

Community Radio as a Tool for Youth Mental Health Awareness: Analysis of the Pass the Mic Show Content on Pamoja FM in Kibra Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Community radio is an important tool for health communication, drawing its greatest appeal from its ability to address the psychological and social concerns of local audiences through culturally resonant programming. Community radio stations are regarded as powerful sources of information, broadcasting on a small scale and predominantly serving underserved and marginalized areas, such as slums. A growing consensus acknowledges the high prevalence of mental health challenges among youth, with slum settlements projected to lead in these figures, largely due to socioeconomic and sociocultural factors. Given the potential of local broadcasting to create awareness of various health issues, including mental health, and the significant dearth of scholarly literature on the effectiveness of community radio mental health content in the Kenyan context, this study examined the influence of the *Pass the Mic Show's* content in this regard. The study was guided by the Health Belief Model and adopted a qualitative research design utilizing content analysis and in-depth interviews. Eight purposively selected episodes of *Pass the Mic Show* were analyzed alongside in-depth interviews with nine youth listeners selected through snowball sampling. Data analysis involved content analysis of the radio episodes and thematic analysis of the interview data, with findings presented in a narrative format. The findings revealed that the program effectively created mental health awareness among listeners by informing them about factors that increase susceptibility to mental health challenges and emphasizing the severity of these issues. It also highlighted the benefits of taking mental health-related actions, such as help-seeking, while addressing the barriers that may hinder such efforts. The study recommended the need for training journalists on the appropriate handling of mental health discussions, as presenting mental illness predominantly in a negative context, particularly in association with suicidal ideation as observed in the program, can perpetuate stigma and reinforce negative attitudes towards mental illness.

Keywords: Community Radio, Youth, Mental Health Awareness, Stigma, Slum Settlements

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Mental health in slum settlements has been a research subject for a long time, as scholars and practitioners have sought to understand the unique challenges individuals face in these environments. Typically, the definition of the word slum embodies the concept of hardship and struggle. Linford et al. (2018) observe that an area should be classified as a slum if at least half of its households lack access to improved water, adequate sanitation, sufficient living space, durable housing, secure tenure, or a combination of these factors. An exponential growth in urban slums has been observed in the recent past, and this trend can be attributed to population growth and rural-urban migration. Estimates show that nearly 80% of the global slum population resides in Asia and Africa (United Nations, 2021). Existing scholarly evidence demonstrates a link between individual mental health and the environmental conditions in which people live (Swahn et al., 2022), with mental health often worsened by socioeconomic and sociocultural factors unique to slum settlements (Wado et al., 2022; Murage et al., 2023). Furthermore, the temporary nature of most slum settlements can itself be a

determinant of mental health, as the perpetual fear of displacement among slum dwellers is a well-established factor contributing to mental health challenges (Goswami, 2020).

While the youth mental health crisis has been a long-standing issue in Kenya, the situation in the slums worsened with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Murage et al., 2023; Meherali et al., 2021). Notably, by November 2020, Nairobi's slums accounted for 60% of all reported COVID-19 cases (Namwaya & Abdi, 2021). Murage et al. (2023) attribute the increase in mental health disorders among the young demographic in slums during this period to factors such as poor sanitation and overcrowded housing, which were also risk factors for COVID-19. The scholars also ascribe this outcome to COVID-19 restrictions, which significantly impacted family incomes.

Although the mental health crisis in Kenya affects youth, including adolescents, from all backgrounds, scholars have noted that youth in urban slums typically face alarmingly high levels of mental health challenges compared to their peers in non-slum urban areas (Swahn et al., 2022). Thus, there is a need for immediate and special attention to the mental health crisis among this vulnerable population. Moreover, youth mental health risks in Kenya have been linked to adverse early life experiences, including victimization, sexual assault, violence, crime, neighborhood safety concerns, and socioeconomic challenges such as extreme poverty, unemployment, and inadequate housing (Mental Health Taskforce [MHT], 2020; Wado et al., 2022; Murage et al., 2023). Kenyan slums clearly exemplify these challenges (Solymari & Czirják, 2024), thus placing youth in these areas at greater mental health risk than their counterparts in well-established neighborhoods.

Okoth and Mburu (2016) note that drug use among the young demographic is one of the most catastrophic issues that the Kibra Slum is facing. It is worth noting that substance use disorder is a common mental health issue that can severely impact individuals' health, well-being, and social lives while also placing a significant burden on society by contributing to health risks, economic strain, and crime (Volkow & Blanco, 2023). In Kenyan slums, substance use remains a major concern as youths turn to drugs to escape harsh realities and cope with stressors linked to difficult living conditions. However, this provides no long-term solution, as the root causes of their struggles remain unaddressed. As a result, many fall into addiction, further worsening mental health challenges and increasing the risk of premature mortality (Murray et al., 2020).

There is an urgent need for radical mental health crisis mitigation measures in Kenya, even as stigma remains a significant barrier to effectively addressing mental health challenges (Omondi, 2024). It is worth noting that Kenya is among the 28% of WHO member states without a dedicated mental health budget, with only 0.01% of total health expenditure allocated to mental health. As a result, individuals with mental health issues often pay for treatment out of pocket, and most private insurance plans do not cover mental health care (Ministry of Health [MOH], 2021; MHT, 2020).

Against this backdrop, community radio is recognized as an effective channel for health messaging and awareness promotion across Africa (WHO, 2024; Olaoye & Onyenakeya, 2023). Similarly, Gupta and Sharma (2018) highlight its role as a widely used tool for raising awareness about various community health issues. The objective of health communication facilitated by community radio is usually to enhance healthcare practices, prevent illnesses, address healthcare policies, promote health, and improve the well-being of individuals (Thomas et al., 2018; Olaoye & Onyenakeya, 2023; Mbatha et al., 2023).

Radio is the second most consumed medium in Kenya after television (Media Council of Kenya, 2024) and has long been regarded as a powerful and influential source of information (Brooke, 2024). While both commercial and community radio stations enjoy prominence, community radio stands out by prioritizing content created by and for the people, ensuring a deep connection with the communities it serves. Beyond its non-profit nature and small-scale operations (Myers, 2011), its greatest appeal lies in its ability to address the psychological and social concerns of local audiences through culturally resonant programming (Lewil Diedong & Dzisah, 2023).

Predominantly, community radio stations are situated in underserved and marginalized areas, with slums fitting this description. Pamoja FM broadcasts within Kibra, which is considered Kenya's and Africa's largest slum (Bloxham, 2020). The station was created to serve as a platform for community members from different

tribes to come together, share their perspectives, and foster reconciliation after Kenya's largely divisive post-election violence in 2007/2008 (Rosenblad & Nyström, 2012). Pamoja FM hosts a youth-centered program called *Pass the Mic Show*, which airs on weekdays from 2 PM to 4 PM. The program explores a range of social issues affecting young people, with a special emphasis on mental health in weekly episodes.

