ZIMBABWE: ‘Friendship Bench’ Program Proves Effective at Alleviating Mental Illness Symptoms

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ScienceDaily [1]

According to a recently published randomized controlled trial, a mental health intervention delivered by lay health workers may have helped to reduce depression and anxiety in a sample of clinic patients in Zimbabwe. The study evaluated the effectiveness of six weekly problem-solving therapy sessions, which were carried out on wooden seats called “Friendship Benches” by trained community “Grandmothers.” At six-month follow-up, patients with depression or anxiety who received the Friendship Bench intervention showed significantly fewer symptoms on diagnostic questionnaires than patients who received standard care. The Friendship Bench program was developed in response to a shortage of mental health providers and limited access to evidence-based mental health treatment in Zimbabwe. "Common mental disorders impose a huge burden on all countries of sub-Saharan Africa," said lead author and Friendship Bench cofounder Dixon Chibanda. "Developed over 20 years of community research, the Friendship Bench empowers people to achieve a greater sense of coping and control over their lives by teaching them a structured way to identify problems and find workable solutions."

Spark Extra! Read the full text of the research study [2].

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