Title of Presentation: Kenyan Immigrant Women’s Beliefs and Stigmas about Mental Illness

Introduction:

Research done to examine the role of stigma in preventing low-income minority women in the United States from seeking mental health care has relatively small samples and does not distinguish between immigrants and black women born in the U.S. Venters, Adekugbe, Massaquoi, Nadeau, Saul, and Gany (2010) found that between 1990 and 2000, the total number of African immigrants to the U.S. increased by 166% which was approximately one million. Of all African immigrants residing in the United States in 2007, 54.4% were men and 45.6% were women. Only a few researchers have examined how Kenyan traditional beliefs and customs have influenced Kenyan women’s mental health seeking behaviors. Working directly with this population raises some ethical challenges involving the client’s rights to self-determination and confidentiality given Kenyan women’s collective socio-cultural backgrounds.

Specific Aims & Objectives

The ultimate goal of this study is to reduce mental health stigmas and increase the use of appropriate coping behaviors among Kenyan immigrant women. The main objective of the study is to determine appropriate culturally sensitive interventions to realize this goal.

Significance of the research

There is a lack of literature concerning the specific stigmas and beliefs of mental health services of Kenyan immigrant women. Therefore, this study is significant because it addresses a gap in mental health services and cultural competence in a growing population in the USA.

Research Design & Methods

Potential participants will be recruited from Kenyan communities residing in the USA. Participants will be recruited via snowballing and social networking. We will provide a link on
targeted emails or social network sites where potential participants will click to connect to the online survey. An exploratory cross-sectional sample will be used and data will be collected through an online survey. The survey will consist of questions in Likert scales with five-item response categories. The questions will assess beliefs, perceived stigmas and coping strategies. IRB approval will be acquired prior to study initiation. Results of the survey will be analyzed using PASW. Statistical analyses will include descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to test for significance.

Implication for Social Workers

In their study on immigrant women’s mental health, Yukoshko and Chronister (2005) stated that psychological theories and interventions are typically grounded in Western individualistic values. This opens up possibilities of breaching confidentiality guidelines within the social work profession as these women may not be culturally empowered to make their own decisions without involving their partners or their family members. Another ethical challenge involves the level of knowledge about the clients’ cultural backgrounds which in this case would be beliefs relating to mental illness and traditional forms of psychotherapy. Failure to understand the culture might be seen as being intrusive or disrespectful and this can affect their willingness to seek mental health services.

References:
