



# Preand Post-COVID-19 Mental Health Needs of Youth in South African Informal Settlements: An Exploration of Services Accessibility

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## Abstract

South African informal settlements have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with heightened risks to mental health. A mixed-methods approach including structured interviews and focus groups was employed among youth aged 15-24 in selected informal settlements. Findings indicate a significant increase in anxiety and depression symptoms post-COVID-19, with only 30% of participants reporting access to psychological services. The study highlights the urgent need for accessible mental health support tailored to the specific needs of young people in informal settlements. Immediate implementation of community-based mental health programmes and integration of telepsychology into service delivery models is recommended.

**Keywords:** *African contexts, mental health disparities, qualitative methods, stigma, youth resilience, community-based interventions, accessibility barriers*

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