

Awareness, accessibility and utilization of mental health care services among youths in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Mental health diseases or illnesses in all human beings especially youths in the prime of their lives, are crucial and worthy of attention. This is a crucial epidemiology that should be of prime concern because mental health issues among youths appear to be increasing. This paper seeks to investigate the level of awareness, accessibility and utilization of mental health services (provided by professional counsellors) among working class youths in Lagos state. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study with a random sample of 613 comprising 464 female and 149 male young workers. A questionnaire constructed by the researcher was used to gather data from respondents. Three research questions were raised and four hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data gathered were analyzed and presented using figures, simple percentages, frequency tables and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that 96.2% of respondents are aware of mental health services, 64.2% have access to mental health service, however 26.4% actually utilize mental health services from professional counsellors. A significant gender difference was observed in the level of awareness and utilization of mental health services. There is also a significant difference in the level of awareness and utilization of mental health services due to age of respondents. Recommendations include the introduction of courses into junior school curriculum for early exposure of young people to signs and symptoms mental health problems. To also expose them to the importance of seeking assistance from professional counsellors who are trained to render such assistance.

Key words: *Mental health services, Professional counsellors, Youths, Awareness, Accessibility, Utilization.*

Introduction

Mental health is a condition of tranquility where people perceive their personal potentials, are able to manage the usual pressure of life, are able to function effectively and are able to make meaningful contributions to their society. Mental health disorder can affect the ability of young people to live happy, satisfied and fruitful lives (WHO, 2018). Mental ill-health constitutes the main hazard to the well-being, viability and future prospects of young people all over the world. There are series of evidence that revealed an increasing trend of susceptibility, urgency and concern about this problem, a tendency that has also been intensified by the covid 19 pandemic. Mental health problems constitute a worldwide general health catastrophe which not only requires an extensive and elaborate perception of feasible objectives for elimination or avoidance in addition to critical improvement and contribution to the provision of advanced, suitable, objective and unbiased, scientific health care services. (Mc Gorry et al, 2022).

Mental health assistance and facilities for young people differ around civilizations and cultural background. It is necessary to grasp the view point of young people who have lived with these ordeals before making arrangement for necessary mediations and assistance, particularly in societies

and communities that have inadequate professional support and illustrative publications on the problem (Vostanis et al, 2022). Compared to other preventive medicine divisions, mental health has shifted in the direction of alternate or auxiliary elimination with the attempt to uncover and take care of mental health conditions as quickly as practicable. Nevertheless, emerging testimonies throw fresh understanding on the future of essential or basic precautionary and improvement programmes for mental health of young people (Colizzi et al, 2020).

The mental health of youths is a crucial epidemiology and of prime concern mainly because mental health issues in this category appear to be on the rise. Surprisingly in nations with apparently superior or high-quality opportunities to use or benefit from preventive medicine, only a handful of young people request assistance for mental health issues. Mental health issue among young people is a major factor in debilitated somatic and mental health challenges that can continue to later years (Westberg et al, 2022) and even beyond. Treatment of mental or emotional problems by psychological means can be done by a few experts in diverse professions such as, psychiatrists and psychologists; social workers, professional counsellors, marriage and family therapists who possess the necessary

certification; psychiatric nurses and other experts with specific background in psychotherapy. It is important for individuals seeking mental health care to look for therapists they can trust and with whom they can discuss confidential issues.

Counsellors, psychologists and therapists ought to get the necessary certification so that they can render expert and professional service in their specific discipline. They are supposed to get the necessary training and instruction in curative and restorative methods to assist individuals with intellectual, psychological and developmental health problems. However, specific educational prerequisites may differ from profession to profession (Cherney & Juby, 2022) and country to country. Professional counsellors and therapists are trained, equipped and are committed to providing therapy. They are expected to obtain advanced skills that are applicable to delivering mental health services. While considerable improvement in having access to therapy could perhaps amount to educating and allowing competent personnel apart from psychiatrists, psychologists or clinical social workers to carry out tests to detect potential mental health problems and render assistance to clients; the role of experts in the profession should not be ignored. Confusion or disorganization in the mental health of any individual are complications worthy of

attention. These complications are to some extent prevalent in young people but they are manageable using the right therapy and mediation provided by professional counsellors and therapists. Mental health disorder might hinder people's propensity to comprehend, grasp and clearly or coherently describe the anxieties they are facing. It can also prevent them from properly complying with or sticking to suggested or prescribed therapy and intervention (ACOG, 2017).