Statement Of the Problem

Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are leading causes of mental illness among young people (WHO, 2024). Youth in Kenyan slums are particularly vulnerable due to a high prevalence of factors such as victimization, sexual assault, crime, low family or school connectedness, neighborhood insecurity, and economic hardship (Wado et al., 2022; Murage et al., 2023). As a result of these heightened risks, slum-dwelling youth face greater mental health challenges than their peers in non-slum areas (Swahn et al., 2022). While local broadcasting has proven to be an effective strategy for creating mental health awareness and reducing stigma (Lee et al., 2024; Ikpeama et al., 2024; Marino et al., 2020), *Pass the Mic Show*, a youth program on Pamoja FM, has aired episodes focused on this issue. However, there remains limited understanding of the effectiveness of such content within the Kenyan context, thus necessitating this study.

Study Objective

The objective of the study was to analyze how the content of mental health episodes aired on Pamoja FM's *Pass the Mic Show* contributes to creating mental health awareness among the youth living in Kibra Sub-County.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Health Belief Model (HBM)

Developed in 1974 by Rosenstock, the Health Belief Model (HBM) is a psychological framework that seeks to explain and predict health-related behaviors by focusing on individuals' perceptions of health risks and their ability to mitigate them (Rosenstock, 1974). Notably, HBM is still one of the most popular theoretical frameworks of health behavior that psychologists, health educators, and other medical professionals use today (Green et al., 2020; Rosenstock et al., 1988). Even though the HBM has been extensively applied in other disciplines, it appears to be well-suited for communication research (Jones et al., 2015).

The HBM suggests that people's beliefs about health and health conditions influence their health-related behaviors. The theory identifies six key cognitive constructs that predict health-related behaviors. These include: perceived risk susceptibility, perceived risk severity, perceived benefits of taking action, perceived barriers to taking action, self-efficacy, and cues to action. Originally, the first four were the main constructs of HBM at its inception, while the last two were later added by theorists in response to research on the model (Boskey, 2024).

The first construct of the HBM is perceived susceptibility, which refers to an individual's belief about the likelihood of experiencing a particular health issue. Boskey (2024) suggests that people are unlikely to change their health behaviors unless they perceive themselves to be at risk. In the context of slum settlements, this involves individuals recognizing the mental health risks associated with stressful living conditions. In this regard, a radio program can play a key role in creating awareness of susceptibility by sharing personal stories of individuals facing mental health challenges within the locality and providing information on how socioeconomic and environmental factors contribute to increased mental health risks in these communities.

The second construct is perceived risk severity. This refers to an individual's belief about the seriousness of the health condition and its potential ramifications. Individuals assess the severity of a health condition by considering factors such as its seriousness, impact on their lives, source of care, and associated costs (Green et al., 2020). It is worth noting that the likelihood of a person altering their behavior to prevent a consequence largely depends on their perception of the severity of that consequence (Boskey, 2024). In the context of this study, this refers to the radio program's ability to enhance the audience's understanding of the severe

consequences of neglected mental health, consequently emphasizing the importance of early intervention and consistent care in addressing mental health issues to prevent severe outcomes.

The third construct is the perceived benefits of taking action. It refers to an individual's belief that taking a specific health action will lead to positive changes in their well-being. According to Boskey (2024), convincing people to change behavior is challenging unless they perceive a reward for doing so. The scholar further notes that most individuals are reluctant to give up something they enjoy without gaining something in return. In the context of mental health awareness through radio, this may involve highlighting individuals who have sought mental health services and transformed their lives, thus presenting the positive changes that result from addressing mental health challenges.

The fourth construct is the perceived barriers to taking action. This refers to the obstacles that discourage individuals from taking action. In the context of this study, these barriers include stigma and limited access to mental health services. In this regard, a radio program can create awareness of these obstacles and work to address them by, for example, challenging stigma through open conversations about mental health issues and improving access to mental health services through referral pathways.

Last but not least, the fifth construct is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to take the necessary actions to address a health issue. Boskey (2024) observes that, although this construct may seem less significant, an individual's belief in their ability to succeed can significantly influence their actual capacity to do so. A radio mental health awareness program can foster self-efficacy among the audience by sharing relatable success stories and providing practical guidance on achievable actions for managing mental health.

Lastly, the sixth construct of the HBM is cues to action, which refer to the triggers or prompts that motivate individuals to take action. Health promotions delivered via media channels function as cues to action, thereby translating readiness into behavior (Green et al., 2020). Boskey (2024) describes them as factors that motivate an individual to move from intending to make a health change to taking concrete steps to implement it. A radio program may incorporate cues to action in its messaging by featuring regular promos on mental health, thus reinforcing its importance to the audience. In addition, interactive segments can serve as cues to action. By listening to the challenges faced by individuals with mental health issues, including struggles like suicidal thoughts, the audience may be prompted to reflect on their own mental health and take the necessary steps toward improvement.

In light of the foregoing, the HBM proved relevant to the study and provided a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing how Pamoja FM's *Pass the Mic Show* content created mental health awareness and encouraged action among listeners. It is worth noting that the study focused only on the first four constructs, namely: perceived risk susceptibility, perceived risk severity, perceived benefits of taking action, and perceived barriers to taking action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health awareness has emerged as a critical area of focus in the contemporary media discourse. This reflects the growing recognition of its importance for individual and societal well-being. According to Zhang & Firdaus (2024), the mass media, both traditional and digital, plays an important role in promoting understanding of mental health issues by acting as conduits for information dissemination, advocacy, and stigma reduction. Global mental health campaigns have typically sought to engage audiences by disseminating diverse messages through a wide range of media forms, including television, radio, print materials like posters, billboards, magazines, and newspapers, as well as online platforms (Goodwin & Behan, 2023).

With growing recognition of the high prevalence of mental health issues, particularly among young people (Hamilton et al., 2024), the media plays an important role in creating awareness about mental health (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024; Tam et al., 2024), especially by promoting an understanding of vulnerability among affected individuals and communities. Studies indicate that mass media efforts to cover mental health issues have been

effective in promoting help-seeking behavior, reducing stigma, and preventing suicide (Goodwin & Behan, 2023; Tam et al., 2024; Duthie et al., 2024).

The media illuminates the systemic factors that exacerbate mental health vulnerabilities, such as poverty, discrimination, social pressures, and social exclusion, among others. By addressing causes, media campaigns can promote awareness of how societal structures influence mental health outcomes. A study by Tam et al. (2024) reveals that media mental health campaigns have been linked to positive shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and intentions regarding mental health among the youth. This highlights the potential of media not only to inform but also to inspire proactive actions through targeted messaging. Moreover, by amplifying diverse voices and experiences, the media can empower vulnerable groups to seek support and access care.

The portrayal of danger, specifically the perceived dangers of mental illness, is a key feature in how the media constructs content related to mental health issues (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024). When mental health issues are perceived as serious and widespread, they are more likely to be recognized as urgent problems requiring immediate attention and action. This perception of severity plays an essential role in shaping how individuals view these challenges, potentially portraying them as crises. However, study findings suggest that media content can also shape negative attitudes towards mental illness, often in a detrimental way (Goodwin & Behan, 2023). The media's portrayal of the severity of mental health issues is frequently presented in a negative context, which can reinforce stigma and harmful stereotypes. This calls attention to the need for sensitivity in how mental health is represented. For instance, according to a study by Gallagher et al. (2023), violence and crime are often linked with mental illness in media coverage, which can further marginalize individuals with mental health conditions by casting them as dangerous. Furthermore, the media's potential as an influential tool should be acknowledged (Tam et al., 2024). As such, sensational reporting and disproportionate coverage of extreme cases of mental health, such as celebrity suicides, can have harmful effects, including the potential to encourage suicidal ideation among vulnerable audiences.

