The impact of an educational intervention on knowledge of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder among primary school teachers in Lagos Nigeria

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Abstract

Objective Primary school teachers have been identified as important partners in the prompt recognition, referral and management of children with ADHD. However their capacity to function in these roles is hinged on their extent of knowledge about ADHD. Furthermore teachers' knowledge about ADHD may influence the education and clinical outcomes of children with ADHD. This study assessed the impact of an educational intervention program on knowledge about ADHD among primary school teachers in Lagos, Nigeria.

Method An experimental study of the impact of a brief educational intervention on ADHD literacy among primary school teachers (n=144) in Lagos, Nigeria. At baseline, knowledge about symptoms and treatment of ADHD was elicited with a vignette-based questionnaire. The intervention consisted of the administration of an educational leaflet about ADHD, designed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. One week post-intervention, the baseline assessments were repeated.

Results At baseline, 92.4% of the teachers could not recognise features of ADHD. The majority were also unaware of the role of teachers, medications and psychological interventions in the management of children with ADHD. Post-intervention, significantly greater number of respondents compared with baseline (88.0% vs. 7.6%) correctly identified symptoms of ADHD (p<0.005), and agreed that ADHD could be successfully managed with medications (63.2% vs. 9.0%; p<0.005) and psychological treatment (79.2% vs. 16.7%; p<0.005).

Conclusion A simple low-cost educational intervention is effective in improving knowledge about ADHD among primary school teachers in the short-term. Further research is required to evaluate the impact of this intervention in the long term.

Keywords ADHD, Teachers, Educational Intervention, Knowledge, Mental Health Literacy.

Introduction

Attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neuro-psychiatric disorder of childhood onset characterised by developmentally inappropriate symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity and/ or inattention¹. It is the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric disorder in children, with an estimated prevalence of about 5%, according to a western systematic review and meta-analysis ².

A systematic review of the African literature reported that the prevalence of ADHD among school children in Africa ranged from 5.4-8.7% ³. Learning in a typical classroom setting requires sustained attention, impulse control, behavioural regulation and task completion, which are direct antithesis of the core features of ADHD ⁴, ⁵. Consequently, children with ADHD may have difficulties blending in the school environment, with negative impact on their academic performance, and relationships with teachers and students ⁴, ⁵.

Since the features of ADHD, even when previously occult, become more apparent in the school setting, teachers have important roles in the prompt identification and referral of children with ADHD to mental health services.

In western countries, a high proportion of children with ADHD are referred for clinical evaluation by teachers, a role contingent on knowledge about ADHD ⁶, ⁷. Previous research has shown varying degrees of knowledge deficit regarding the features of ADHD and its treatment modalities among primary school teachers. About 20% and 47% of primary school teachers in Thailand and Iran respectively were reported to have knowledge about features of ADHD, while in the United Kingdom, case vignettes of ADHD were correctly identified by 43% to 56% of teachers ⁸, ⁹, ¹⁰. North American and Australian teachers demonstrated higher rates of ADHD literacy with average correct responses to questionnaire items eliciting knowledge.