There is little understanding on how to address mental health issues among young people in Africa. There is also a paucity of understanding on how professional counsellors and therapists can tackle mental health problems in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially among young people. It is against this backdrop, that the writer investigated the awareness, accessibility and utilization of mental health services rendered by professional therapists in Nigeria,

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to:

1. Investigate the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

2. Evaluate the extent of youths' accessibility of mental health services provided by professionals.

3. Ascertain the extent of youths' utilization of mental health services provided by professionals.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

2. What is the extent of youths' accessibility of mental health services provided by professionals.

3. What is the extent of youths' utilization of mental health services provided by professionals.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant gender difference in the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

2. There is no significant gender difference in the utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

3. Age do not significantly differ in the utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study with a random sample of organizations across Lagos state. Purposive sampling was used to select 613 respondents comprising 464 female and 149 male young workers (18-37years) from these organizations to provide the best information for the study. Two research instruments constructed and adapted by the researcher from Survey Template (2022), were used to collect data electronically from respondents in diverse work settings. Mental health Services Questionnaire (MSQ) and Awareness, Accessibility and Utilization of Mental health Services Questionnaire (AAUMSQ). MSQ assessed demographic data of respondents such as, gender, age range, profession of respondents and qualitative analyses of questions on awareness, accessibility and utilization of mental health services rendered by professionals. AAUMSQ comprise 26 statements to assess awareness (10 statements), accessibility (6 statements) and utilization (10 statements) of mental health services rendered by professionals. AAUMSQ has a Cronbach alpha measure of internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.73. Analyses of data was done using charts, simple percentages, frequency counts and analysis of variance statistical tool was used to analyze the hypotheses. A Multiple Comparison on Awareness based on Age was also done.

Results

Research question 1: What is the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State?

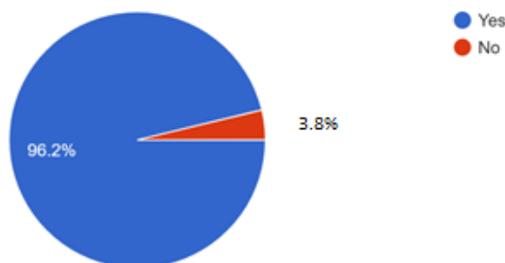


Figure 1: Chart showing respondents' level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals

Chart in Figure 1 shows that 96.2% of the sampled youths were aware of mental health services provided by professionals as against 3.8% that were ignorant. This shows a very high level of awareness among youths in Lagos State Nigeria. Further question was asked as to where they got to know about the mental health services provided by professionals. Most frequent of their reactions were:

- I first learnt about them from my secondary school where guidance counsellors assisted with academic, career and personal problems.
- I know that we have psychiatric hospitals.
- There is awareness about depression and some mental issues on social media and who to consult for help.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of youths' accessibility of mental health services provided by professionals.

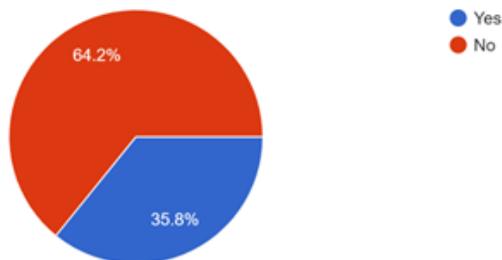


Figure 2: Chart showing extent of youths' accessibility of mental health services provided by professionals.

Observation from Figure 2 shows that more respondents 64.2% do not have access to mental health services provided by professional while 35.8% found them accessible. The following were some of the reasons.

