The Mental Health and Poverty Project
Mental health policy development and implementation in four African countries: Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia

What is the Mental Health and Poverty Project?

The Mental Health and Poverty Project (MHAPP) is a 5-year (2005 – 2010) funded study which seeks to undertake a full analysis of existing mental health policies in four countries, provide interventions to assist in the development and implementation of mental health policies in those countries, and evaluate the policy implementation over a 5-year period. The project is being conducted in Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia.

During the first phase of the project (2005 – 2007), in-depth interviews were conducted in each of the project countries. This involved a review of the current status of mental health policies and legislation, and an investigation into existing mental health services. This policy analysis phase is followed by an implementation phase (2008 – 2010). During this phase, comprehensive support is given to four countries to implement and evaluate models of best practice for the integration of mental health care into general health care at district level.

Why is mental health a crucial public health issue in Africa?

1. Mental health is a public health concern in Africa due to the high burden of mental, neurological and substance use disorders.
2. The growing burden of mental, neurological and substance use disorders is exacerbated in developing countries due to the interaction of poverty, poor human rights and discrimination.
3. Mental health conditions are important in the context of other public health issues such as HIV and TB.

What did we find?

1. Labour-force participation of people with mental disorder was found to be significantly lower in the African countries studied than in other regions.
2. There is a high burden of mental disorders in Africa, with 12% of the global burden of disease.
3. Mental illness is a significant contributor to poverty, with people with mental illness being more likely to be poor.

What are we doing?

1. Developing a comprehensive national mental health policy and identifying key stakeholders.
2. Developing an implementation plan for the national mental health policy.
3. Developing and implementing demonstration projects.
4. Evaluating the effectiveness of the demonstration projects.

Zambia

1. The Mental Health and Poverty Project in Zambia is focused on developing a comprehensive national mental health policy, identifying key stakeholders, and developing and implementing demonstration projects.
2. The project aims to improve mental health care services in a district demonstration project in KwaZulu-Natal by combining treatment with poverty eradication interventions.

South Africa

1. The Mental Health and Poverty Project in South Africa is focused on developing a comprehensive national mental health policy, identifying key stakeholders, and developing and implementing demonstration projects.
2. The project aims to improve mental health care services in a district demonstration project in KwaZulu-Natal by combining treatment with poverty eradication interventions.

References

2. Mental Health and Poverty Project, Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, University of Cape Town, South Africa.