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11-15-2017

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A PROOF OF CONCEPT STUDY: RAISING AWARENESS OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND DISPELLING STIGMA IN RURAL KENYA THROUGH AN ADVOCACY INCUBATOR

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Background

- Stigma surrounding mental illness significantly contributes to the ‘wickedness’ of this problem, creating numerous barriers for people with mental illness (WHO, 2001)
- CREATE Kenya provides people with mental illness (PLWMI) with opportunities for employment and psychosocial support. This is achieved through:
 - the creation of locally viable businesses
 - participation in an evidence based, recovery oriented psychosocial rehabilitation (PSR) toolkit group

Project Goals

- Leverage CREATE’s proof of concept work in Machakos, Kenya to:
 - build awareness surrounding mental health
 - decrease stigma
 - Increase social inclusion
- Our solution is to create an *advocacy incubator*, designed with and for people with mental illness (PWMI)

in · cu · ba · tor
 noun
 / a safe space which supports people with mental illness to develop and implement their creative and innovative ideas.

- The incubator was inspired by the powerful personal narratives and advocacy initiatives being undertaken by employees of CREATE’s social business, Point Tech Solutions, and aims to spread these powerful narratives to a wider audience, expanding awareness, increasing advocacy initiatives, and ultimately creating more advocates
- Incubator members will be comprised of PWMI, friends, family members, and community members (e.g., politicians, musicians, religious leaders, social media influencers) interested in coming together to create awareness and reduce stigma surrounding mental illness (see Figure 1)
- Incubator members will meet on a regular basis to generate advocacy ideas and initiatives
 - Meetings will initially be supported by members of the research team, with the end goal being to provide incubator members with the guidance and support needed to become facilitators, thus making the incubator self-sustaining

Project Outcomes

- n=8 participants have been recruited as core incubator members (see Figure 1)
- Focus groups were conducted revealing:
 - High levels of interest and enthusiasm for the project
 - A strong understanding of factors contributing to stigma in the community towards mental illness
 - Participants desire to increase the public’s understanding of mental illness to dispel stigma and misinformation
 - A number of advocacy goals including public speaking and writing about mental illness/mental health
 - Between focus groups participants contacted additional community members (e.g., physician, church leader) whom they wished to involve in the incubator



Figure 1. Advocacy incubator model

Next Steps

- Begin incubator sessions, working collaboratively with incubator members to support desired advocacy initiatives
- Explore partnerships with other local organizations that support PWMI

Project Challenges

- Uncertain political climate leading up to and after federal election, held in August, 2017
- Loss of original incubator meeting space
- Communication challenges and barriers amongst research team

Professional Learning

- An increased understanding of and appreciation for:
 - the importance of partnerships with local stakeholders and beneficiaries
 - conducting research in diverse cultural contexts
 - Leveraging areas of strength (e.g., participant enthusiasm and resilience) to mitigate systemic challenges (stigma deeply embedded within the culture)



Figure 2. Research team and faculty mentor, Dr. Arlene MacDougall at the Global MINDS 2017 Summer Institute in Mahcakos, Kenya.