

A snapshot of mental health issues and extent of unmet treatment need among clients of the Kirketon Road Centre (KRC) - a primary healthcare service for marginalised populations

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Introduction / Issues: The Kirketon Road Centre (KRC) provides a range of services including drug treatment and general medical care for mental health issues. While a proportion of clients engage with the service specifically for their mental health issues, the extent of mental health problems and unmet treatment need generally among clients is unknown.

Method / Approach: In consultation with staff and consumers, a cross-sectional 8-item survey was developed and implemented in August-September 2022. Clients presenting for any consultation type were asked about past and current mental health conditions and treatment, hospitalisation, satisfaction with treatment and the presence of any undiagnosed or untreated mental health symptoms. The Kessler-5 (K5) Psychological Distress Scale was administered. Participation was voluntary.

Results: One hundred clients were surveyed. Most (71%) reported one or more mental health conditions ever diagnosed. Depression (82%) and anxiety disorders (77%) were the most common followed by PTSD (48%) and psychotic disorders (46%). One-third (31%) reported recent hospitalisation for a mental health condition. Most (74%) receiving treatment for a mental health condition were receiving it from KRC and half (49%) felt it was well or very well managed. Thirty-eight percent thought they had undiagnosed mental health symptoms. Average K5 score 12.6 (range 5-23).

Discussions and Conclusions: A clearer picture of the extent of mental health problems and unmet treatment need helps to better target mental health care for this group. A challenge of delivering mental health services to vulnerable groups is the need to address multiple complex health conditions and social factors in populations which are largely disengaged from mainstream health services.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Mental health is not a static state. Routine assessment of all clients will more accurately determine current mental health and treatment needs and better support wellbeing, but can be challenging if engagement is sporadic.

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