



Operational Research on Integrating Mental Health Services into Chronic Disease Clinics at Primary Health Centres in Tanzania's Iringa Region: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

In Tanzania, the concurrent high burden of chronic diseases and common mental disorders presents a major public health challenge. At primary health centres, these conditions are frequently managed separately, resulting in fragmented care. Operational research is needed to inform effective service integration to improve outcomes and system efficiency. This systematic review synthesised existing operational research on integrating mental health services into chronic disease clinics at primary health centres in Tanzania's Iringa Region. It aimed to identify reported integration models, assess documented implementation processes, and evaluate reported outcomes and challenges. A systematic review of published and grey literature was conducted. Relevant databases and organisational websites were searched for studies describing operational aspects of service integration in the specified setting. Identified studies were screened, selected, and their data extracted and analysed using thematic synthesis. The synthesis incorporated qualitative and quantitative operational research. A key theme was the role of task-shifting, with nurses and clinical officers delivering integrated care after tailored training. Documented challenges included high staff workload and unreliable medicine supply. Improved mental health case detection was reported in integrated clinics. Operational research from Iringa suggests that integrating mental health into chronic disease care at primary health centres is feasible and can enhance service access. However, sustained success depends on addressing systemic barriers such as workforce constraints and supply chain weaknesses. Future integration programmes should prioritise sustained, practical training for primary care staff and strengthen logistics for psychotropic medicines. Further operational research is required to develop cost-effective supervision models and explore sustainable financing for integrated services. operational research, service integration, mental health, chronic disease, primary health care, Tanzania, task-shifting This review consolidates operational evidence to guide policymakers and programme managers in designing and implementing integrated mental health and chronic disease services in similar primary care settings in Tanzania and beyond.

Keywords: *Sub-Saharan Africa, Health systems integration, Operational research, Primary health care, Mental health services, Chronic disease management*

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