The media has the potential to shape behaviors (Tam et al., 2024), serving as a powerful tool for advocating behavioral shifts by emphasizing the benefits of adopting healthier attitudes and practices toward mental well-being. Studies evaluating media-driven mental health campaigns targeting depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide reported both proximal and intermediate outcomes. Proximal effects included greater awareness, an increase in positive attitudes, and reduced stigma surrounding mental health (Tam et al., 2024), while intermediate outcomes involved an increase in help-seeking behaviors (Goodwin & Behan, 2023; Tam et al., 2024). Consistently emphasizing the benefits of good mental health through diverse media approaches can significantly influence the perceptions and behaviors related to mental well-being. By presenting evidence-based messages that emphasize the positive outcomes of mental well-being, such as enhanced productivity, improved relationships, and individual happiness, the mass media can encourage proactive engagement in positive mental health practices.

Media mental health campaigns often seek to address the factors that hinder individuals from improving their mental health. With the growing global focus on mental health issues (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024), stigma remains a significant barrier to mental health promotion (Kagunda & Masibo, 2020; Gallagher et al., 2023), as it hinders help-seeking behaviors (Goodwin & Behan, 2023). This challenge is particularly pronounced among young men, for whom the need to conform to masculinity norms has been identified as a key barrier (Sheikh et al., 2025). A study by Duthie et al. (2024) revealed that media-based campaigns targeting mental health and depression, with or without a focus on suicide prevention, show some evidence of improvements in help-seeking behaviors among males. Another study by Marino et al. (2020) demonstrated how a radio program contributed to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues, thus providing the broader community with a resource for self-awareness and encouraging help-seeking behaviors.

The media plays an essential role in reshaping societal perceptions toward individuals with mental health conditions, supporting the advancement of their rights and facilitating better access to care services (Anbessie et al., 2023). Through responsible, accurate, and empathetic reporting, the media can challenge stereotypes and combat the stigma associated with mental health issues. Zhang and Firdaus (2024) emphasize the importance of such reporting in fostering a more informed and supportive community. Moreover, mass media mental health awareness campaigns can help address misconceptions stemming from limited public understanding of

mental health conditions that often perpetuate stigma. However, studies have also shown that the media can contribute to mental health stigma (Gu & Ding, 2023; Goepfert et al., 2019). It is within this context that Goepfert et al. (2019) acknowledge the media's dual role in shaping mental health perceptions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design, employing in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis as data collection methods. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on eight purposively sampled mental health-focused episodes of Pamoja FM's *Pass the Mic Show*. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine youth listeners of the program, aged 15 to 24 years, who were selected through snowball sampling. The study utilized a content analysis code and an interview guide as data collection instruments. A pilot test was conducted, leading to the refinement of these tools and enhancing their robustness. Various ethical guidelines were observed during the data collection process, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the use of empathetic approaches to minimize potential distress among participants. Data analysis involved content analysis of the radio episodes and thematic analysis of the in-depth interview data, with findings presented in a narrative format and supported by direct quotes from the participants and excerpts from the radio episodes.

FINDINGS

Based on the qualitative data collected, the following is a comprehensive analysis of how the content of mental health episodes aired on Pamoja FM's *Pass the Mic Show* created mental health awareness among the youth living in Kibra Sub-County. The study objective allowed the researcher to examine Pamoja FM's deliberate efforts to enhance listeners' understanding of mental health issues by investigating four key attributes derived from the Health Belief Model: vulnerability awareness, the severity of mental health issues, the benefits of taking action, and the barriers to taking action. Excerpts from the analyzed radio episodes and quotes from the in-depth interviews are presented in their original form (Swahili and Sheng), along with English translations.

Vulnerability Awareness

The study found that the program created awareness of young people's vulnerability to mental health challenges. Socioeconomic issues emerged as a major recurring theme across most of the episodes and were also highlighted in insights from in-depth interviews with participants about the program. The discussions shed light on how factors like unemployment, poverty, and the housing crisis play a significant role in the mental health struggles of young people. Unemployment as a key causal factor of mental health challenges was addressed in *PTMS* Episode 1, *PTMS* Episode 4, *PTMS* Episode 5, and *PTMS* Episode 8. In *PTMS* Episode 8, the presenter highlighted the widespread nature of unemployment and its link to depression. He explained:

"...wakenya wengi wanasema kwamba hali imezorota, watu wengi hawana kazi... na utapata in one way or another unakua affected, labda kuna mtu ameenda shule na hajapata kazi... Hizo changamoto zote unapata kwamba uko na depression, umekua na stress na haujielewi..."

("...many Kenyans say that the situation has worsened, many people are jobless... In one way or another, you find yourself affected, maybe you don't have a job, or perhaps you went to school but haven't found employment... All these challenges can lead to depression, stress, and a sense of confusion.")

The program also addressed poverty as a mental health risk factor. This issue was covered in *PTMS* Episode 1, *PTMS* Episode 2, *PTMS* Episode 5, and *PTMS* Episode 8. In *PTMS* Episode 5, a guest from a Kibra-based mental health community-based organization (CBO) emphasized how financial instability at home contributes to mental health struggles:

"Afya ya kiakili inatoka pia na mambo madogo madogo tunayokumbana nayo pale nyumbani, umekosa school fees, umekosa chakula, hali haikwendi vizuri, landlord anakusukuma na kadhalika. Hayo yote yanaweza kukukosesha afya ya kiakili, yaani yanaleta msongo wa mawazo..."

“Mental health issues also arise from the small challenges we face at home, you lack school fees, you have no food, things are not going well, your landlord is pressuring you, and so on. All these factors can affect your mental well-being, leading to stress and anxiety.”

The housing crisis was another topic the program linked to mental health challenges, addressed particularly in PTMS Episode 3 and PTMS Episode 6. In the latter episode, the presenter explained:

“...kuna wale ambao wanapitia mambo mengi tu, wale waishi kando kando ya mto, kwa mfano, katika mto huu wetu wa Nairobi River ukielekea sehemu za Katwekera, unakwenda mpaka sehemu za Siranga. Nafahamishwa kwamba nyumba nyingi zimesombwa katika maeneo hayo, na hivyo basi najua kwamba watu wengi wako katika misongo ya mawazo, mambo mengi, asijue kwamba ataweza kuishi vipi... masuala haya yote yanaweza kukupa msongo wa mawazo...”

“... many people are going through difficult times, especially those living close to the river, for example, near Nairobi River, stretching towards Katwekera and Siranga. I have been informed that many houses have been swept away in these areas, and as a result, I know that many people are experiencing high levels of stress, uncertainty about their living situation, and anxiety... All these issues can lead to mental distress.”

