

The Psychological Impact of a Flu-like Outbreak on a Post-COVID-19 Community: A Case Study in Magwegwe Suburbs in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the psychological impact of a flu-like outbreak on a community in Magwegwe Suburbs, Bulawayo Province, Zimbabwe that had previously experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aimed to: 1) examine the community's levels of trauma, resilience and mental health outcomes; 2) investigate the psychosocial effects of health-related anxiety and stigma; and 3) evaluate the utilization of mental health services before, during and after the outbreak. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, open-ended Questionnaire and analysis of medical records. The findings indicated that the community exhibited elevated rates of PTSD, depression and health-related anxiety, alongside both community cohesion and interpersonal conflicts. Significant barriers to accessing mental healthcare were also identified. The study provided crucial insights into the long-term psychological toll of compounding public health crises in a low-resource setting. The results informed recommendations for comprehensive, community-based mental health programmes, integrated primary care-based services and continued research engagement with affected populations. Overall, the findings highlight the need for tailored interventions to support community resilience in the face of successive public health emergencies.

Keyword: Psychological impact; Post-COVID-19 community; Flu-like outbreak; Magwegwe Suburbs; Community resilience