Exploration of the perception of Mental illnesses among secondary school students in selected schools in Ndola, Zambia.

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A significant percentage of Children and Adolescents are affected by Mental illnesses globally and this epidemic is rising steadily. If not treated, this affects their potential to thrive in class and leads to inefficiencies in adulthood. Research has also shown that mental illness and those who suffer from mental illness face a great deal of stigma which is very much ingrained in the society due to the inaccurate and damaging portrayal of mental health patients in the media. To explore the perceptions of mental illnesses among secondary school students in selected schools in Ndola. A total number of eight (8) focus group discussions were conducted from four (4) selected schools in Ndola town. Each focus group had a total number of six students and there was a total of 48 students. The discussions were recorded digitally. The recordings were transcribed into the computer using Microsoft Word. Data was analyzed using grounded theory where the data collected was sorted out and reflected upon. A majority of 79.4% of the students admitted to not having an accurate source of knowledge while 20.6% of the students said their source of knowledge was accurate enough. The findings were that the student’s knowledge was present but inadequate and misplaced. However, important gaps were evident, particularly with respect to the characteristics of mental illnesses, examples of mental illnesses and the treatment. Attitudes toward individuals with mental illnesses were generally positive, though a few participants had a less favorable attitude. Despite students having some basic knowledge on mental illnesses there is still a misconception on mental illnesses which may lead or has led to stigma against people with mental illnesses. There is a negative perception and this may be due to their insufficient knowledge on mental illnesses or the knowledge attained from social media platforms.

Keywords: Mental illnesses, stigma, knowledge, attitudes, focus group discussions, perception