Insights from the in-depth interviews also supported these findings. Interviewee 1 acknowledged that the program broadened his understanding of unemployment as a mental health vulnerability. He noted:

“Kuna msee hujipata suicidal juu amesoma tu poa hadi amemaliza shule na hapati job... na issues kama hizi huwa tuna-discuss Pamoja FM.”

“Some people find themselves suicidal because they have performed well academically, completed their education, yet still cannot find a job... and these are the kinds of issues we discuss on Pamoja FM.”

Interviewee 6 mentioned that it was through the program that he learned how poverty can contribute to mental health challenges. He said:

“Mtu kama mimi nimezaliwa hapa Kibra, nimegrow hapa, like sijui life ingine. So, through hii show nilikuja kujua kwamba hii environment tunaishi, like hii hali ya umaskini iko hapa ghetto, inaweza letea mtu shida za mental health...”

“Someone like me, I was born and raised here in Kibra, like I don't know any other life. So, through this program, I came to understand that the environment we live in, like the poverty situation here in the ghetto, can lead to mental health issues.”

The program enhanced listeners' understanding of how socioeconomic conditions increase their vulnerability to mental health challenges by presenting these issues as mental health risk factors. Unemployment is a well-established contributor to mental health issues, not only in Kenya but also globally (Wado et al., 2022; MHT, 2020; Murage et al., 2023). Poverty is similarly linked to poor mental health, with slum settlements reporting alarmingly high rates of mental health disorders (Murage et al., 2023; Swahn et al., 2022), largely because many residents live below the poverty line. The housing crisis, characterized by overcrowding, poor living conditions, and the constant fear of displacement, also affects mental well-being (Goswami, 2020). By informing listeners about how these factors increase the likelihood of experiencing mental health challenges, the program reinforced the perception that they are at high risk. This heightened awareness increased the likelihood that listeners would seek support and adopt coping mechanisms to safeguard their mental well-being.

The study also found that the program addressed substance use as both a contributing factor to and a consequence of mental health challenges. The discussions primarily focused on the use of bhang and alcohol, highlighting their impact on psychological well-being. The issue was discussed in PTMS Episode 2 and PTMS Episode 6. In the latter episode, the presenter highlighted how substance use contributes to mental health challenges among youth:

“Mental health ni jambo ambalo linatugiza sana sisi vijana. Vijana wengi wamejikusisha na madawa ya kulevya, na hizi ni vyanzo vya matatizo ya afya ya kiakili...”

(“Mental health is an issue that deeply affects us as young people. Many youths have engaged in drug use, and these are major contributors to mental health problems.”)

The in-depth interviews further supported these findings. Interviewee 5 emphasized that the link between substance use and mental health is a prominent topic in the program, stating:

“...hio kipindi imenisaidia sana kuelewa that story na drugs huaribu mental health, kitambo nilikua natumia pombe kutoa stress but nimeanza kuwacha saabu kila time hua naskia presenter akiongelelea hio mambo hadi ime-stick kwa akili.”

(“...the program has greatly helped me understand that drug use harms mental health. I used to drink alcohol to relieve stress, but I have started quitting because I constantly hear the presenter discussing this issue, and it has stuck in my mind.”)

Interviewee 8 observed that the guests on the program consistently addressed the psychological impact of alcohol and bhang. He noted:

“Yeah, nimekua nikiskia kwa hio show ma-guest wakisema vile pombe na bangi huongeza shida za kiakili...”

(“Yeah, I have been hearing guests on the program talk about how alcohol and bhang worsen mental health issues...”)

Considering that substance use disorder is a prevalent mental health issue with severe consequences on individuals' health, well-being, and social lives (Volkow & Blanco, 2023), and given the longstanding crisis of substance abuse in Kibra (Okoth & Mburu, 2016), the program's efforts to create awareness about the link between substance use and mental health were particularly crucial. By shedding light on this intersection, the program played a key role in increasing youth awareness of their vulnerability to substance-related mental health challenges. The program also debunked the misconception that drugs can serve as effective coping mechanisms, highlighting instead how substance use often leads to addiction, worsens mental health conditions, and contributes to premature mortality (Murray et al., 2020). This awareness was essential in empowering young people to recognize their susceptibility to these risks and adopt healthier coping strategies to safeguard their mental well-being.

The study also identified themes of grief and adversity, particularly in relation to their link to mental health challenges. The program emphasized how these issues affect youth in Kibra Sub-County, highlighting their vulnerability to mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In PTMS Episode 3, a guest from a CBO provided insights into the diverse mental health struggles faced by the youth:

“Sisi katika shirika la Mental 360 huwa tunaangalia maswala mengi maanake sisi kama binadamu sisi wote ni tofauti, hatufanani... maswala tofauti tofauti ambayo yanatukumba... inaeza kuwa ni grief pengine ulipoteza mpendwa na uko na unresolved trauma...”

(“At Mental 360, we address a wide range of issues because, as human beings, we are all different... There are various challenges we face... It could be grief, perhaps you lost a loved one, or you are experiencing unresolved trauma...”)

He further elaborated how different forms of adversity contribute to trauma, reflecting the varied experiences of those who seek mental health support:

“... kuna wenye wanakuja wanasema wako na childhood trauma, unakuta vile alilelewa huko kutoka akue mdogo na vitu amepitia zinam-haunt... unapata pia kuna watu walipitia gender-based violence, wakadhulumiwa, watu kama hao pia huwa wanakuja, yeah, kwa hivyo shida zinakuja tofauti tofauti...kuna watu wengi wanapitia hizi changamoto hapa Kibra”

“... there are those who come saying they have childhood trauma, you find that the way they were raised from a young age and the things they went through still haunt them... you also find that some people experienced gender-based violence, they were abused, and people like that also come forward, yeah, so the problems come in different forms... there are many people going through these challenges here in Kibra.”

In *PTMS* Episode 4, the guest emphasized how grief can lead to serious psychological distress that can contribute to suicidal ideation:

“...tumezungumzia pia ni nini hufanya watu kutaka kujiua... maybe saa zingine... grief, umepoteza mtu katika maisha yako...”

“We have also discussed what drives people to contemplate suicide... Sometimes, it could be grief, losing a loved one in your life.”

Adversity is prevalent in Kibra and greatly affects the mental health of young people (Wado et al., 2022), emphasizing the importance of the program in creating awareness about their vulnerability to mental health challenges resulting from it. Furthermore, the connection between suicidal ideation, grief, and adversity in slum settings, as highlighted in the program, is reinforced by findings from Culbreth et al. (2018). Therefore, the program played an important role in helping young people understand the effects of grief and adversity on their mental well-being. Promoting open discussions on loss and trauma, while highlighting that other individuals facing similar challenges have come forward to seek support, created a bandwagon effect that encouraged listeners to do the same. In addition, the program connected listeners to mental health resources, such as Mental 360, a mental health support organization based in Kibra.

The study also identified relationships as a key theme in the program's efforts to create vulnerability awareness, particularly in relation to psychological challenges such as depression. In *PTMS* Episode 1, a guest from a mental health CBO noted:

“Kitu ingine ni ati ma vijana wanaingia kwa relationships, mambo ikiharibika mtu anakua depressed akinyamazia unapata msee anataka kujimada.”

“Another issue is that young people get into relationships, and when things go wrong, some become depressed. If they keep it to themselves, it can lead to suicidal thoughts.”

This concern is further explored in *PTMS* Episode 4, *PTMS* Episode 5, and *PTMS* Episode 6. In line with this, study participants also acknowledged that the program provided guidance on navigating relationship challenges to mitigate mental health struggles. Interviewee 2 noted:

“Hii kipindi hufunza sana jinsi ya ku-cope na ma-stress za relationship, mtu ukisikiza tu vile wasee wakapitia inabidi tu uchungane na mental health yako...”

“This program teaches a lot about how to cope with relationship stress. Just listening to what others go through makes you realize the need to take care of your mental health.”

Similarly, Interviewee 8 noted that individuals experiencing depression stemming from relationships often confessed their struggles on the program as they sought help from psychologists invited to the program. He stated:

“Shida za depression, vile inaweza letwa na story za relationships, huongelelewa kwa show coz watu hu-open up kuhusu hizi issues wakitaka help kutoka kwa hao psychologists wa Mental 360.”

“Depression issues, especially how they can be caused by relationship problems, are always discussed on the program as listeners often open up about these issues, seeking help from the psychologists from Mental 360.”

The program highlighted how relationship struggles can lead to severe psychological distress and, in extreme cases, suicide. By addressing this issue, the program deepened listeners' understanding of the emotional toll of

relationship challenges and the importance of seeking support. It emphasized open conversations, thereby encouraging young people to speak out rather than suffer in silence.

Thus, the illustrations above demonstrate that the program actively promoted vulnerability awareness among listeners by addressing mental health determinants specific to Kibra Sub-County. Community radio, as part of the mass media, plays a key role in enhancing public understanding of mental health issues by serving as a platform for information dissemination and advocacy (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024). The vulnerability awareness created by the program helped listeners recognize factors contributing to psychological challenges and take appropriate action. As a result, study participants expressed a willingness to adopt healthier coping mechanisms to safeguard their mental well-being. This aligns with scholarly research linking media-driven mental health campaigns to positive shifts in beliefs and behavioral intentions regarding mental health (Tam et al., 2024; Goodwin & Behan, 2023).

Severity of Mental Health Issues

The study found that the program addressed the severity of mental health issues by emphasizing suicidal ideation as a potential consequence of untreated mental health conditions, thus highlighting the need for early intervention steps such as help-seeking. For instance, in *PTMS* Episode 1, the presenter gives the story of a mental health victim who died by suicide. He explained:

“Msikilazaji wangu kuna kisa kilitokea tu hapa chini, mtu aliweza tu kuingia kwa nyumba yake, ako na mastress zake, amekuja haoengei, imagine huyu mtu amekua akiongea na watu lakini hio siku aongei na watu, kidogo kidogo jamaa akadoz, kesho yake jamaa hakuwa... asubuhi kuamka wanapata alishameza dawa, na alishakufa...”

(“My listener, there was an incident that happened just nearby. Someone entered his house, burdened with his own stress, and stopped talking to people. Imagine this is someone who usually talks to others, but on that day, he was silent. He then dozed off. The next day, he was no more... In the morning, when people woke up, they found that he had poisoned himself and had already passed away.”)

The concern was also addressed in *PTMS* Episode 3, where a guest from a mental health CBO gives an instance of victims with suicidal ideation who come to seek help. He said:

“...but kuna yule anaweza kuja na shida yenye anasema ako suicidal, ata yeye mwenyewe anasema haoni ata kifika kesho...”

(“...but there are those who come with problems and openly say they are suicidal, that they don’t even see themselves making it to tomorrow...”)

The issue was further reiterated in *PTMS* Episode 5 and *PTMS* Episode 6. Insights from in-depth interviews highlight the program’s effectiveness in portraying the dangers of untreated mental health conditions. Interviewee 4 noted that suicide as a consequence of mental health challenges is a recurring theme in the program, which has made him more mindful of his mental well-being to avoid the risks associated with these disorders. He stated:

“...yeah, naskizanga dangers za mental health problems zikiongelelewa, mostly wanaongelea vile wasee hu-experience mawazo ya kutotaka kuishi juu ya depression. Nikiskia hivo, inabidi tu pia mimi nijichunge ndio nisijipate kwa hio situation manzee...”

(“Yeah, I often hear about the dangers of mental health problems being discussed, especially how people struggle with suicidal ideation due to depression. When I hear that, I feel the need to take care of myself so I don’t end up in that situation, man....”)

Similarly, Interviewee 6 also noted that the program’s consistent discussion on the link between unaddressed mental health challenges and suicidal ideation served as a wake-up call for him. He said:

“Vile show huongelelea kila mara stori za wasee kufikiria kujimada wakiwa na shida za mental health, huwa inanifanya niujiulize if pia mimi nataka kuenda hio route. So, hapo ndio huwa naona hii issue ni serious na nafaa kujichunga.”

(“The way the program frequently talks about people struggling with suicidal ideation due to mental health challenges makes me question whether I would want to go down that path too. That’s when I realize this issue is serious, and I need to take care of myself.”)

Portraying the dangers of mental illnesses is a central feature of how the media constructs content related to mental health issues (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024). Emphasizing suicide and self-harm as potential consequences of untreated mental health conditions is a key approach that was adopted by the program in its mental health awareness efforts. This strategy played an important role in encouraging help-seeking behaviors among individuals in distress, preventing them from reaching advanced stages of mental illness where they may experience suicidal ideation.

The study also established that the severity of mental health issues was addressed through discussions on the rising prevalence of suicide cases. The program consistently framed suicide as a widespread crisis, emphasizing the increasing mental health struggles contributing to high suicide rates. This was discussed in *PTMS* Episode 1, *PTMS* Episode 3, *PTMS* Episode 4, and *PTMS* Episode 5. In *PTMS* Episode 3, a guest from a mental health CBO observed a steady rise in the number of young people dying by suicide in Kenya. He said:

“...katika nchi yetu tunaona kuwa idadi ya vijana ambao wana-die by suicide imekua ikiongezeka.”

(“...in our country, we see that the number of young people dying by suicide has been increasing.”)

Insights from the in-depth interviews also revealed that the program emphasized the scale of the suicide cases. Interviewee 4 noted:

“Ahh... mimi personally kitu hio show imenifunza ni ati hizi shida za mental health ziko kila mahali, si ati ni hapa Kibra pekee, zii, like issue za wasee kujitoa uhai ziko everywhere sana sana ma-youths, eeh... Show hutueleza hii issue.”

(“Ahh... personally, what this program has taught me is that mental health issues are everywhere. It’s not just here in Kibra, no. The issue of people dying by suicide is widespread, especially among the youth, yeah...the program tells us about it.”)

Interviewee 6 noted that the program used statistics to highlight the prevalence of mental health challenges, which contribute to the rising suicide rates. He stated:

“Huwa tunaelezewa vile hizi issues [suicide] ziko kila mahali, like kuna hii statistics huwa wanapeana that kati ya watu wanne, kuna mmoja ako na shida ya mental health...”

