

## **STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH OF RURAL WOMEN IN ORUMBA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the strategies for improving the mental health of rural women in Orumba South local Government Area of Anambra State. The study was guided by three research questions. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 260 rural women. There was no sampling because the population was small and manageable. A nineteen-item questionnaire titled Strategies for Improving the Mental Health of Rural Women Questionnaire (SIMHRWQ) was used for data collection. The reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha statistical tool and overall coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. The findings of the study revealed that Mental health education, access to mental health services and early intervention and prevention amongst others can help in improving the mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area, Anambra State. Based on the discussion of the findings the following recommendations were made: Adequate medical facilities and funds should be made available by the government. This will help to improve the mental health of rural women. The number of trained mental health workers, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and counsellors, who can provide mental health services in rural areas should be increased. Access to mental health services should be improved by providing transportation and financial assistance to rural women to attend appointments, and by providing services in local languages. Develop community-based mental health education programs that are tailored to the specific needs of rural women and their families. Promote mental health literacy among rural women and their families by providing information about mental health conditions, how to recognize signs and symptoms, and where to seek help.

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**Keywords:** Mental health, rural women, rural area

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### **Introduction**

Health is a state of being free from illness or injury; it is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health can be defined in various ways, covering different dimensions and perspectives. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) health is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) (2019), defined "Health as more than the absence of disease. Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being." Keyes (2002) also defined health as the presence of positive psychological functioning, such as life satisfaction, positive emotion and resilience. His definition of health laid more emphasis on positive emotion and psychological wellbeing. Health is simply referred to as the absence of disease or disability; it may also refer to a state of fitness and ability (Naidoo and Wills 2010). On the other hand, Ryff and Singer (2018), suggested that health is not a medical concept associated with absence of illness, but rather a philosophical one that requires an explanation of a good life. It is a condition in which an individual has a sense of purpose,

and is engaged in quality relationships with others, and possesses self-respect and mastery. However, as important as overall health and wellbeing is, mental health remains a neglected part of global efforts to improve health generally. Mental health is a vital aspect of overall well-being, deserving special attention and support.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2014) defined mental health as a state of wellbeing in which individuals realize their own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and are also able to make contributions to their own community. Mental health is an integral component of health including different aspects of activities which are directly and indirectly related to promotion of wellbeing, prevention of mental disorders, and treatment as well as rehabilitation of people with illnesses (WHO 2014). Mental health is very essential for all women, whether they live in rural or urban settings. Women represent a special population who do not only ensure the continuity of humans but also play important roles in nurturing the young generation and ensuring that they turn out to be responsible citizens of society. The mental health of women is a critical facet of their overall well-being and contributes significantly to their quality of life. With unique biological, societal, and psychological factors at play, women's mental health is a dynamic subject of concern. This is due to its profound impact on their overall well-being and that of their families and communities. In recent times, women whether married, single or divorced have experienced many things that can lead to the possible deterioration of their health, like domestic violence, and the aftermath of child birth which leads to postnatal depression and anxiety. Furthermore, violence against women, both domestic and outside the home is a global issue which has enormous consequences in all dimensions of women's health. Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. This violence takes many forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, child marriage and female infanticide. (United Nations, 2021).

Domestic Violence against women is a violation of women's human rights beyond geographical, cultural, religious, social, and economic conditions. It is a common problem experienced by women all around the world to varying degrees and types. As an important public health concern, it has a strong social, cultural, and psychological basis, and has devastating physical, emotional, social, and financial effects. Despite direct effects on women, it also affects women's children, families, and the society as a whole. Besides the psychological emotion, social and financial distress domestic violence put women through, depression and anxiety as a result of postnatal stress is another prevalent mental health problem which is very common among nursing mothers (Dinc, Sibel 2015).

Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of mental health in overall wellbeing, there is still a significant difference in the way mental health problems of rural women are handled in comparison to their counterparts in urban areas, these disparities arise as a result of the mental health care availability for rural women. These can result in under diagnosis, under treatment, and limited support for individuals with mental health issues, leading to grave consequences (Aloha, O. O., Akinsulore, A., & Mapayi, B.M. 2018). Rural women in general, face significant challenges in accessing mental health services and achieving optimal mental wellbeing.

Additionally, Societal factors, such as gender norms and inequalities, play a pivotal role in influencing rural women's mental health. Social pressures related to body image, caregiving responsibilities, and balancing work and family life can contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression. The unique characteristics of the rural areas such as their geographical remoteness, limited transportation options, and socioeconomic challenges are barriers to mental health access utilization (Igbo 2019). These mental health disparities in rural areas, including Orumba South, Nigeria, are complex and multifaceted. Hence, the need for strategies for improving mental health of rural women, in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

Mental health education is very important for those living in rural areas. This is because there are so many stigmas attached to mental illnesses (especially those rooted in traditional beliefs) which prevents affected individuals from coming forward and seeking or receiving the adequate care that they need out of fear of rejection – even by relatives, who may hide them so as to avoid the so-called ‘embarrassment’ or abandon them altogether (Hobson-West, P., & Flowers, A 2014). Mental health education can be especially beneficial for improving the health of rural women in Orumba South, who face different barriers to accessing mental health resources and support. According to Ilo and Adeyemi (2010) lack of information and awareness increases the risk of adverse mental health issues among rural women in Nigeria. Mental health education can help to reduce stigma, improve access to resources, and empower marginalized groups to take control of their own mental health. Additionally, mental health education can help to improve the overall quality of life for marginalized groups by addressing the social determinants of mental health, such as poverty, housing, food security, and access to healthcare. (Michael 2016).

Access to mental health services allows for timely intervention and prevention of mental illness, thereby reducing the duration and severity of mental health problems. According to Patel (2011), the importance of access to mental health services is significant, particularly for marginalized groups, such as people with low socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic minorities and those with disabilities, who are at a higher risk for mental health problems and often have difficulty accessing the resources and support they need. Barriers to access may include lack of culturally competent services, lack of insurance coverage, language barriers, stigma and discrimination, and lack of transportation or childcare. By increasing access to mental health services, the mental health and well-being of marginalized groups can be improved and reduce disparities in health outcomes. Improve access to mental health services will also ensure that rural women have increased opportunities for diagnosis, treatment, and ongoing support. They can receive appropriate care for mental health conditions leading to better management of symptoms and improved overall well-being, they also get a wide range of options. This includes counseling, psychotherapy, medication, and other evidence-based intervention tailored to their specific needs. These options increase the chance of finding suitable treatment approaches that work best for every woman.

Early intervention is a recognized key element for minimizing the impact of any potentially serious health condition. Through early intervention and prevention, the mental health condition of rural women can be prevented from worsening and they can receive help on time to help them recover effectively. According to Friedman (2018), early intervention and prevention can help to reduce the risk of mental health disorders in rural and marginalized communities by: Identifying individuals at risk for developing mental health disorders and providing them with appropriate treatment and support,

educating individuals about mental health disorders and how to seek help, encouraging positive coping strategies and promoting resilience, promoting social support and reducing social isolation, improving access to mental health services. Furthermore, he argues that early intervention and prevention can have a significant impact on improving mental health in rural and marginalized communities. Most rural women with mental ill-health do not have adequate access to the essential mental healthcare they need because many rural areas have a shortage of healthcare professionals, they may not have reliable transportation to access mental health services, they are poor and they lack the financial resources to pay for mental health services, and they face cultural barriers, such as stigma, discrimination and a lack of understanding about mental health issues (Kaiser family Foundation, 2017). These are just a few examples of the challenges that rural women may face when trying to access mental health services. There is therefore the need for effective strategies for improving the mental health of rural women in the area.

