

POLICY BRIEF: EFFECTS OF CYCLONE IDAI ON MENTAL HEALTH IN ZIMBABWE

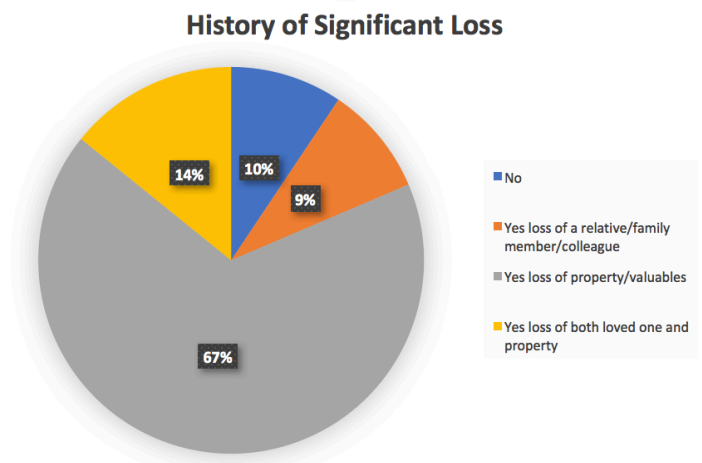
Background

Cyclone Idai was one of the worst tropical cyclones to affect Africa from March 4-21 2019. The effects, particularly on Mozambique and Zimbabwe, were devastating. More than 1300 people died. Now, months later, the aftermath is still visible on communities, especially in terms of mental health.

We analyzed 2019 records including ~1300 patients from two Zimbabwean districts (Chimanimani and Chipinge) that were affected by the cyclone.

Key Finding #1: High levels of displacement and loss

People who suffered mental distress were likely to have been displaced from their homes (54%). 67% lost property or valuables due to the cyclone, and 9% experienced the loss of a family member or loved one, 14% experienced loss of both loved one and property.



Key Findings #2: High levels of anxiety and depression

Most people (90%) had never experienced mental illness before, but in the wake of Idai, 61% of people with mental distress experienced anxiety and 42% experienced sadness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- There is a high burden of mental illness, most likely due to grief and trauma from loss
- Urgent relief is required to facilitate restoration
- Counselling services will be critical, and likely best delivered by non-specialist providers in order to meet the high demand
- Community strengthening work is needed in order to promote sustainability

We are an independent research organization based in Zimbabwe. Our team is led by researchers at University of Zimbabwe, University of Washington, and Harvard Medical School.

For questions, or further data, please contact:
Debra Machando (Managing Director): ddmachando@gmail.com
Website: www.kushinga.org
Twitter: @kushingazim