(“We are told how these issues [suicide] are prevalent, like there is this statistic they share that out of four people, one has a mental health problem.”)

The program created awareness about the gravity of mental health issues by emphasizing the scale and significant rise in suicide cases. The discussions highlighted the widespread nature of mental health challenges. They portrayed them as a crisis, thereby reinforcing a sense of urgency for early intervention among listeners to help avert such challenges.

Given the illustrations above, it is evident that the program reinforced the severity of mental health issues, which is an important approach in creating awareness and shaping how listeners perceive and respond to these challenges. However, greater caution was needed in addressing this issue. Repeatedly portraying mental health conditions in a predominantly negative context, particularly by depicting suicidal ideation as the potential outcome, as observed in the program, can contribute to the marginalization of individuals struggling with these conditions (Gallagher et al., 2023) and may further perpetuate the stigma surrounding mental illness (Gu &

Ding, 2023; Goepfert et al., 2019). Similarly, Goodwin and Behan (2023) emphasize the need for caution, as media content can also foster negative attitudes toward mental health in a detrimental way. In this regard, the media's influential role should be acknowledged and handled with sensitivity (Tam et al., 2024); however, the program failed to do so.

Benefits of Taking Action

The study found that the program emphasized the benefits of taking mental health- related actions by highlighting

the positive outcomes of maintaining good mental well-being. This approach encouraged listeners to seek help whenever they were struggling and to be more mindful of their mental health. In *PTMS* Episode 1, the presenter linked good mental health to productivity and making sound decisions. He said:

“Mental health ya msee ikiwa sawa, msee atafanya vitu in the right way.”

(“When a person’s mental health is in a good state, they will do things the right way.”)

A guest from a mental health CBO reinforced this point by comparing mental health to a car engine, emphasizing that normal functioning depends on mental well-being. He stressed the importance of seeking help to maintain stable mental health:

“Akili ya mtu ni kama engine ya gari, engine iki-knock gari haiwezi function, hii inamaanisha that hakuna vile utakua uko na raha na uko na stress, hakuna vile utafanya job. Kuna watu wako na dooh na hata job fity na bado wana-commit suicide juu upstairs hawako poa, kuna kitu inamsumbua... ukiwa na problem ni poa ku-share usiwache zi pile-up.”

(“A person’s mind is like a car engine, if the engine fails, the car cannot function. This means that you cannot be happy while stressed, and you cannot work effectively. Some people have money and good jobs, yet they still die by suicide because they are not okay mentally, something is troubling them. If you have a problem, it’s good to share; don’t let issues pile up.”)

The importance of speaking out as a step towards finding solutions to mental distress was also emphasized by a listener, who noted:

“...unajua uki-speak out vitu zinaeza kua solved, a problem shared is a problem solved.”

(“...you know, when you speak out, issues can be resolved. A problem shared is a problem solved.”)

The benefits of taking action are further reiterated in *PTMS* Episode 3, *PTMS* Episode 6, and *PTMS* Episode 7. In line with these findings, the study participants also acknowledged that the program consistently conveyed messages on the benefits of seeking help from a trusted individual or a psychologist when facing mental health challenges. Interviewee 2 noted:

“Mara nyingi hio kipindi iki-happen lazima waongelelee story na ku-speak up wakati ma-stress zinakusumbua coz inasaidia... like help mtu anaeza pata ata kwa rafiki yake, bora tu mtu yeyote mwenye unam-trust. But ikizidi tuliambiwa, kuna Mental 360, hao wanakuanga na madaktari. So kutafta msaada ukiwa na issue inasaidia tu sana yani, yeah...”

(“Mostly when that program airs, they always talk about speaking up when stress is overwhelming because it helps... like, you can get help even from a friend, as long as it’s someone you trust. But if it gets worse, we were told about Mental 360, they have psychologists. So, seeking help when you have an issue really helps a lot, yeah...”)

Interviewee 9 noted that the program strongly advocated for help-seeking by highlighting its positive outcomes. She stated:

“Kipindi hueleza vile vitu poa hu-happen kwa life ya msee wakati amesaidika na mental health yake iko sawa. Huwanasema vile mtu hupata furaha, anasoma vizuri, anapiga wera yake vifiti, na vitu zingine tu mob...”

(“The program explains the good things that happen in a person’s life when they get help and their mental health improves. They say how someone becomes happier, studies well, works efficiently, and many other positive things.”)

The illustrations above demonstrate that the program effectively emphasized the benefits of taking action to address mental health challenges. This approach informed listeners about the positive outcomes associated with good mental well-being, reinforcing the idea that these benefits can only be achieved through proactive efforts such as seeking help when needed. These findings align with studies showing that media-driven mental health campaigns can have proximal effects, such as increasing awareness (Tam et al., 2024), as well as intermediate outcomes, including a rise in help-seeking behaviors (Goodwin & Behan, 2023). The program not only created awareness about mental health but also served as a key link between youth listeners and available psychosocial support services.

Barriers to Taking Action

The study found that the program discussed barriers to taking mental health-related actions like help-seeking by addressing the stigma associated with mental health. Stigma emerged as the main barrier that the program sought to tackle by informing the youth that mental health discussions should be normalized in society and that one should not hesitate to speak out when in distress for fear of judgment. In *PTMS* Episode 1, a listener, through SMS, noted that people end up dying by suicide when in mental distress because they fear that sharing their problems might be seen as an embarrassment. He said:

“Watu wengine, kwanza majamaa, hujimada juu kuna wale wako na issue personal na hawataki ku-share, ju wanaona waki-share inaonekana ni embarrassment kwa society so msee anaamua tu kukufa kiwanaume na shida zake.”

(“Some people, especially young men, take their own lives because they have personal issues that they don’t want to share. They feel that if they open up, it will be seen as an embarrassment in society. So, a person decides to just die like a ‘real man’ with their problems.”)

The listener’s assertion highlights the perception that young men in the Kenyan context are influenced by societal norms that dictate they must always appear strong and view emotional vulnerability as a sign of weakness. This mental construct reinforces the belief that sharing personal problems is an embarrassment, leading them to internalize their struggles. The phrase *“dying like a real man with their problems”* reflects the pressure to conform to societal expectations of masculinity, thus hindering help-seeking behavior among young men facing mental health challenges. This finding aligns with a study by Sheikh et al. (2025), which established that the need to adhere to masculinity norms serves as a key barrier to help-seeking among young men.

In response to the listener’s assertions, a guest from a mental health CBO in *PTMS* Episode 1 acknowledged the deep-rooted masculinity norms that hinder young men from seeking help, emphasizing that these beliefs are misleading and should be debunked. She explained:

“...kama alivyosema msikilizaji mmoja, kuna hizo dhana potovu kwamba ati wanaume wanafaa kujinyamazia na shida zao ati ni aibu ku-speak up wakiwa na shida za mental health, hizo ni dhana potovu ambazo zinafaa kuvunjwa katika jamii yetu. Ikifika mambo ya afya ya kiakili, kila mtu yuko sawa na hakuna gender ambayo iko strong kuliko nyingine. Kwa hivyo wanaume jitokezeni msaidike, msioCOPE wala kuona aibu...”

