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Gender-Sensitive Mental Health Implications for Children Living with Caregivers with Alcohol Use Disorder

Abstract:

Introduction: Children living in households affected by caregivers with Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) are uniquely vulnerable to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral disturbances. In South Africa, studies reveal that one in five children from alcohol-affected households suffers from emotional neglect, increasing the risk of developing substance use disorders later in life (Peltzer et al., 2018). In East Africa, particularly in rural areas, the impact of alcohol misuse by caregivers is profound, with limited mental health support further compounding the emotional and developmental struggles of children (WHO, 2019). Moreover, the experiences of boys and girls in such contexts differ significantly, warranting a gender-sensitive approach to understanding and intervention.

Aim: This study explores the gender-specific mental health challenges faced by children of caregivers with AUD and evaluates the role of recovery services in addressing these needs.

Methodology: A desktop review of secondary data, including case studies, program reports, academic literature, and family support models, was conducted to analyze gender-specific mental health issues among children living with caregivers affected by alcohol misuse.

Findings: The study identifies that girls often assume caregiving roles within the family, leading to significant emotional strain and psychological distress. Boys, in contrast, face societal pressures to adopt risky behaviors, including substance use, as a coping mechanism. Both genders experience challenges in academic performance, emotional stability, and social integration, with inadequate mental health resources in rural communities exacerbating their difficulties.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Addressing the mental health implications of caregiver AUD for children requires gender-sensitive and culturally relevant interventions. Key recommendations include implementing school-based mental health programs, family counseling, and child protection services tailored to the needs of boys and girls. A collaborative approach involving schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations like Hope and Beyond can provide comprehensive support for children and their caregivers. Scaling such initiatives in rural areas is essential for sustainable impact.

Biography

Kizito Julius, is associated with Hope and Beyond, an organization in Uganda. He is dedicated to social impact, focusing on rehabilitation, mental health, and community development initiatives to support vulnerable individuals and families.