



A Scoping Review of Informal Healthcare Provision and Medicinal Access in Urban Equatorial Guinea

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Abstract

In urban Equatorial Guinea, formal healthcare is frequently inaccessible or unaffordable. A substantial informal healthcare sector, including unlicensed providers, traditional healers, and unregulated medicine vendors, has emerged to fill this gap. Its role in providing medicinal access and primary care is significant but poorly documented. This scoping review aims to map and synthesise existing literature on informal healthcare provision and medicinal access in urban Equatorial Guinea. Its objectives are to describe the sector's nature and scope, identify key actors and practices, and understand the population's reliance on it. The review was conducted following Joanna Briggs Institute methodology. Five academic databases and grey literature sources were searched systematically. Included studies, published in English, Spanish, or French, reported on informal healthcare or medicine access in urban Equatorial Guinea or analogous regional settings. Data were charted and analysed thematically. A pronounced knowledge gap was identified, with very few studies focusing specifically on Equatorial Guinea. Synthesis from broader regional literature suggests the informal sector is a primary care source for many urban residents. A dominant theme was the widespread sale of prescription-only medicines, including antibiotics and antimalarials, by untrained street vendors without prescription. Informal healthcare provision is a dominant yet critically under-researched component of the urban health landscape in Equatorial Guinea. This lack of contextual evidence constitutes a major blind spot for effective health policy and regulation. Urgent primary research is required to understand the specific Equatoguinean context. Future policy development must account for the informal sector's role to enhance medicine safety and explore pathways for integrating effective informal practices into the formal health system. informal healthcare, medicinal access, urban health, Equatorial Guinea, scoping review, unregulated medicines. This review consolidates the limited evidence on a critical component of urban healthcare in Equatorial Guinea, highlighting a significant research gap and providing a foundation for future study and informed policy dialogue.

Keywords: *informal healthcare, medicinal access, urban Africa, traditional medicine, scoping review, Equatorial Guinea, health systems*



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