(“...as one listener mentioned, there are these misguided beliefs that men should remain silent about their problems and that speaking up about mental health struggles is shameful. These are false notions that should be broken in our society. When it comes to mental health, everyone is equal, and no gender is stronger than the other. So, men, step forward and seek help, don’t be afraid or feel ashamed...”)

Mental health stigma was further challenged in *PTMS* Episode 3, *PTMS* Episode 6, *PTMS* Episode 7, and *PTMS* Episode 8, addressing issues such as misleading traditions and religious beliefs surrounding suicide, the belief that mental illness equates to insanity, and the notion that mental illness stems from witchcraft and sorcery. In-depth interviews also confirmed that the program actively addressed mental health stigma, encouraging listeners not to let it stop them from seeking help. Interviewee 2 noted that the program consistently debunked the misconception that mental illness equates to insanity. She stated:

“Hio show imekua ikifunza vile mental health issues sio ati ni kukua mwendawazimu. I think hio imesaidia wengi kuelewa hii issue, but mimi nilikua najua that mental health ni ugonjwa tu like any other.”

“(This program has been teaching that mental health issues do not mean being insane. I think this has helped many people understand the issue, but I already knew that mental health is just an illness like any other.)”

Interviewee 6 acknowledged the program’s coverage of societal norms surrounding masculinity that always discourage help-seeking among young men, which helped him learn to open up when experiencing emotional distress. He noted:

“Manze, for me, kuambia mtu shida yangu na mastress zangu huwa ni aibu, but show hu-insist that tusiogope kusema, kwanza sisi ma-boyz, coz ni muhimu, yeah... but saizi naeza tafta help nikiwa na kitu inani-trouble kwa akili”

“(Honestly, for me, sharing my problems and stress with someone feels embarrassing, but the program keeps insisting that we shouldn’t be afraid to speak up, especially us boys, because it’s important, yeah... But now, I can actually seek help when something is troubling me mentally.)”

Interviewee 9 highlighted that the program actively discouraged stigma surrounding mental health and promoted the normalization of discussions on the topic. He stated:

“...show hueleza vile watu hawafai kuongelelea vibaya watu wako na mental health challenges ama kuwacheka, huwa inasema pia tunafaa kufanya discussions za kuhusu mental health ziwe kitu ya kawaida. Kwangu personally huwa sina uwoga ya kushare mastress niko nazo ndio atleast nipate usaidizi ju ya mafunzo mi hupata kwa show.”

“(The program explains that people should not speak negatively about those with mental health challenges or mock them. It also emphasizes that we should make discussions about mental health a normal thing. Personally, I am not afraid to share the stress I am going through so that I can at least get help, thanks to the knowledge I gain from the program.)”

As observed in the study, mental health stigma remains a significant barrier to effectively addressing mental health challenges (Omondi, 2024; Gallagher et al., 2023; Kagunda & Masibo, 2020). Nonetheless, evidence suggests that media can act as a protective factor by fostering social support and reducing stigma, particularly among individuals with limited access to resources (Hamilton et al., 2024). Based on the study findings, it is evident that the program effectively addressed the stigma that often hinders help-seeking among young people, as demonstrated by participants’ growing willingness to seek help after listening to the program. This aligns with a study by Marino et al. (2020), which established the crucial role of radio programs in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues, thereby providing the broader community with a resource for self-awareness and encouraging help-seeking behaviors.

Young men are generally reluctant to seek help, with conformity to masculine norms being a notable reason (Sheikh et al., 2025). Therefore, by challenging the masculinity norms that equate emotional vulnerability and help-seeking with weakness, the program positively impacted listeners, as male study participants reported an increased willingness to seek help when facing mental health struggles. This finding aligns with a study by Duthie et al. (2024), which found that media-based campaigns targeting mental health and depression contributed to improvements in help-seeking behaviors among males. By tackling masculinity norms as a key barrier to help-seeking among young men and debunking misconceptions that associate mental health with

insanity, witchcraft, and sorcery, the program played a key role in creating awareness and fostering open discussions on mental health.

The study also found that the program addressed barriers to taking mental health-related actions by tackling the high cost of mental health treatment and the scarcity of mental health services. In *PTMS* Episode 2, a psychologist noted that accessing mental health treatment, particularly in severe cases that require hospitalization or rehabilitation, is expensive for those who need it. She emphasized that this financial burden makes it difficult for individuals struggling with mental health issues to receive assistance and stressed the importance of early intervention, which can be managed without hospitalization. She stated:

“...sababu nyingine ni kwamba wengi hawana healthcare coverage, kwa sababu ukienda rehab kuna pesa utatoa... kwa miezi tatu huenda ikawa Ksh 75,000, wewe kama kijana pengine kwenyu hamna uwezo...”

(“...another reason is that many people do not have healthcare coverage. If you go to rehab, you will have to pay... for three months, it could be around Ksh 75,000, and as a young person, maybe your family cannot afford it...”)

In *PTMS* Episode 3, the issue of the high cost of mental health treatment is reiterated by a guest from a mental health CBO, who highlighted it as a barrier to help-seeking among the youth in Kibra. He also provided linkage pathways for those in need by recommending Mental 360, which offers affordable mental health services to victims in Kibra. He noted:

“...huduma ya kiakili ni very very expensive, ni bei ghali sana na sio kila mtu yeyote anaweza aka-afford na ndio kwa maana sisi kama Mental 360 huwa tunapeana huduma hii at a sliding scale...”

(“...mental health services are very, very expensive; they are highly costly, and not everyone can afford them. That is why we, at Mental 360, offer these services on a sliding scale...”)

The issue of high mental healthcare costs as a barrier to seeking help was further reiterated in *PTMS* Episode 8. Insights from in-depth interviews also revealed that the program addressed this issue while providing linkages to available mental health services. Interviewee 1 noted:

“Cost ya kutibu mental health huwa tunaambiwa kwa show iko juu so tujichunge na tutafute msaada before mambo ikue mbaya. Na pia tunaelezewa mahali tunaeza pata usaidizi.”

(“We are told on the program that the cost of treating mental health issues is high, so we should take care of ourselves and seek help before things get worse. We are also informed about where we can get assistance.”)

Similarly, Interviewee 4 confirmed that the program addressed the issue of mental health treatment costs and highlighted the role of Mental 360 in providing support. He stated:

“Yeah, gharama ya kupata matibabu ya mental health huwa iko juu na ni kitu huwa tunaelezewa kwa show, but Mental 360 wanakuanga kwa show na huwa tunaelezewa tukiwa na mental health issue, they are always ready to help ata kama iko na issue ya dooh, yeah.”

(Yes, the cost of accessing mental health treatment is high, and it is something we are informed about on the program. Mental 360 is always present on the program, and we are told that if we have a mental health issue, they are always ready to help, even if we don't have the needed costs.”)

