

A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA: MENTAL HEALTH PREVALENCE AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATIONS AMONG POST-CONFLICT PRIMARY CARE ATTENDEES

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Background

COMGAP-S is a collaboration between Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US, Anglia Ruskin University, UK, THEME Institute and the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Research is carried out in a two-phase design in Northern Province, Sri Lanka by researchers from Colombo and Northern Province together with the UK Principal Investigator and experts from both countries. This alliance combines specialized expertise and regional knowledge to ensure research activities are appropriate and meaningful to the local population.

Issues of Focus

Northern Province has suffered extensively from prolonged conflict and internal displacement, and is slowly recovering. The aim of COMGAP-S is to: 1) estimate the prevalence of mental illness of internally displaced populations (IDP); and 2) evaluate the effectiveness of training primary care practitioners (PCP) in identifying and managing mental health conditions.

Methods

To establish prevalence, a cross-sectional survey was conducted in 2016 with 1,015 previously displaced adults accessing primary healthcare. In addition to screening for common mental health disorders, data was collected about displacement, stress, quality of life, disability, and social support.

Results

Results indicated a high burden of mental suffering, with 58.8% of respondents screening positive for any mental health disorder (MHD) and 42.4% positive for two or more disorders. Results informed Phase 2, where PCP and community representatives are currently undergoing training to identify and manage common MHD using the World Health Organization mental health Gap Action Programme 2.0.

Discussion

COMGAP-S is an example of a North-South cross-disciplinary initiative led primarily by Sri Lankan partners. Public health specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, and community workers collaborated to identify the mental health needs of IDP. A training intervention to improve mental health knowledge and skills in PCP is currently underway in collaboration with field staff. This demonstrates how post-conflict mental health can be addressed, taking into account context and culture.

Author List

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Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Prepare cross-sectional studies in similar contexts
2. Apply methodology and partnership process gained in future global mental health projects

References

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