



Research Article

PREVALENCE OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AMONG HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN SELECTED HOSPITALS IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, a region marked by armed conflicts and unique challenges. A cross-sectional study involving 90 healthcare professionals from three selected hospitals revealed that 27.8% met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Nurses exhibited the highest prevalence, followed by doctors and support staff. Exposure to traumatic events, particularly those related to armed conflict and life-threatening illnesses, was significantly associated with an increased risk of PTSD. This study establishes a strong association between exposure to traumatic events, particularly those related to armed conflict and life-threatening illnesses, and an elevated risk of developing PTSD. The findings emphasize the urgent need for mental health support and tailored interventions to address the well-being of healthcare professionals in this region, ultimately enhancing the quality of healthcare services provided to the community.

KEYWORDS

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Healthcare Professionals.

INTRODUCTION

In the heart of the Northwest Region of Cameroon, healthcare professionals are facing a silent crisis within the shadows of armed conflicts and unique challenges. These dedicated individuals, working tirelessly on the frontline, are not only battling to save lives but also confronting the unseen enemy of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a significant mental

health concern that can affect individuals who have experienced or witnessed traumatic events (Vyas, 2019). While it has been widely studied in various populations, there has been limited research on the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals, especially in the context of the Northwest Region of Cameroon. This article explores into the depths of this

predicament, exploring the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in selected hospitals within the region. In doing so, it unveils a pressing concern that demands immediate attention—27.8% of these heroes bear the heavy burden of PTSD. Among them, nurses bear the brunt, followed closely by doctors and support staff. This grim reality underscores the urgency of tailored interventions and robust mental health support mechanisms, paving the way to a brighter, healthier future for both the healthcare professionals and the communities they serve (Sepeng & Makhado, 2019). This article aims to shed light on the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals working in selected hospitals within this region.

Statement of the Problem:

The Northwest Region of Cameroon has been marred by a prolonged crisis characterized by socio-political unrest and violence. Healthcare professionals, particularly those working on the frontline, have been exposed to traumatic experiences that may lead to the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, the prevalence of PTSD among these professionals remains poorly understood. This study seeks to determine the extent of PTSD among healthcare professionals in selected hospitals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

Objectives

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To determine the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals working in Saint Elizabeth General Hospital Shisong, Banso Baptist Hospital Kumbo, and Mbingo Baptist Hospital Bamenda in the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

2. To identify the factors contributing to the development of PTSD among healthcare professionals in these hospitals.

3. To provide recommendations for interventions and support mechanisms to address the mental health needs of healthcare professionals in the North West Region of Cameroon.

Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in Saint Elizabeth General Hospital Shisong, Banso Baptist Hospital Kumbo, and Mbingo Baptist Hospital Bamenda?

2. What are the factors contributing to the development of PTSD among healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon?

3. What recommendations can be made to mitigate the impact of PTSD and provide support to healthcare professionals in this region?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a serious mental health concern that affects individuals who have experienced or witnessed traumatic events (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While extensive research has explored the prevalence of PTSD in various populations, there has been limited investigation into the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals, especially in conflict-affected regions such as the Northwest Region of Cameroon. This article delves into this issue, shedding light on the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in selected hospitals within the region.

Research has consistently highlighted the elevated risk of PTSD among individuals exposed to traumatic events, particularly those related to armed conflicts and life-threatening illnesses (Finch, Ford, Grainger, & Meiser-Stedman, 2020). The Northwest Region of Cameroon has been marred by prolonged socio-political unrest and violence, exposing healthcare professionals, especially those working on the frontline, to such traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, studies have shown that occupation can influence the risk of developing PTSD. For example, research by Smith et al. (2018) found that nurses, who are often directly involved in patient care and may witness distressing events, exhibit a higher prevalence of PTSD compared to other healthcare professionals. This aligns with the findings in the current study, which revealed that nurses in the Northwest Region bear the brunt of PTSD, followed by doctors and support staff.

In addition to occupation, the availability of mental health support and resources has been recognized as a critical factor influencing the development and severity of PTSD (Ramos-Lima, Waikamp, Antonelli-Salgado, Passos, & Freitas, 2020). The study at hand underscores the lack of mental health support, limited resources, and ongoing stressors faced by healthcare professionals in the North West Region of Cameroon, further emphasizing the pressing need for tailored interventions.

PTSD Prevalence in Conflict-Affected Regions of Africa

Research in various African countries, such as Sudan, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, has highlighted the high prevalence of PTSD among individuals exposed to conflict-related trauma (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2013). These studies underscore the relevance of investigating PTSD

among healthcare professionals in conflict-affected regions like the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

Occupational Stress and PTSD among Healthcare Workers in Africa

The healthcare profession in Africa is confronted with unique stressors, including resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and the burden of infectious diseases. These challenges can contribute to the development of PTSD among healthcare workers. Studies in sub-Saharan Africa have shown that healthcare providers are at risk of experiencing PTSD symptoms due to occupational stress (Kagee et al., 2017; Iversen et al., 2015).

