



TRANSFORM

Ibadan
Nigeria

Transforming Access to Care
for Serious Mental Disorders in Slum
(TRANSFORM)

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Foreword



On behalf of the Transforming Access to Care for Serious Mental Disorders in Slums (TRANSFORM) Nigeria Team, I welcome you to read this very first edition of our newsletter. Between 1998 and 1999, I studied at the Nuffield Institute for Health in the University of Leeds to obtain a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. As a psychiatrist looking to bring much needed change to mental health care in my home country, Nigeria, my dissertation was titled: “Integrating Mental Health into Primary Health Care (PHC) in Nigeria with Clearly Defined Roles for Psychiatric Hospitals: Developing a Pilot Project for Ibadan”. During this period of research, I studied the literature quite intensively on this topic and returned 23 years ago with a proposal on my plans for mental health in PHC. At that time, the enormous burden of neuropsychiatric disorders in Nigeria was well established, as was the huge treatment gap. I understood more the defined burden measured in terms of prevalence, and the burdens from mental illness affecting aspects of life and daily living that were difficult to quantify. There was the undefined burden which families and communities suffered as a result of human and economic loss; there was the hidden burden, resulting from the consequences of stigma that led to humiliation, isolation and unemployment; and there was the future burden, which would occur if urgent and adequate measures were not instituted. As far back as in 1989, mental health was added on as the 9th component of primary health care in Nigeria, but in the decades afterwards, there has essentially been no mental health services in PHC.

Some of the problems identified then were the low priority accorded to mental health by policy makers, which persists to date as exemplified by the yet-to-be-signed Mental Health Bill in Nigeria. This law will repeal the grossly out-dated Mental Health Legislation that is currently in use. Another concern identified was how to deal with the community focus on traditional and religious healthcare, which are readily available and highly regarded in Nigerian communities.

A leading Neurologist, Professor Benjamin Osuntokun, had in 1975 stressed that “traditional healers will continue to hold the keys to PHC until modern services become more accessible”.

Several measures of response have been initiated since then, one major change being the adoption of the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan released in 2013 by member states. The Plan stresses the need for a comprehensive and coordinated response from health and social sectors at the country level. There was an emphasis in the document on the need for Greater Collaboration with informal mental health care providers such as families, school-teachers, police officers, religious leaders, traditional healers and NGOs, as part of the comprehensive, integrated and responsive mental health and social care services in community-based settings. In synergy with the WHO Action Plan was the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), which I was privileged to participate in developing. All these are built into the TRANSFORM project plan.

Building upon the outstanding work that has been done in Nigeria, the TRANSFORM project utilises partnerships between traditional and faith-based healers, community health workers, persons with serious mental disorders and their caregivers, and mental health professionals to derive an accessible, appropriate, available, acceptable, affordable mental health care package using innovation, creativity and co-production. We are excited about the collaboration with partners in the United Kingdom and Bangladesh.

Olayinka Omigbodun
Professor of Psychiatry & Principal Investigator TRANSFORM Nigeria Team

WHAT IS TRANSFORM?

The TRANSFORM “Transforming Access to Care in Slums” is a 4-year research project funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), a United Kingdom government agency which funds research into global health and social care.

The TRANSFORM project aims to help people with serious mental illness to receive good quality care and treatment. The project will develop ways for traditional and faith healers, mental health professionals, primary care practitioners and community health workers (CHWs) to work together to provide the best treatment and improve the lives of people with serious mental illness and their families.

Research has found that people with serious mental illness living in poor urban areas have very little access to good quality mental health care. People with mental illness and their families often use traditional and faith healers such as alfas (Islamic cleric) or prophets as they may be more accessible and affordable and offer treatments which address spiritual concerns. However, sometimes people with serious mental illness, such as psychosis, also need medical treatment, such as medication.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

TRANSFORM is a partnership between the University of Warwick, UK, The University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and the Telepsychiatry Research and Innovation Network (TRIN), Bangladesh.



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WHERE THE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED

The TRANSFORM project will be conducted in two urban communities, one in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the other in Ibadan, Nigeria.

In the first phase of the research, we want to understand:

- How people living in these communities understand mental illness
- How people use traditional and faith healers treatment in the community
- How traditional and faith healers and health workers identify people with serious mental illness
- The treatments offered by traditional and faith healers and health services in the community
- How people with mental illness experience these treatments
- How healers and health workers could work together



WHAT WE PROPOSE TO DO

After we have spoken to people in the community to understand how mental illness is perceived and treated, we will work with healers and health workers to develop a training. This training will help healers and community health workers identify people with severe mental illness and support them to access local mental health services.

