ABSTRACT

"Depression Literacy"

A Survey of Community Health Aides' Recognition and Understanding of Adolescent Depression and Their Perception about the Effectiveness of Various Treatment Options

Latoya Alicia Taylor

Mental health is indispensable to personal wellbeing, family and interpersonal relationships, and contribution to community and society. It is easy to overlook the value of mental health until problems surface. Yet from early until death, mental health is the springboard of thinking and communication skills, learning emotional growth, resilience, and self-esteem. (1)

This study sought to determine Community Health Aides' (CHAs) recognition and understanding of adolescent depression, a mental disorder, and their perception about the effectiveness of various treatment options for the condition.

A cross sectional survey of CHAs attached to types 3, 4 & 5 health centres in Kingston and St. Andrew and St. Catherine was conducted using an interviewer administered questionnaire consisting of a vignette of a depressed teenager.

The majority of the respondents (64%) recognized the presence of some form of mental disorder. The disorder was correctly labeled as depression by 41.7% of the sample. Although not statistically significant, recognition of depression was greater among younger persons, persons with prior personal or family experience with depression and persons who attained secondary or higher education.

When various treatment options were rated as helpful or harmful for the teenager described in the vignette counseling was most frequently rated as helpful. Medication was least rated as helpful thereby suggesting a preference for non pharmacological treatment.

Most of the participants (36.1%) suggested family as the first point of contact for help for the teenager described in the vignette followed by general practitioner 33.3%. Counselor (47.2 %) followed by general practitioner (35.2%) were identified as the preferred point of first contact among professionals.

Though many CHAs appeared to have some theoretical knowledge of adolescent depression when presented with a case (the vignette) most were unable to recognize the condition. If adolescent depression is to be recognized early and the appropriate interventions taken by those directly linked to the pathway to care, their level of depression literacy needs to be improved.

Keywords: Adolescents; Depression; Community Health Aides (CHAs)