Gender Disparities in PTSD among African Healthcare Professionals

Research has also highlighted gender disparities in the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare workers in Africa. Female healthcare professionals may face additional challenges and vulnerabilities related to trauma exposure and subsequent PTSD symptoms (Baxter et al., 2019). Understanding these gender dynamics is crucial for tailored interventions.

Mental Health Support and Resources in African Healthcare Settings

The availability of mental health support and resources is a critical factor influencing the mental well-being of healthcare professionals. In many African countries, including Cameroon, there is often a shortage of mental health services and resources. Studies have pointed out the need for strengthening mental health infrastructure in African healthcare settings to address the mental health needs of professionals (Kakuma et al., 2011).

Challenges of Stigma and Help-Seeking Behavior

In African cultures, mental health issues are often stigmatized, which can deter healthcare professionals from seeking help for PTSD symptoms. Research has explored the impact of stigma on help-seeking behavior and emphasized the importance of reducing stigma surrounding mental health in healthcare settings (Ndetei et al., 2015).

In conclusion, the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in conflict-affected regions of Africa, including the Northwest Region of Cameroon, is a pressing concern that deserves further research attention. This review highlights the need for comprehensive studies in this area and emphasizes the importance of tailored interventions, mental health support, and stigma reduction efforts to safeguard the well-being of healthcare professionals and enhance the quality of healthcare services across the African continent. The existing literature and the findings of this study underscore the urgent need for mental health support and targeted interventions to address the well-being of healthcare professionals, particularly in conflict-affected regions. By recognizing the elevated risk associated with exposure to traumatic events, tailoring interventions to specific healthcare roles, and ensuring access to mental health services, healthcare institutions, government authorities, and international organizations can play a pivotal role in safeguarding the mental health of healthcare professionals and improving the quality of healthcare services for the community.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design:

The research uses a cross-sectional descriptive study design. This design allows the researchers to collect data at a single point in time to provide a snapshot of the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare

professionals in the selected hospitals. Cross-sectional studies are suitable for assessing the prevalence of a condition or characteristic within a specific population. This design involves collecting data at a single point in time to assess the prevalence and factors associated with PTSD among healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It allows for a snapshot of the situation at a specific moment.

Sample Selection:

Sampling Technique: The study employed a random sampling technique to select healthcare professionals from three specific hospitals - Saint Elizabeth General Hospital Shisong, Bansa Baptist Hospital Kumbo, and Mbingo Baptist Hospital Bamenda. Random sampling enhances the representativeness of the sample, reducing bias in participant selection.

Simple Random Sampling: Healthcare professionals are selected randomly from a list of all eligible professionals working at the selected hospitals. This is done using a random number generator or a lottery-type system to ensure each professional has an equal chance of being selected.

Sample Size Determination:

The study involved 1,579 healthcare professionals from three selected hospitals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. The researcher used a cross-sectional study design to determine the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in the region. The researcher first defined the population of interest, professionals working in Saint Elizabeth General Hospital Shisong, Bansa Baptist Hospital Kumbo, and Mbingo Baptist Hospital Bamenda in the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

Sampling Technique: The study employed a random sampling technique to select healthcare professionals from the selected hospitals.

Sample Size: The researchers randomly selected 30 healthcare professionals from each of the three selected hospitals. The total sample size was calculated by multiplying the number of hospitals (3) by the number of healthcare professionals selected from each hospital (30), resulting in a total sample size of 90 participants. So, the sample size in this study was 90 healthcare professionals working in the selected hospitals within the Northwest Region of Cameroon. This sample size was chosen to investigate the prevalence of PTSD among this specific population. The sample size was relatively small but is not uncommon in certain types of research, because it was challenging to access a larger population and the resources were limited. The study's findings are based on the data collected from these 90 participants.

Study Participants and Participating Hospitals: The study included healthcare professionals working in three selected hospitals: Saint Elizabeth General Hospital Shisong, Bansa Baptist Hospital Kumbo, and Mbingo Baptist Hospital Bamenda. Nurses, doctors, and support staff were surveyed.

Nurses: This group included registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and other nursing staff involved in patient care.

Doctors: This category encompasses medical doctors, specialists, and physicians working in various departments within the hospitals.

Support Staff: Support staff included administrative personnel, laboratory technicians, and other non-clinical staff members who support the healthcare operations.

Study Variables, Data Sources, Measurement, and Operational Definitions:

Study Variables:

The primary variable of interest was the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among healthcare professionals.

Independent Variable(s)

Exposure to Traumatic Events: This variable includes experiences related to armed conflict and life-threatening illnesses, and it can be considered an independent variable as it is being studied to understand its impact on the dependent variable (PTSD prevalence).

Dependent Variable

Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): This is the primary outcome of interest in the study. It represents the mental health condition under investigation and is the dependent variable influenced by other factors, such as exposure to traumatic events.

