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Introduction

- African immigrants and refugees have increased mental health needs due to higher rates of trauma exposure, discrimination, and post-migration stressors when compared to general populations^{1,2}, despite protective factors including faith, community, and family support
- This group shows a significantly greater burden of mental health disorders than the general population, with pooled prevalence rates of 34.6% for anxiety, 33.2% for depression and 37.9% for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)²
- There is little evidence regarding the experiences of mental health care providers in providing services to this population

Aims and Objectives

1. To examine perceived barriers to mental health service access and utilization among African immigrants and refugees
2. To identify provider-informed insights to support culturally responsive mental health care
3. To explore the experiences of mental health care providers in delivering services to African immigrant and refugee populations

Methods

- This study used an inductive qualitative design
- Purposive and snowball sampling^{3,4} were used to recruit mental health care with experience working with African immigrants and/or refugees (N = 5)
- Participants completed a one-time, audio recorded interview using open-ended questions
- Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step process of thematic analysis⁵.

Results: Six Major Themes

Cultural Norms and Stigma Limiting Mental Health Discussions

- Stigma associated with seeking help
- "Stigma with being in counseling, confidentiality"
- Cultural norms discourage open discussions about mental health issues
- "Different culture beliefs and traditions; not sitting and talking about women's health, it is cultural beliefs, traditions from different background"

Preference for Community-Based Mental Health Approaches

- Emphasis on community for support
- Suggestions for services delivered within community
- "Groups may be better. Looking for a sense of community, I wonder if they might benefit from the group"

Need for Cultural Competence and Relational Trust

- Shared cultural experiences can enhance trust and understanding
- "African people need African counselors"

Communication Barriers and Accessibility Issues

- Language barriers are obstacles to accessing mental health services
- "No translator-equity issues, treating were not understanding"

Navigating Adversity

- Refugees may experience war and displacement
- Adjusting to new environments is challenging
- "Overwhelming - did not understand, new systems, no neighbors."

Resilience

- Emphasis on the strength African immigrants and refugees demonstrate while navigating their expereinces
- "Have that extreme tolerance, African women, push self too much, want to survive"

Conclusions

- The findings emphasize the critical impact of stigma and cultural beliefs on access to mental health services, highlighting the need for practitioners to confront these issues directly
- There is a strong call for mental health models that prioritize community support and address the unique needs of culturally diverse populations
- Recognizing the specific trauma experienced by war victims and refugees, alongside language barriers, underscores the importance of developing tailored interventions and ensuring effective communication support in mental health services

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