- I have only heard that they are available but I haven't visited one.
- People don't understand mental health issues and the general public need to be sensitized about mental issues and not just relating mental issues to madness.
- I have never meet one before physically.

Respondents that claim ease of accessing assistance from professionals who render mental health services gave the following reasons.

- Because there is a counselling unit in the school I attended.
- They are in some hospitals and are the first to attend to you before seeing the doctor.

In order to further examine the extent of accessing assistance from professional counsellors who render mental health services, responses got through the instrument is hereunder presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Responses on Access to Professional Counsellors

SN	Statement	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%

1	I have these professionals in my home/school/work environment.	435	71	178	29
2	I can easily get their contact from friends and family.	347	57	266	43
3	The services of these professionals and their contact details are available on the web.	382	62	231	38
4	I can easily get their contact from available website.	405	66	208	34
5	Their services are easily accessible to anyone who needs them.	347	57	266	43
6	Professional counsellors/psychologists/therapists create a great awareness about the mental health services they render.	451	74	162	26

Research Question 3: What is the extent of youths’ utilization of mental health services provided by professionals?

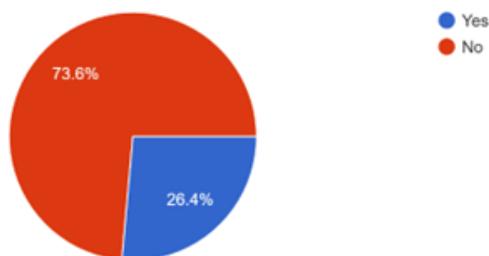


Figure 3: Chart showing extent of utilizing mental health services provided by professionals

Analysis in Figure 3 shows that most of the respondents 73.6% never sought or utilized assistance from professional counsellors/psychologists/therapist as against

26.4% that has utilized the service. Respondents that responded “No” had the following reasons.

- Professional counsellors are only available in schools and a few churches.

- *It's not so easy to just walk up to someone to discuss personal and confidential issues*
- *We only have them in universities, it's really hard to get one that's practicing, in a society like Nigeria for fear of being labelled as crazy.*
- *I understand that the service is expensive.*

Conversely, those that responded “Yes”, gave the following reasons for utilizing the services of professional counsellors.

- *I feel that people sometimes suffer from depression and anxiety issues, so I feel there is*

need for professionals to come to the aid of such individuals.

- *When I had some issue that bothered me and was faced with some personal challenges.*
- *I once had problems coping with my studies in school, so I went to the counselling clinic for assistance.*

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant gender difference in the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

Table 2: Descriptive and Inferential Analysis on Awareness based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Male	149	17.93	3.97		
Female	464	21.85	6.57		
Total	613	20.89	6.27		
Group	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1733.78	1	1733.78	47.49	.000
Within Groups	22306.32	611	36.51		
Total	24040.11	612			

Observation from Table 1 shows that male respondents had mean of 17.93 while the female respondents had a higher mean difference of

21.85. Analysis of variance was computed to determine if there exist significant difference in the mean. F-calculated value of 47.49 was

derived as gender difference in the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State. The calculated value was found to be greater than the critical value of 3.86, given degrees of freedom 1 and 611 at 0.05 level of significance. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that there is significant gender difference in the level of awareness of mental

health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State. The female had higher level of awareness than their male counterparts.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant gender difference in the accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

Table 3: Descriptive and Inferential Analysis on Utilization based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Male	149	17.65	5.15		
Female	464	19.24	6.80		
Total	613	18.85	6.47		
Group	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	285.26	1	285.26	6.88	.009
Within Groups	25336.82	611	41.47		
Total	25622.08	612			

Figures from Table 2 shows that mean response on accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State were 17.65 and 19.24 for male and

female respondents respectively. The female respondents were observed with a greater mean value. In order to determine if the mean difference were significant, Analysis of Variance

was computed and a F-calculated value of 6.88 ($p < 0.05$) was derived. The calculated value was observed to be greater than the critical value of 3.86, given 1 and 611 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected in lieu of the alternative hypothesis. It was concluded that, there is significant gender difference in the accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

Female youths were observed to have more accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professional than their male counterparts.