Given the foregoing, the program effectively addressed the high cost of mental health treatment and the scarcity of services by providing linkage pathways for individuals to access care on a sliding scale, allowing them to pay only what they can afford. This aligns with observations by Anbessie et al. (2023) that media-driven mental health campaigns facilitate better access to care services. The program also emphasized the importance of early intervention, which helps manage mental health conditions without hospitalization, thereby reducing costs. This information was particularly valuable in the program's mental health awareness efforts, given that Kenya lacks a dedicated mental health budget, allocating only 0.01% of its total health

expenditure to mental health, as a result, individuals often have to pay for treatment out of pocket (MOH, 2021; MHT, 2020).

Tabular Representation of the Study Findings

The table below presents a summary of the key findings from the study and indicates the frequency with which each attribute was addressed across the analyzed episodes.

Attributes	Study Findings	Frequency
Vulnerability Awareness	The program educated listeners on how socioeconomic and sociocultural factors contribute to increased vulnerability to mental health challenges, focusing on poverty, unemployment, housing crisis, substance use, grief, adversity, and relationships.	Appeared in seven out of the eight analyzed episodes.
Severity of Mental Health Issues	The program addressed the severity of mental health issues by focusing on suicidal ideation as a potential outcome of untreated mental illness and highlighting the prevalence of suicide cases, thereby emphasizing the need for early intervention and support.	Appeared in five out of eight analyzed episodes.
Benefits of Taking Action	The program highlighted the benefits of taking mental health-related actions, such as help-seeking, by emphasizing positive outcomes like improved happiness, productivity, and academic achievement.	Appeared in four out of the eight analyzed episodes.
Barriers to Taking Action	The program addressed barriers to mental health-related actions, such as help-seeking, by challenging mental health stigma and tackling financial and accessibility barriers to mental health care.	Appeared in six out of the eight analyzed episodes

DISCUSSION

As part of its vulnerability awareness efforts, the program created awareness about various socioeconomic and sociocultural factors that increase youth vulnerability to mental health challenges. This theme was addressed in seven out of the eight episodes analyzed. The program highlighted key socioeconomic determinants of mental health, including unemployment (Wado et al., 2022; MHT, 2020; Murage et al., 2023), poverty (Swahn et al., 2022; Murage et al., 2023), and the housing crisis (Goswami, 2020), emphasizing their role in worsening mental health challenges among young people in Kibra. The program also addressed substance use, particularly bhang and alcohol, as significant contributors to mental health challenges, debunking the misconception that drugs serve as effective coping mechanisms and instead highlighting their role in addiction, deteriorating mental health, and premature mortality (Murray et al., 2020). It further explored grief and adversity, emphasizing their link to mental health conditions such as PTSD and suicidal ideation, with a focus on the high prevalence of adversity in Kibra and its psychological impact on youth (Wado et al., 2022). In addition, the program tackled the impact of relationships on mental health, particularly their connection to depression and suicidal ideation, which is critical given that suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth (WHO, 2024). Through these discussions, the program played a key role in enhancing youth awareness of their vulnerability to mental health risks and encouraging proactive coping strategies.

The program addressed the severity of mental health issues, thereby emphasizing the importance of early intervention and support. This theme featured in five out of eight analyzed episodes. The program portrayed suicidal ideation as the possible outcome of unaddressed mental health disorders, reinforcing the need for timely action. This approach aligns with how the media often constructs content related to mental health, focusing on the dangers of mental illnesses (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024). The program also discussed the rising prevalence of suicide, presenting it as a widespread crisis. While the program effectively created awareness about the urgency of addressing mental health challenges, it may have contributed to the marginalization of individuals with mental health conditions by presenting mental illness in a largely negative context and repeatedly portraying suicidal ideation as a possible outcome. Such portrayals can perpetuate stigma and reinforce negative attitudes toward mental illness (Gallagher et al., 2023; Gu & Ding, 2023; Goepfert et al., 2019). Goodwin and Behan (2023) also emphasize the importance of sensitive handling of media content related to mental health, a need that the program did not fully meet.

The program highlighted the benefits of taking mental health-related actions by emphasizing the positive outcomes of maintaining good mental well-being. This theme appeared in four out of the eight analyzed episodes. This approach encouraged listeners to seek help when struggling and to be more mindful of their mental health. By reinforcing the connection between proactive efforts, such as seeking help, and positive well-being, the program aligned with studies showing that media-driven mental health campaigns can have proximal effects, such as increasing awareness (Tam et al., 2024), as well as intermediate outcomes, including a rise in help-seeking behaviors (Goodwin & Behan, 2023).

Finally, the program addressed barriers to mental health-related actions, a theme that appeared in six out of the eight analyzed episodes. Stigma emerged as the main obstacle, and the program sought to normalize mental health discussions among youth, encouraging them to seek help without fear of judgment. It targeted key stigma-reinforcing issues, such as masculinity norms (Sheikh et al., 2025), misleading traditions and religious beliefs surrounding suicide, the misconception that mental health issues equate to insanity, and associations with witchcraft and sorcery. Evidence suggests that media can serve as a protective factor by fostering social support and reducing stigma, particularly among those with limited resources (Hamilton et al., 2024). By challenging these misconceptions, the program helped increase listeners' willingness to seek help without fear of stigma. This was particularly crucial in the program's awareness efforts, given that stigma remains a major barrier to addressing mental health challenges (Omondi, 2024; Gallagher et al., 2023; Kagunda & Masibo, 2020). In addition to stigma, the program addressed financial and accessibility barriers to mental health care, including high treatment costs and the scarcity of care services. It provided linkage pathways for individuals to access care on a sliding scale, ensuring affordability, and concurring with research findings that media-driven mental health campaigns enhance access to care services (Anbessie et al., 2023). The program also emphasized the importance of early intervention to manage mental health conditions before hospitalization becomes necessary, thereby reducing costs.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations were encountered during the study. Due to the sensitivity of the mental health topic, some participants were unwilling to share their experiences for fear of stigma. As a result, only nine participants were interviewed out of the fifteen initially targeted. However, this number was sufficient to achieve thematic saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Another challenge stemmed from the limited timeframe under which the study was conducted. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the long-term impact of the program on mental health awareness. Future studies could adopt a longitudinal design to assess the sustained impact of community radio programs on help-seeking behaviors, particularly examining whether such programs lead to lasting changes in mental health-related help-seeking.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The program's content informed listeners about factors that made them more susceptible to mental health challenges, focusing on socioeconomic issues, substance use, grief, adversity, and relationships. It also

addressed the severity of mental health challenges, with an emphasis on suicidal ideation and the rising prevalence of suicide cases. It highlighted the benefits of taking mental health-related actions by emphasizing the positive outcomes of maintaining good mental well-being through help-seeking. It further addressed the barriers to such actions, focusing on stigma and financial constraints. However, to some extent, it also perpetuated stigma through repeated portrayal of suicidal ideation as a possible outcome of mental illness. This, in turn, risked marginalizing mental health victims and discouraging help-seeking behavior due to fear of judgment. This notwithstanding, it can be concluded that the program's content effectively created mental health awareness among its youth listeners.

Recommendations

The study recommended the need for training journalists on best practices for reporting and discussing suicide-related content. Although highlighting the risks of poor mental health can promote positive behavior change, the study emphasized the importance of avoiding negative portrayals of mental illness, particularly its linkage to suicidal ideation.

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