### **Purpose of study**

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the strategies for improving mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State, specifically, the study seeks to determine:

1. the extent to which mental health education can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State
2. the extent to which access to mental health services can improve the mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State
3. ways early intervention improves mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does mental health education improve the mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?
2. To what extent does access to mental health services improve the mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA Anambra State?
3. What are the ways early intervention improves the mental health condition of rural women in orumba South LGA Anambra State?

### **Methods**

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive research design is a research design which aims at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts of a given population. Descriptive survey design is considered appropriate for the study because, it is concerned with investigating, documenting and describing events as they are without any manipulation. The study was conducted in Orumba South Local Government Area, Anambra State. The population of the study comprised 260 rural women from the total number of registered women in Orumba South Local Government Area who were victims of health-related problems. The population of these women was elicited from health centers in Orumba South Local Government Area. There was no sample because the population was small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: "Strategies for Improving the Mental Health of Rural Women Questionnaire (SIMHRWQ)". The instrument was structured in a 4-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) for research questions 1 – 2 while, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly

Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) were used for research question 3. The reliability of the instrument was determined by Cronbach Alpha method which yielded the co-efficient of 0.82, 0.84 and 0.85 for the three clusters respectively. The highest reliability coefficient value of the instrument was 0.86, which showed that the instrument was highly reliable. A direct delivery method was used to administer the questionnaire to the respondents in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The researcher and research assistant distributed the questionnaire to rural women who were victims of mental health issues in the five health centers in Orumba South Local Government Area on their meeting days and collected them immediately on completion. Data collected from the research questions were analyzed using weighted mean. The criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision rule. Responses with a mean rating of 2.50 and above was considered positive and accepted, while mean rating less than 2.50 was considered negative and not accepted.

## Results

**Question 1:** To what extent does mental health education improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 1:** Mean ratings of respondents on the extent mental health education can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State (n = 260).

S/N	Item statement	VHE 4	HE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	Total Score	Mean Score	Decision
1.	Mental health education helps to enlighten the rural women on measures to take in order to improve their mental health.	71	69	63	57	674	2.59	High Extent
2.	Empowering rural women with the ability to think creatively.	88	71	49	52	715	2.75	High extent
3.	Equipping rural women with ability to implement unique strategies to improve their mental health.	69	71	61	59	670	2.58	High extent
4.	Creating a platform where victims of mental health issues can easily find solace.	79	71	59	51	698	2.68	High extent
5.	Equipping rural women with the ability to harness any potential for improvement in their mental health.	76	67	61	56	683	2.63	High extent
6	Equipping rural women with the ability to proffer lasting solutions to their mental health problems.	56	49	78	77	604	2.32	Low extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>							<b>2.59</b>	<b>High extent</b>

N = 260, X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of respondents on the extent mental health education can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. From the table it can be seen that all items, except item 6, had mean scores above 2.50 indicating that to a high extent mental health education can improve the mental health of rural women in Orumba South LGA.

**Question 2:** To what extent does access to mental health services improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 2: Mean ratings of respondents on the extent access to mental health service can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State (n = 260).**

S/ N	Item statement	VHE 4	HE 3	L E2	VL E1	Total score	Mea n score	Decision
7.	Promoting optimal quality of life for these women with mental health problems.	79	69	57	55	692	2.66	High extent
8.	Offering effective diagnosis and treatment to these rural women who are victims of mental health issues.	75	67	61	57	680	2.62	High extent
9.	Empowering rural women with the requisite knowledge to avoid health related issues.	81	71	55	53	700	2.69	High extent
10.	Making health care services readily available to victims of mental issues to receive treatment.	73	71	61	55	682	2.62	High extent
11.	Equipping rural women with the ability to proffer preventive measures against the emergence of mental health problems.	49	51	79	81	588	2.26	
<b>Grand Mean</b>							<b>2.57</b>	<b>High extent</b>