Hypothesis 3: Age of participants does not significantly differ in accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State.

Table 4: Descriptive and Inferential Analysis on Utilization based on Age Range

Age Range	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		
18-22	432	19.69	7.27		
23-27	76	16.96	4.17		
28-32	26	18.65	2.80		
33-37	79	16.20	1.71		
Total	613	18.85	6.47		
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1127.37	3	375.79	9.34	.000
Within Groups	24494.71	609	40.22		
Total	25622.08	612			

Analysis above shows that the F-calculated value of 9.34 was greater than the critical value of 2.64,

given 3 and 609 degrees of freedom. This led to the rejected of the null hypothesis. It was

concluded that age of participants did not significantly differ in accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State. A multiple

comparison was done to determine the group with the difference. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 5: Multiple Comparison on Accessibility and Utilization of mental health services based on Age

(I) Age Range	(J) Age Range	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
18-22	23-27	2.72*	.001
	28-32	1.03	.421
	33-37	3.48*	.000
23-27	18-22	-2.72*	.001
	28-32	-1.69	.240
	33-37	.78	.457
28-32	18-22	-1.03	.421
	23-27	1.69	.240
	33-37	2.45	.088
33-37	18-22	-3.48*	.000
	23-27	-.78	.457
	28-32	-2.45	.088
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.			

Age range of 18-22 years was found to be significant when paired with each of 23-27 years ($t = 2.72$; $p < 0.05$) and 33.37 years ($t = 3.48$; $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis 4: Age of participants does not significantly differ in the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professional among youths in Lagos State.

Table 6: Descriptive and Inferential Analysis on Awareness based on Age Range

Age Range	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		
18-22	432	21.18	6.60		
23-27	76	21.26	7.70		
28-32	26	20.85	2.71		
33-37	79	18.99	2.01		
Total	613	20.89	6.27		
(I) Age Range	(J)				
18-22					
23-27					
28-32					
33-37					
Group	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	333.08	3	111.03	2.852	.037
Within Groups	23707.03	609	38.93		
Total	24040.11	612			

Figures above shows that 2.852 was derived as the age difference in the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professional among youths in Lagos State. The value was found to be significant because it was greater than the critical value of 2.64, given 3 and 609 degrees of freedom

at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted. A multiple comparison was computed to determine the pair that was significant. The outcome of the analysis is presented below.

Table 7: Multiple Comparison on Awareness based on Age

The age range of 18-22 years was found to be significant when compared with 33-37 years. Also, 23-27 years was found to be significant when compared with 33-37 years.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that 96.2% of the sampled youths were aware of mental health services provided by professionals as against 3.8% that were ignorant. This shows a very high level of awareness among youths in Lagos State Nigeria. 73.6% never sought or utilized assistance from professional counsellors/psychologists/therapist as against 26.4% that claimed to have utilized the service. A few of the reasons given by respondents are similar to the findings of Radez et al (2020) which discovered that mental health illness in children and young adults are extremely widespread or common and still inadequately managed. A comprehensive recognition of the purpose for not looking for or obtaining assistance

as observed by young people is critical in order to tackle this chasm. Evaluative and quantifiable studies describing obstacles, and assistance to children and young people looking for and obtaining expert assistance for mental health issues, disclosed that a high percentage (96%) of the studies revealed obstacles associated with young people's specific elements such as inadequate or scanty mental health comprehension and deeper insight of assistance or aid among other factors such as awareness of societal disgrace and discomposure (92%), recognized privacy of clients, the potential to have faith in a person that is unknown to them(68%). Comprehensive and structural barriers such as economic aspects (costs) of mental health services, operational obstacles and the accessibility of expert help (58%) were also discovered in the study (Radez et al, 2020). That is, if experts would be available and accessible. A study was carried out in the United States of

America from 2011 to 2019 to examine the reasons given by young people for not seeking mental healthcare for depression. It was discovered that a high percentage of young adults had no knowledge of where to access mental health care. Other reasons include; apprehension about convalescence, being compelled to take treatment, poor indemnity for therapy, anxiety over rejection in the workplace which might affect career progression, worries about issues of privacy and discretion in dealing with clients (Lu et al, 2022).

