

Holes in the wall: Examining gaps in knowledge in child and adolescent mental health in Tanzania

A scoping review



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1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this scoping review is to identify and summarise the existing literature available specific to child and adolescent mental health in Tanzania.

2. METHODOLOGY

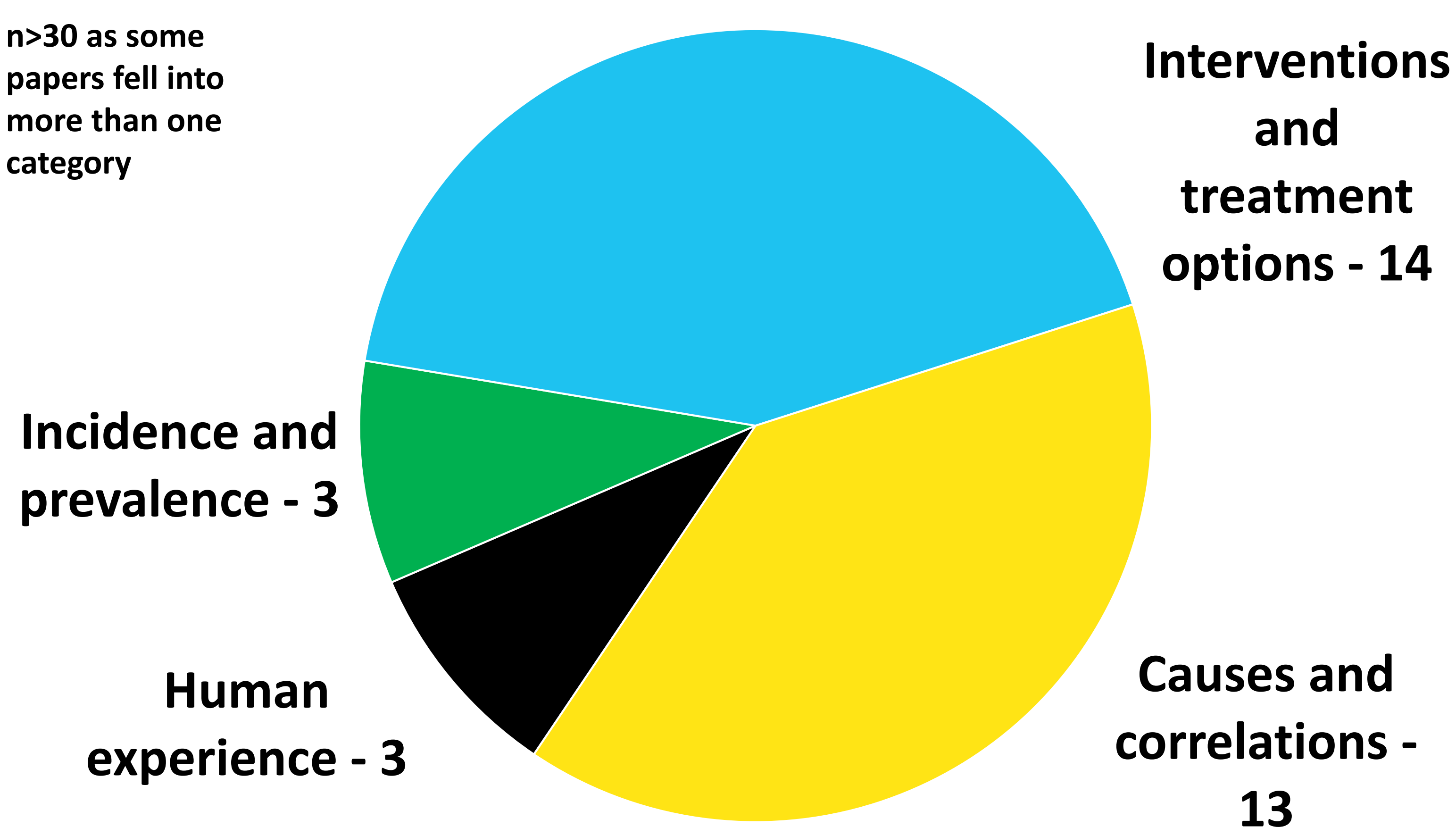
We carried out an extensive literature search of PubMed, Scopus, Medline and Embase to identify studies focussed on mental illness in children and young people in Tanzania. The search included neurological and functional disorders, affective disorders, psychosis, epidemiology, interventions and treatments. Qualitative analysis of the studies was undertaken to assess extent of knowledge, reliability of studies and identify further areas of research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

30 studies were included in the final synthesis. These were split according to their main focus into 4 categories: prevalence and incidence of child and adolescent mental illness, causes and correlations, identified treatments and interventions and qualitative studies of human experience. Research was limited to anxiety, depression, autistic spectrum disorders and suicidal behaviours.

BREAKDOWN OF MAIN RESEARCH FOCUS

n>30 as some papers fell into more than one category



Eight topics were identified as common threads throughout the existing literature:

1. Orphaned and institutionalised youth
2. Physical abuse and violence
3. African girls and young women
4. Bullying
5. Trauma-focussed cognitive behavioural therapy
6. Food insecurity
7. Tools to identify mental illness
8. Chronicling human experience

Patient experience and triggers for mental illness were similar between Tanzania and high income countries. Those identified as at risk for mental illness were young women, institutionalised children and the food insecure. Studies ranged from large, multi-site studies with few results in Tanzania to small single site studies. This leaves knowledge gaps from a national overview perspective and it is unknown how reproducible results will be. There was a lack of longitudinal case-control studies, more of which would allow for more generalisable and reliable data.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There is a dearth of published research regarding child and adolescent mental health in Tanzania. Although some high-quality studies allow us good insight into the epidemiology of mental illness, interventional studies are often small and low-power, and significant correlational relationships are yet to be drawn. There is significant scope for further child and adolescent mental health research in Tanzania.

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