

ABSTRACT

Background: The advancement of mental health literacy is important for the integration of mental health care services into primary health care. Little is known about the knowledge of and attitude to mental illness in sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda in particular. From the evidence perused in the literature, the researcher observed that communities with sound mental health knowledge and a positive attitude towards mental illness are motivated to seek professional help, whilst communities with a lack of mental health knowledge and a negative attitude towards mental illness are less motivated to seek professional help.

Aims: The study aimed to determine the knowledge and attitudes of the Oyam community members towards mental illness.

Methodology: A descriptive, cross sectional survey, with a quantitative approach. An adjusted, existing questionnaire, with, self-compiled, closed ended questions, was used to collect data on the level of knowledge, awareness and attitudes about mental illness. 400 respondents were randomly selected from 5 villages in Loro sub county Oyam district.

Results: Poor knowledge of causation was common. Negative views of mental illness were widespread, with as many as 96.5% (s.d. =0.5) believing that people with mental illness are dangerous because of their violent behavior. Most would not tolerate even basic social contacts with a mentally ill person: 82.7% (s.e. =1.3)

Conclusions: There is indeed a significant relationship/ association between awareness, attitudes and mental health seeking behavior. For example 40%-50% of the variance in mental health seeking behavior is explained by the attitudes towards mental ill health and the level of awareness about mental

health. This indicates that community knowledge, attitudes and awareness affect mental health seeking behavior.