N = 260, X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Results in table 2 show the mean ratings on the extent access to mental health service can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The result showed that items 7, 8, 9, 10 with mean scores of 2.66, 2.62, 2.69, and 2.62 respectively are above 2.50 which is to a high extent, indicates that access to mental health services can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

**Question 3:** What are the ways early intervention and prevention improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 3: Mean ratings of respondents on the ways early intervention and prevention can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State (n = 260).**

S/N	Item statement	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total score	Mean score	Decision
12.	Enlightening rural women on ways to avoid mental health challenges through counselling sessions.	71	69	63	57	674	2.59	Accepted
13.	Empowering rural women to embark on new simple income-generating activities as primary coping strategies to overcome mental illness.	67	49	75	69	634	2.43	Not Accepted
14.	Sensitizing rural women on the causes and effects of health problems.	82	76	49	53	707	2.72	Accepted
15.	Stimulating citizens to understand that they have the capabilities to identify their health problems, improvement needs and ways to prioritize them appropriately for a healthy living.	79	53	63	65	666	2.56	Accepted
16.	Providing citizens with opportunities for dialogue and discussion with relevant health care practitioners on ways to prevent mental health problems.	76	67	61	56	683	2.63	Accepted
17.	Sensitizing rural women appropriate mental health care measures.	88	65	58	49	712	2.73	Accepted
18.	Giving rural women orientation on The need to consult a physician once any symptom of mental imbalance is recognized.	71	69	63	57	674	2.59	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>							<b>2.60</b>	<b>Agree</b>

N = 260, X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

From Table 3, it can be seen that all items except item 13 had mean scores above 2.50 indicating that all those items were identified as ways early intervention and prevention can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State

### Discussions

The result of the findings showed that mental health education can improve the mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area to a high extent. This is because Mental health education helps to enlighten the rural women on measures to take in order to improve their mental health. It helps in equipping rural women with the ability to harness any potential for improvement in their mental health. This is in line with Longley (2011) who states that, given the pervasive impact of mental illness and trauma on rural women, socially, occupationally, or educationally, promoting good mental health through the administration of mental health education is very imperative and will need to become a collective responsibility of all of society rather than the sole responsibility of healthcare professionals. The findings also indicate that creating a platform where victims

of mental health issues can easily find solace can help in improving mental health of rural women. Mental health education should not be delivered solely in the healthcare arena going forward, but in other institutions where women can be identified, both privately and publicly owned as well. Only then can mental health difficulties be supported in a truly holistic way (Attoe 2018). The result of the findings again shows that access to mental health services can improve mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State to a high extent. This is because access to mental health services helps in empowering rural women with the requisite knowledge to avoid health related issues. It helps in making health care services readily available to victims of mental issues to receive treatment, the world health organization (2013) states that promoting good well-being is an increasing priority on many government agenda. The findings also indicate that offering effective diagnosis and treatment to these rural women who are victims of mental health issues can help in improving mental health of rural women.

Furthermore, the result of the findings shows that early intervention and prevention is accepted as a way of improving mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. This is because early intervention and prevention helps in enlightening rural women on ways to avoid health challenges through counseling sessions. It helps in sensitizing rural women on appropriate healthcare measures, efforts in handling mental health requires appropriate knowledge, information and specialized help (Minulescu, 2016). The findings also indicate that providing citizens with opportunities for dialogue and discussion with relevant healthcare practitioners on ways to prevent mental health problems can help in improving mental health of rural women in line with Odimegwe (2011) who stated that healthcare workers and social workers will help mentally challenged persons to become autonomous, regain independence, self-confidence and how to rebound with family and friends.

## **Conclusion**

This study focused on strategies for improving mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Based on its findings, the following conclusions were made: to a high extent, mental health education, access to mental health services and early intervention and prevention are all different strategies for improving mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area. Illiteracy among rural women, inadequate medical facilities to cater for the teeming rural women, poor funding for healthcare practitioners and poor infrastructure were some of the challenges to improving mental health of rural women in Orumba South Local Government Area identified in the study.

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