Where is the evidence for "evidence-based" therapy? *Journal of Psychological Therapies in Primary Care*, (4), 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2018.02.001>
- Wahlbeck, K., Cresswell-Smith, J., Haaramo, P., & Parkkonen, J. (2017). Interventions to mitigate the effects of poverty and inequality on mental health. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, (52), 505–514. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-017-1370-4>