Intervening Variables (factors that may mediate the relationship between exposure to traumatic events and the development of PTSD):

Occupation: This variable could potentially intervene in the relationship between exposure to traumatic events and the development of PTSD. The study found that nurses exhibited the highest prevalence of PTSD, followed by doctors and support staff. Occupation might influence how individuals are exposed to trauma or how they cope with it, thus potentially mediating the development of PTSD.

Mental Health Support and Resources: The availability of mental health support, as mentioned in the study, was an intervening variable. Limited access to support

and resources contributes to the development or exacerbation of PTSD among healthcare professionals.

Stressors and Ongoing Challenges: The ongoing stressors and challenges faced by healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region is an intervening variable. These stressors include working conditions, resource shortages, and the overall environment in which healthcare professionals operate. These factors impact the development and severity of PTSD.

DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical Methods: The collected data were analyzed using various statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of the study population and provide an overview of the prevalence of PTSD.

Data Sources

Data were collected through structured interviews and the administration of standardized PTSD assessment tools.

Tools and Questionnaires for Assessing PTSD

- **The Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS)** This is a structured interview often conducted by trained mental health professionals to assess PTSD based on the criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).
- **The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)** A self-report questionnaire that assesses the presence and severity of PTSD symptoms based on DSM-5 criteria.
- **The Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R)** A self-report questionnaire that measures the impact of traumatic events and assesses PTSD symptoms.

- **The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (PCL-C)** This self-report measure is used to assess PTSD symptoms in various populations.

ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

- **Prevalence of PTSD:** The study's primary objective was to determine the prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. The research found a noteworthy prevalence rate of 27.8% among the surveyed healthcare professionals. This indicates that more than one in four healthcare workers in the region is affected by PTSD, highlighting a substantial mental health concern within this population.
- **Occupational Differences:** Among the healthcare professionals surveyed, nurses exhibited the highest prevalence of PTSD, followed by doctors and support staff. This variation suggests that certain healthcare roles may be more vulnerable to the development of PTSD, potentially due to differences in exposure to traumatic events or coping mechanisms. Further investigation into these differences could inform targeted interventions.
- **Trauma Exposure:** The study identified exposure to traumatic events, particularly those associated with armed conflict and life-threatening illnesses, as a significant risk factor for PTSD among healthcare professionals. This finding underscores the importance of recognizing the unique challenges faced by healthcare workers in conflict-affected regions and the need for trauma-informed care.
- **Mental Health Support:** The discussion section highlights the lack of mental health support, limited resources, and ongoing stressors faced by healthcare professionals in the North West Region. This context may contribute to the high prevalence of PTSD. The

article calls for healthcare institutions, government authorities, and international organizations to recognize and address these mental health needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes by emphasizing the urgent need for tailored interventions aimed at improving the mental well-being of healthcare professionals in the North West Region. These interventions should include access to mental health services, trauma-informed care, and training on coping strategies. By addressing the mental health needs of healthcare workers, the quality of healthcare services provided to the community can be enhanced.

- **Implement Trauma-Informed Care Training:** Hospitals and healthcare institutions in the Northwest Region of Cameroon should prioritize the implementation of trauma-informed care training programs. These programs should be mandatory for all healthcare professionals to equip them with the necessary skills to recognize and manage PTSD symptoms in patients and themselves. This training should also include strategies for preventing and coping with trauma in high-stress healthcare environments.
- **Establish Dedicated Mental Health Support Services:** To address the mental health needs of healthcare professionals, healthcare institutions should establish dedicated mental health support services within their facilities. These services should offer confidential counseling and therapy sessions specifically tailored to the unique challenges faced by healthcare workers. Additionally, institutions should ensure that mental health support is readily accessible and destigmatized.

- **Promote Work-Life Balance and Self-Care:** Encourage healthcare professionals to prioritize work-life balance and self-care practices. Hospitals should implement policies that promote reasonable working hours, rest breaks, and access to relaxation spaces. Furthermore, healthcare institutions should provide resources and incentives for healthcare workers to engage in activities that promote mental and emotional well-being.
- **Advocate for Policy Changes:** Collaborate with government authorities to advocate for policy changes that prioritize the mental health of healthcare professionals. This may include measures such as increased funding for mental health services, improved working conditions, and legal protections against workplace harassment or violence. These policies should reflect the unique challenges faced by healthcare professionals in conflict-affected regions.
- **Research and Continuous Assessment:** Continuously conduct research to monitor the mental health of healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. Regular assessments and studies should help identify emerging trends, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and adapt strategies accordingly. This ongoing research will provide valuable insights into the evolving needs of healthcare workers and inform evidence-based approaches to support their mental well-being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, addressing the high prevalence of PTSD among healthcare professionals in the Northwest Region of Cameroon requires a multifaceted approach. By implementing these recommendations, healthcare

institutions, government authorities, and international organizations can play a pivotal role in safeguarding the mental health of healthcare professionals and, in turn, improving the quality of healthcare services for the community.

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