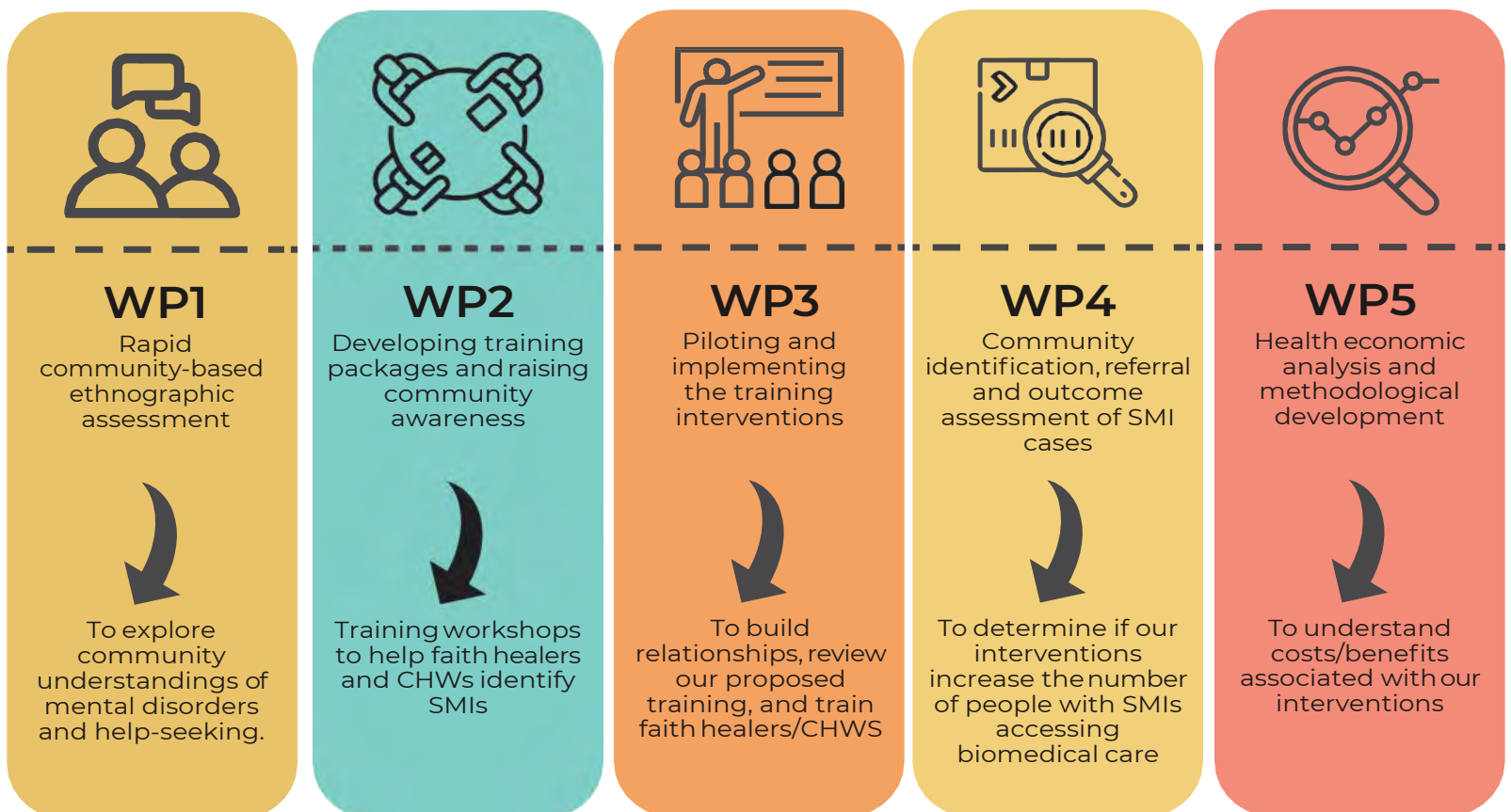
HOW TO KNOW IF THE RESEARCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE



After observing the current practice, we will train the local healers and health workers. Then, check if more people are referred to mental health services by healers or community health workers. The improvement in mental health of people referred after medical treatment will be evaluated. In addition, the cost-effectiveness of our intervention will be tested.

The Five Stages of the Research work

All of this work will be done in 5 stages, called 'work packages' (WPs) as shown in the picture below.



Upcoming Activities

In Ibadan, we are beginning data collection for Work Package I (WPI) to explore communities' views of mental health and where and how people seek help.

In Dhaka, Bangladesh, there will be a training for our research team and plans for data collection will be finalised. A field office within the Korail slum has been rented and the team is engaged in visit to the community.



A photograph of three Black women wearing face masks, engaged in a collaborative activity outdoors. The woman on the left, wearing a blue mask and a dark top, is looking down at a notebook. The woman in the center, wearing a black mask and a brown top, is holding a pen and writing in the notebook. The woman on the right, wearing a white mask and a red top, is pointing at the notebook with a pink highlighter. The background shows a brick wall and a wooden structure.

TRANSFORM IBADAN TEAM

Some project activities



Inuaguration of Local Steering Committee (LSC) Meeting

IBADAN NIGERIA

The Local Steering Committee (LSC) inuagral meeting took place on the 26th of January, 2022 at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan. The purpose for this first meeting was to introduce the TRANSFORM to the members of the LSC and get their consent to be a part of the project. The meeting was attended by Co-investigators, the LSC members and other members of the TRANSFORM Ibadan team. Some members of the Warwick team attended virtually.

Other activities carried out during the LSC meeting include: preview of excerpts from the movie, “Nkabom-a little prayer, a little medicine”, discussions on the roles of and expectations from LSC members and an interactive session between the LSC members and the investigators, and closing remarks.





Capacity Building

The TRANSFORM Nigeria team in collaboration with the TRANSFORM UK team had an 8-week training, from October 26 to December 17, 2021. The twice-weekly training was to equip the members of the team (Research Assistants, PhD fellows, Post-doc fellows and Co-investigators) with the research tools needed to achieve the objectives of the project. Topics like Ethnography, Qualitative research,, Ethics, Culture and Spirituality, Slum research and Mental Health were treated in-depth. Highlights of the training include Participatory mapping, Free listing, Roleplays, among others.



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