A high number 64.2% of participants in this study do not have access to mental health services provided by professional while 35.8% found them accessible. An article by the United Kingdom Educational Policy Institute in 2020, called attention to the increase in request for assistance of experts in providing mental health care for children and young people. Up till now, one in four people are unable to access appropriate treatment for mental health disorder because of the local disparity throughout England. For those cases that are booked to receive therapy, there are prolonged delay or waiting periods of up to 6 months (Genna – Jennings & Hutchinson, 2020). Investigation into causes, outcome and attention given to mental health illness is scanty in nations with small and average wages than in nations with

high wages such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and some societies in the north and west of the European union (Erskine et al, 2017). A new study by the university of California-San Francisco revealed that almost fifty percent (50%) of young people had mental health manifestations throughout the covid-19 pandemic, and more than a third of the above figure of these young people did not have the opportunity to get mental health therapy (Adams et al,2022). The statistics gathered between June and the first few days in July 2021, covered the evaluation of the use of mental health services and unfulfilled need for mental health treatment. Forty eight percent (48%) of young people had complaints about mental health manifestation and out of those with these signs, 39% were unable to access and use recommended medicines and/or receive counselling. At the same time, 36% disclosed an unfulfilled counselling need and intervention (Adam et al,2022).

The study revealed a significant gender difference in the level of awareness of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State. The female respondents had higher level of awareness than their male counterparts. Female youths were also observed to have greater

accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professional than their male counterparts. The study of Smith et al (2013) revealed that generally, more female participants utilize mental health services. Adult male participants may probably take their time in going to a medical practitioner for what they consider unimportant mental health issues but will ask for assistance as soon as the problem gets to a level at which they start to feel the need to seek help. Similarly, Coveney (2022) opined that a high number of researchers have discovered that among men and women who take part in these experiments, men rarely appreciate or admit the importance and usefulness of treatment of mental health disorders. However, Erick et al (2022) studied the gender difference in mental health issues, mental health conditions and the requests for assistance among young foreign university scholars. The results revealed that both male and female graduate scholars were inclined to request for assistance for their mental health problems.

The age of participants in the study was also discovered to significantly differ in the awareness, accessibility and utilization of mental health services provided by professionals among youths in Lagos State. A multiple comparison was done to determine the group with the difference. Age range of 18-22 years was found to be significant

when paired with each of 23-27 years and 33.37 years. The plausible explanation of this is that, while participants in the age range of 18-22 may be in the world of work, the majority of them are fresh out of secondary schools where they had access to academic, vocational and personal social guidance and counselling. Secondary schools in Lagos state are mandated to have guidance counsellors to assist students going through educational, career, personal and social problems.

The research of Mc Gorry et al (2022) also revealed that worldwide advancement attained so far in discharging consolidated mental health protection for young people has stressed that these facilities are being obtained by young people who have actual or real and significant demands for mental health care and that they are making the most and profiting from them. The study also revealed that these young people and their relations are extremely pleased and contented with the services they obtain. None the less, the research is even now at its foundation and basic care stages need to be expanded throughout the world, enhanced by avoidance, computer platforms and essentially, in addition to comprehensive intensive care for complicated and recurrent disorders associated with the transformation order (from roughly 12 to 25 years). The growing trend of mental ill health in

young people worldwide call for an emphasis on a greater and highest attention to be paid to this issue as the most pressing health problem worldwide. The study of mental health issues in young people from 15 to 25 years by Droogenbroeck et al (2018), revealed that the early stages of adulthood in individuals are periods that are defined by difficult transformation, adjustment and development. The pursuit of personal recognition and exploration of methods for independence are accompanied by strong emotional state of precariousness and apprehension. While most young adults are capable of conveniently managing these emotions, a significant number are badly affected by profound mental health issues.

