MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION TREATMENT SERVICES FOR MSM IN CHINA: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

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BACKGROUND

• MSM are disproportionately impacted by mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

• The interplay of mental health and addiction issues fuel the HIV epidemic and jeopardize HIV prevention efforts among MSM.

• Mental health/addiction treatment and care are often lacking and suboptimal
AIMS

• **Quantitative study:**
  • Examine the presence of mental health and substance use issues
  • Document service reception and service gap
  • Identify the factors associated with service fulfilment

• **Qualitative study**
  • Understand preferences in mental health/addiction service utilization
  • Identify the barriers to service seeking
STUDY SITE

Guangdong Province

• The most populous province in China with a large number of domestic migrants
• Tolerant social atmosphere towards MSM
• A concentrated HIV epidemic among MSM: approximately one third were infected through male homosexual transmission
QUANTITATIVE STUDY

**Design:** cross-sectional study

**Data collection:** self-administered online survey

**Platforms:** Guangzhou Tongzhi (gztz.org), Lingnan Partner (https://www.x-data.top/Lingnan/portal/index.html) and associated WeChat groups (approximately 84,000 MSM members)

**Eligibility:** 1) At least 18 years old; 2) Being male at birth; 3) Having had sex with men during lifetime; and 4) Currently residing in Guangdong Province
MEASURES

• Demographic and background characteristics
• Mental health symptoms and substance use (severe enough to interfere with their regular life in the past year)
• Service reception for each presenting symptom
• Preferred health facility for mental health and addiction services

ANALYSIS

• Descriptive analysis of service fulfilment (having received healthcare services for all experienced symptoms during the past year)
• Logistic regression: to identify factors associated with health service fulfillment
PARTICIPANT PROFILE

520 MSM

• Average age = 28.2 (SD=5.8) years
• 53.1% (n=276) had undergraduate or higher education attainment
• 66.0% (n=343) had a full-time job
• Median annual income = 100,000 Chinese yuan (approximately 15,000 USD)
• 60.2% (n=313) were local residents with Guangdong hukou
• 46.7% (n=243) lived alone, and 22.7% (n=118) lived with a male sex partner
• 31.2% (n=162, 31.2%) had not disclosed their sexual orientation to the public
**PSYCHIATRIC SYMPTOMS AND SERVICE RECEPTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Having experienced symptoms</th>
<th>Having received corresponding health services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive symptoms</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping disorders</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance dependence</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory loss</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mental health issues</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any mental health issues</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mental health issues (mean; SD)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SERVICE FULFILMENT

Among the 403 who experienced any mental/substance use symptom in the past year, 169 (41.9%) had fulfilled medical treatment for all experienced symptoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.0469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.0016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a fulltime job</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.3448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual income more than 10,000 USD</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>0.0007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a local residence</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.0540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitting with spouse/partner/family</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.0034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having disclosed MSM status</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.0058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced stigma in healthcare</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.6705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFERRED HEALTH FACILITIES

- 40.3% Provincial/city-level general hospitals
- 17.5% Primary healthcare centers
- 10.8% Mental health specialized hospitals
- 13.8% District/country-level general hospitals
- 0.3% Private hospitals
- 17.5% Others or no preferences
QUALITATIVE STUDY

In-depth interview: 30 MSM

Recruitment: 1) Online recruitment of those who reported psychiatric symptoms during the online survey; and 2) Peer referral

Eligibility: 1) At least 18 years old; 2) Being male at birth; 3) Having had sex with men during lifetime; 4) Currently residing in Guangdong Province; and 5) Self-reported psychiatric symptoms/substance use
FINDINGS

Barriers to service seeking

• Misconception of mental illness and mental health treatment
• Unaware of the location of services
• Mistrust of service providers’ expertise
• Financial burden
• Stigma/confidenciality
DISCUSSION

• There is an urgent need to provide mental illness/substance use prevention, identification, and curative service for MSM in China

• Education to increase the awareness of mental health

• New technology to promote self-screening and confidential counseling

• Involvement of the primary care systems and families
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