

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT SERVICES AND CENTERS; QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS IN KENYA

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Background:

People who inject drugs (PWID) are at an increased risk for SARS-CoV-2 and have experienced barriers to accessing harm reduction services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding how to best provide these services is essential for COVID-19 mitigation. The goal of this study was to ascertain challenges and successes for caring for PWID in Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

We conducted five focus group discussions, and 2 key informant interviews with healthcare providers who work with PWID in Kenya providing treatment and harm reduction services. Interviews explored how COVID-19 and social distancing measures impacted service provision, access to services, and strategies used to overcome these barriers. We analyzed transcribed interviews thematically.

Results:

Participants included 29 service providers from three Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and four Drop-In Center (DIC) sites; 15 male, 14 female with overall average age of 35 years. Four overarching themes emerged in which providers described both barriers to providing care and solutions to overcome them: (1) COVID-19-related misconceptions: “some people did not believe that COVID is real. They believed that it’s a white man disease” (2) Limited COVID-19 testing and screening: “So far we do not have any cases. Though we cannot be certain since people have not been tested” (3) Structural changes related to service provision: “to decongest the clinic... we decided to go to prison, dispense methadone there” and (4) Accessing material resources such as personal protective equipment: “No client will be allowed inside the DIC without a mask because that is the rule. So, we were forced to produce as many masks as we can so any client who comes in without a mask we provide”.

Conclusion:

These findings demonstrate the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic imposed for providers, and the ingenuity and adaptivity they and their clients exhibited in response to these changes.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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