Conclusion

Investigating the worldwide widespread mental health issues of young people is quite challenging and is determined by individual experimentation, preferences, research dimensions, extent of research, finance, contrasting analysis of the disorder and under-publicizing of its pervasiveness (Collishaw, 2015; Wainberg et al, 2017). The worldwide price of regulation of societal resources and conditions, trials and unpredictable occurrences that are likely to happen will depend upon the supervision of

flexible blend of expert and group intervention. Timely mediation in addition to result-oriented, comprehensive or focused plan of action and suitable youth mental health services will likely enhance the mental health of little children and young people (Dodge, 2020; Malla et al, 2016) and lead to a drop in the aggregate of young people who are likely to have mental health issues when they are fully grown (Wilson, 2020) and in the later years of their lives. Throughout most of the first world or developed nations, mental health services are inadequately financed and cannot match the funding of services for physical health problems. Developing a comprehensive purpose for getting bigger financial backing as has been done in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and other developed countries is a major start or initiative in increasing opportunities to healthcare (Hostetter & Klein, 2021). This is expected to spiral down to other developing nations of the world.

During the prevalent covid-19 pandemic, Hostetter and Klein (2022) examined ways to develop and improve the ability of young people to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events. The researchers opined that young people who are in need of assistance can be linked with mental health professionals for therapy and assistance or help. It was observed

that a large number of people are deprived of assistance. The researchers investigated specific patterns of health care that were adapted to the peculiar requirements of young people along with healthcare and youth centres that provide a scope of healthcare services as well as group assistance and restorative tools that can be used by non-professionals or that can be used by the young people on their own without assistance. In spite of the variation in range, all the patterns discovered by the researchers looked for ways to reduce obstacles to obtaining assistance, educate young people on mental health issues and allow them to be, to a certain extent, part of the solution (Hostetter of Klein, 2022).

Researchers are urgently calling out and looking for steps that should be taken to improve upon existing mental health care services and for these services to develop to be a clear-cut field or area of knowledge with particular emphasis on the following four critical components;

- Emphasis should be on avoidance and quick provision of mediation for young people. This should be made an integral part of the general medical practice to be provided in local neighborhoods or community settings.

- Mental health care services should be jointly planned with young people in such a way that it will be easily available and attractive, and not associated with shame or stigma.

- To merge the gains of advanced technological changes, to grant openness and make it convenient for young people to be able to see the magnitude and the different dimensions of individual networking and one-on-one assistance in order to stimulate their commitment to seeking help for mental health issues.

- To lengthen the maturity borderline in the ground work of psychological well-being to include the stage of continuous intellectual advancement and improvement in the “new adolescence” and the highest point threat stage of beginning of psychological confusion.

The gravity of this problem or venture is motivated by a worldwide catastrophe of mental health problems among young people and the non-success of conventional pattern of mental health wellness programme to meet this exigency (McGorry et al 2022 in Hollic, 2022). Many mental health challenges can be adequately managed at moderately little price, however, the wide gap in the number of people who need care and those who actually have access to care is considerably

large. The scope of adequate therapy to address mental health problems is exceedingly small. Bigger funding is necessary on all sides for people to be sensitive to mental health issues, have a greater and better awareness of the problem, reduce the shame and disgrace associated with mental health problems. Attempts should be made for people to have accelerated opportunities to use and benefit from high standard mental healthcare. Investigations should also be continuously carried out to explore and discover the current and available medical care in order to add value to the present medical care and assistance provided for all mental conditions (WHO, 2022).

Recommendations

The study recommends early introduction of courses into the Nigerian elementary and junior school curricular for early exposure of young people to signs and symptoms of mental health problems. The importance of seeking assistance from professional counsellors who are trained to render such assistance is also recommended. The clarion call by most nations of the world for adequate funding of the sector in charge of providing mental health care services is strongly recommended.

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