

COVID-19, Christian Women and Mental Health: An African Interventionist Response

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Abstract

Mental health is posited as a vital constituent of health and well-being. Good mental health is represented by a balance between the mind, body, spirit and context which should all be in tangent. Globally, it has been noted that mental disorders rank among the top ten leading causes of health encumbrance. This dire situation has been compounded by the novel COVID19 pandemic outbreak which exacerbated the global number of mental disorders, with women carrying a higher risk due to their role as primary caregivers. Using a phenomenological study and drawing from Christian women in Harare, this study sought to explore the common risk factors that expose women to the possibility of developing mental health disorders. Research findings indicated varied stressors including gender-based roles, intimate partner violence, lower socio-economic status and household financial instability due to the COVID-19 induced economic recession during the COVID-19 lockdown period as triggers of mental health disorders. Religio-cultural factors, stigma and discrimination associated with mental health disorders were equally identified as inhibitors to women's mental healthcare needs. Study participants also cited heightened reverence to God as well as the use of indigenous practices as coping mechanisms. Such a scenario brought to the fore a practice of religious syncretism among the research participants. The study therefore recommends gender-sensitive as well as culturally-sensitive mental health coping mechanisms and practices to mitigate the challenge of mental disorders, especially among women.

Keywords: COVID-19; Christian women; culturally-sensitive; gender-based roles; intimate partner violence; mental health disorders; religious syncretism