Mental Health and the Effect on Entrepreneurs in Low-Income, Urban Communities of South Africa

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Location and Context

- Research was conducted in various communities within Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa
- A vibrant country of 55 million people
- Over 60% of the country lives in an urban setting
- Came out of legalized segregation (Apartheid) in 1994 and still feels the social and economic effects
- Unemployment rates close to 28% at the end of 2017
- Over 50% of the country is considered chronically poor and there is a small middle class
- Consistently rated (GINI Coefficient) one of the most economically unequal countries in the world

Personal History in South Africa

- Previously lived and worked in Cape Town for 3 years
- Started a microfinance organization in low-income communities
- Provided funding, training and support to entrepreneurs
- Determined barriers to success that entrepreneurs faced in their communities
- At the time, never considered mental health symptoms as one of those barriers to success

Local Partner

- An organization doing very similar work to what I did previously
- Focused on holistic economic development
- Support entrepreneurs in low-income urban communities through providing training, mentorship and financial capital
- Connected me to entrepreneurs to interview

Hypothesis and Methodology

Hypothesis: Individuals from these low-income urban communities will have a presence of mental health symptoms. Those mental health symptoms will have a negative effect on the individual's capacity as an entrepreneur.

- 40 entrepreneurs from Paradigm Shift were identified
- Entrepreneurs all worked in or lived in low-income urban communities
- A local guide was hired and trained to administer the surveys
- Used PHQ-9, GAD-7 and AUDIT Assessments for behavioral health symptoms
- Created a survey to measure business and entrepreneurial performance
- Utilized SPSS software to conduct analysis and organized entrepreneurs into three groups based on monthly revenue levels
- Used descriptive statistics and univariate linear regression to analyze the data

Outcomes

- **Entrepreneur Groups**: n = 10 (0–1500 ZAR), n = 17 (1501–3000 ZAR), n = 13 (3001+ ZAR) – Based on monthly revenues in South African Rand
- **Demographics:** No major differences between groups with respect to age, gender, race, marital status. Education was at a high level across all groups.
- Johannesburg had the highest percentage of low revenue businesses
- **Mental Health:** According to the screens - no significant differences in depression and alcohol use. Anxiety levels differed slightly.
- The group with the middle amount of revenue self-reported highest amounts of anxiety and depression. (Statistically significant)
- No major differences in self-reported satisfaction and efficacy levels.
- Statistically significant correlation of higher revenue levels to higher levels of goal-setting, self-confidence, attention to detail, prioritization and ethics/values.

Classroom Connections

SW 522 – Basic Social Work Research
- The course refreshed some of my foundational understanding of research.
- Taught me how to best organize and categorize variables.
- Showed me which type of analysis is best for the data that I collected
- Gave me some helpful ideas for developing a research survey.
- Taught me how to interpret data and highlight significant findings.
- Showed me how to evaluate articles to determine quality research.

SW 606 – Mental Health and Mental Disorders in Adulthood
- Gave me a framework to better understand symptoms and effects of mental health disorders.
- Taught me how to look at the validity and reliability in different measurements.

SW 630 – Advanced Clinical Social Work Practice in Integrated Healthcare
- Gave me better familiarity with various mental health assessments.
- Showed me how to administrate brief mental health screens.

Career Connections

The project helped me better understand how to conduct and understand research. This will be an important foundation for my career going forward as I want to be grounded in evidence based practices. Following this pilot study I would like to get more funding to do a larger scale study on this topic. If the data supports it, I would like to help more widely distribute mental health resources and education globally. I would love the opportunity to work in global mental health down the road, if there is an opportunity to do so.

Skills Developed

- Research survey development
- IRB application writing
- Research coordination
- Interviewing
- Quantitative data analysis with SPSS
- Navigating international context in order to do research on the barriers to success

Lessons Learned

- Based off of qualitative data, there is some awareness of mental health in these communities.
- Mental health is often perceived as someone who is severely schizophrenic or has lost touch with reality.
- Depression and anxiety are understood but usually not under the term "mental health."
- Mental health symptoms did not impact outcomes quite as expected.
- Significant correlations are found more with the prevalence of certain entrepreneurial characteristics.
- My project would have been impossible without local partners on the ground. I will keep this in mind for the future.

Advice

- If you are doing research, pursue a question that you are really passionate about.
- Pursue your research question even if it seems unorthodox.
- If you are working or partnering with an organization, try to connect with one that has a good reputation through your existing network.
- Do not take on more than you can handle and set realistic goals. 2-3 weeks goes very quickly to conduct research.

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