



Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Mental Healthcare for Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Goma's Displacement Camps

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is prevalent in displacement settings, with survivors often experiencing mental health consequences. In the displacement camps around Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, many survivors have minimal access to mental healthcare. Clarifying the barriers to access in this setting is a necessary step towards improving services. This brief report aimed to identify and describe the principal structural and socio-cultural barriers that prevent gender-based violence survivors in Goma's displacement camps from accessing mental health services. A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with gender-based violence survivors, community health workers, and non-governmental organisation staff operating within selected camps. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Key barriers were identified across two domains. Structural barriers included a severe shortage of trained mental health professionals and essential psychotropic medicines. Socio-cultural barriers prominently featured the stigmatisation of both mental health conditions and survivors of gender-based violence, which deterred help-seeking. A dominant theme was the fear of social exclusion, leading many survivors to prioritise community acceptance over personal mental healthcare. Access to mental healthcare for gender-based violence survivors in these camps is obstructed by a complex interplay of systemic resource deficits and deeply entrenched social stigma. Addressing only one dimension is unlikely to improve service utilisation significantly. Interventions should be integrated, combining capacity-building for local healthcare providers with community-led programmes

to destigmatise mental health and gender-based violence. Sustainable funding for mental health resources within the camp health system is urgently required. Gender-based violence, mental health, access to healthcare, displacement camps, Democratic Republic of Congo, barriers, stigma This report provides field-based evidence on the multi-layered obstacles to mental healthcare in a humanitarian context, highlighting the need for combined structural and socio-cultural interventions.

Keywords: *Gender-based violence, Mental healthcare access, Displacement camps, Democratic Republic of Congo, Post-conflict settings, Structural barriers, Socio-cultural barriers*

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