

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN UGANDA DURING COVID-19

Gulu Sheffield Mental Health Partnership

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The Gulu Sheffield Mental Health Partnership (GSMHP) has been hosted since its inception in 2012, by the Sheffield Health and Social Care (SHSC) NHS Foundation Trust and Gulu Regional Referral Hospital (GRRH). Gulu is the main city in the north of Uganda and is a post-conflict area, having suffered 20 years of terror from the Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony.

The partnership has received several grants from THET and works with Sheffield and Gulu University and service user groups.

In 2019, GSMHP undertook a programme of Suicide Awareness and Prevention in Health Centres in Gulu, through THET's Africa Grants Programme. Suicide was identified as a major health issue by Gulu partners, and this led to a pilot training event being held in a remote village in Gulu District in 2018.



Using a Training of Trainers (ToT) approach, the project started training health centre staff in November 2019. GSMHP staff trained the ToT's in Gulu and employed local workers to manage and deliver the project. Courses continued to be delivered until the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 when Uganda went into lockdown and for several weeks no activity was allowed. In May it became possible to deliver courses, working within both Ugandan Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation guidelines.

Ugandan partners reported that health staff were facing stigma and discrimination due to fear that they may carry Covid-19 from hospitals and health centres back to villages.

UNICEF and the Butabika National Mental Health Hospital in Kampala produced a training package on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) which they trained staff in Regional Referral Hospitals to deliver in their area. However, no funding was available to deliver this training to health staff locally.

The GSMHP Suicide Awareness and Prevention project cancelled its planned trip to Gulu, due to Covid travel restrictions, resulting in an underspend. This funding was used to deliver the MHPSS training using staff trained by UNICEF and Butabika. Six courses were delivered by local ToTs to 73 staff in health centres and GRRH.

This work was used to successfully apply for a dedicated Covid-19 grant from THET, which is currently delivering 15 two-day courses to 180 staff in health centres and GRRH in the Gulu District.

