Reviewer's report

Title: Attitudes towards Mental Illness in Malawi: A cross sectional survey.

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Reviewer: olayinka atilola

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General Information
Though the issue of stigma of mental health has gone beyond knowledge and attitude, the importance of the issue of stigma, especially in Africa, will make any research that can deepen our knowledge worthwhile. The article is well written.

Major Compulsory Revisions
The authors may do well to include in the introduction a description of the state of mental health services in Malawi so as to provide readers a context. They also need to describe the epidemiology of mental disorders in Malawi and use this to strengthen the rationale for the research.

Authors should emphasize very clearly that their study is inherently different from the Gureje study from Nigeria in terms of sampling method, coverage and sample size. This should be sighted clearly as a major confounder for the comparison with their study. For instance, their explanation for the differences in the view of the Malawi and Nigeria participants on the issue of brain disease as a cause of mental illness did not appear to take into cognizance of the fact that an hospital based sample could have received health education in addition to their own beliefs. This may also explain the contradiction that the authors alluded to. The Malawi participants could have endorsed both spiritual and brain disease causation of mental illness in one single breath if the brain disease model had been sold to them in the hospital on top of their own held beliefs. It may reflect ambivalence. This, authors will agree, is not the case for the unalloyed community sample from Nigeria.

I feel authors misinterpreted the question that inquired if mental illness could be treated in the hospital. The question is in the hospital and NOT in this hospital. The idea is if hospital care is appropriate for mental illness and not if the hospital where study took place is appropriate. So, in my own view, this study have only shown that majority of respondents believed that mental illness could be treated in an hospital setting and not necessarily in the hospital where the study took place as the authors seems to view the response of participants. Being an hospital based study, those with a positive view of hospital care for mental illness has been inadvertently selected. Therefore, most of the arguments of the authors in that regard are faulty and should be re-framed.

Minor essential revisions
It will be nice to state the reason (if known) why the three participants declined.
Some typographical errors need to be corrected

Discretionary Revisions

Authors may need to know that there is no uniform definition for stigma, so the phrase.."can be defined" is better than.."is defined"

It may also be important to add that stigma is also a major reason why sufferers of mental illness fail to acknowledge their illness (Rockville, 1999) and the underlying factor mitigating against social re-integration of persons recovering from mental illness (Klin and Lemish, 2008).

Ref


Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests