

# Supporting Families in Recovery: Africa Approaches in the Context of COVID-19

**CICAD, African Union and Colombo Plan Global Dialogue Webinar**

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June 16, 2021



# Outline

- Introduction
- Africa: Some common features, culture and social networks
- Impact of COVID-19 linked to substance use, families and recovery
- Families in recovery
- Perception of substance use in Africa
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- Conclusion

# Introduction

- Africa constitute about 17.44% of the world's population (World Population Review, 2021)
- The poorest continent and the most vulnerable populations to infectious diseases (Lone and Ahmad, 2020)
- 87% of African countries experienced at least one epidemic between 2016 and 2018 (Talisuna et al., 2020)
- Accounts for about 3% of recorded COVID-19 cases and 3.5% deaths (John Hopkins, 2021)
- First case of COVID-19 reported in February 2020
- Death rates have been surprisingly low, however the virus has massively disrupted lives.

# Some Common Features, Culture and Social Networks

- Display of affection such as:
  - hugging
  - shaking hands
  - eating together



- Large social gatherings
  - religious activities
  - festivals
  - weddings
  - funerals
  - Parties
  - open-air marketplace



- These are common space for meaningful social action and interaction. Helps to address the well-being of Africans but have regrettably been impacted by COVID-19 pandemic.

# Substance Use in Africa Prior to and Since COVID-19

- **Prior to COVID-19**

- A disturbing increase in non-medical use of prescription medications and non-conventional psychoactive substances
- Limited access to treatment for substance use disorders (SUDs). Only 1 out of 18 compared to 1 out of 6 global access (AU/UNODC, 2018)

- **Since COVID-19**

- A surge in the consumption of alcohol due to the misconception about ethanol and alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Have become more susceptible to substance use, disorders and relapse.
- 50 percent of persons who use drugs in Nigeria increased their drug use during lockdown (UNODC, 2020)
- The fragile health indices of the continent, especially among persons who use drugs have been complicated
- Persons in recovery have been practically neglected
- The constant flow of stressful news increases feelings of worry, anxiety, and stress.

# Impact of COVID-19 Linked to Substance Use, Families and Recovery in Africa - Economic

- Requires **\$200 billion** to address the financial and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 (UNCTAD, 2020)
- Pushed millions of middle-class families back into extreme poverty. Even with prior record of being the poorest continent.
- Intensified competition for scarce and limited development assistance.
- Estimated **20 million job losses**, which will further increase the unemployment rates in Africa with implications on social unrest, increase crime rates, substance use among other vices
- Shift of budgets from other sectors to the health sector; causing a further decline in the economic growth of the continent



# Impact of COVID-19 Linked to Substance Use, Families and Recovery in Africa – Youth Population

- Continent with the youngest population in the world
- Average age less than 20 years. 4% of population older than 65 years (Lone and Ahmad, 2020)
- **Strategies to contain COVID-19 Virus includes:**
  - Complete lockdowns
  - Travel bans,
  - Close of schools,
  - Close of companies and offices,
  - Ban on large gatherings (including religious, sports, social and other events),
- These adversely affected these young population.



# Impact of COVID-19 Linked to Substance Use, Families and Recovery in Africa – Women and Girls

- Women and girls have largely borne the direct and indirect brunt of the pandemic in Africa
  - A spike sexual abuse, `forced marriages, teenage pregnancy and domestic violence
- Women represents about 57% of the health workforce in Africa (WHO, 2021)
  - Caregivers at home and at work
- For example, in Kenya, women spend an average of 11.1hrs. per day on care work compared to men with 2.9hrs (Parsitau, 2021).
- About 92% of working African women are in the informal economy
- **Why are these important?**
- Women are the **primary care givers in recovery in Africa**



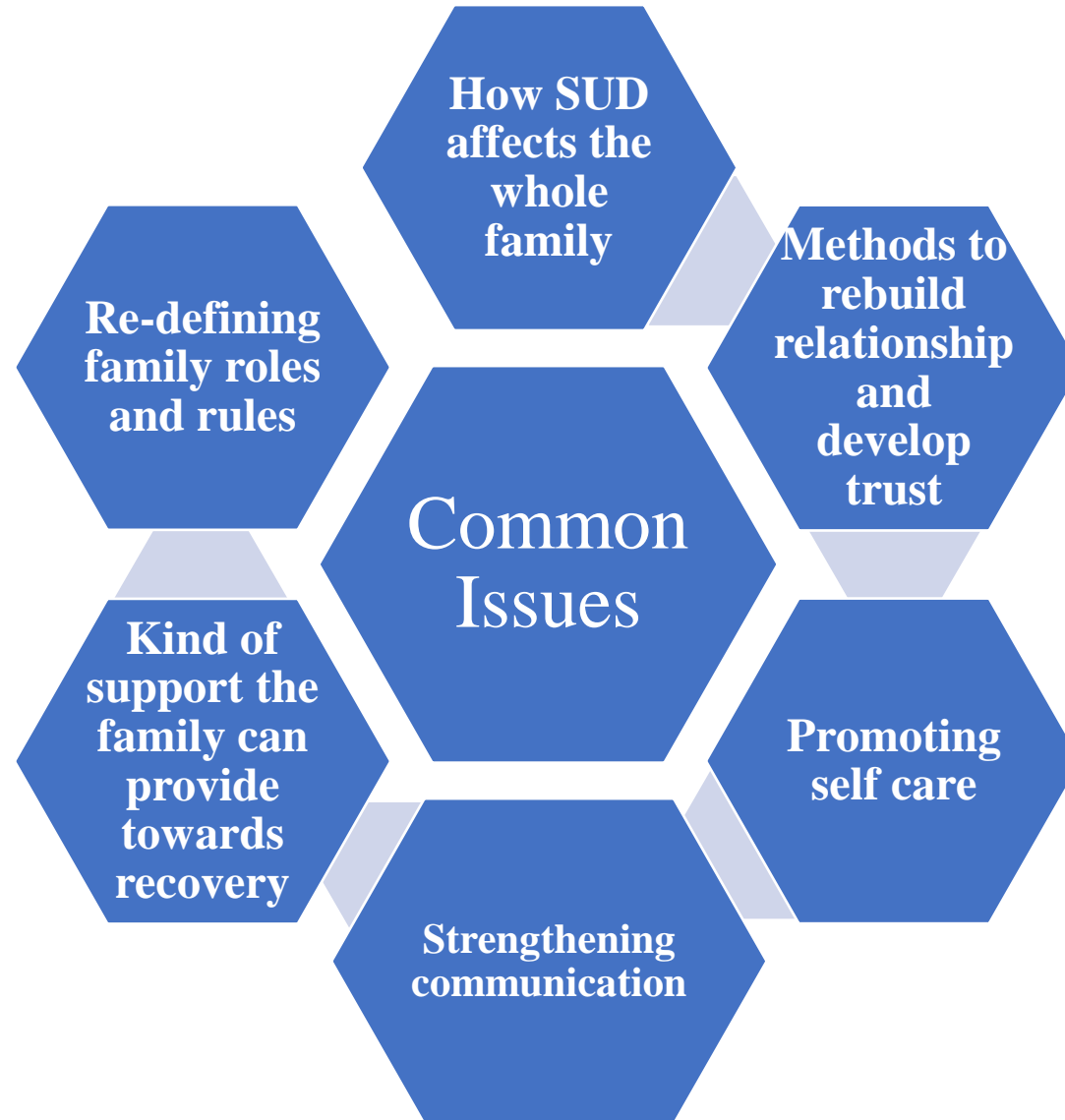


# Component of Families in Recovery

- Members of immediate family (parents, siblings, partners, children)
- Extended family
- Friends
- Colleagues at work
- Mentors
- Anyone who will support recovery
- All of these have been directly or indirectly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
  - An impediment to recovery



# Families in Recovery



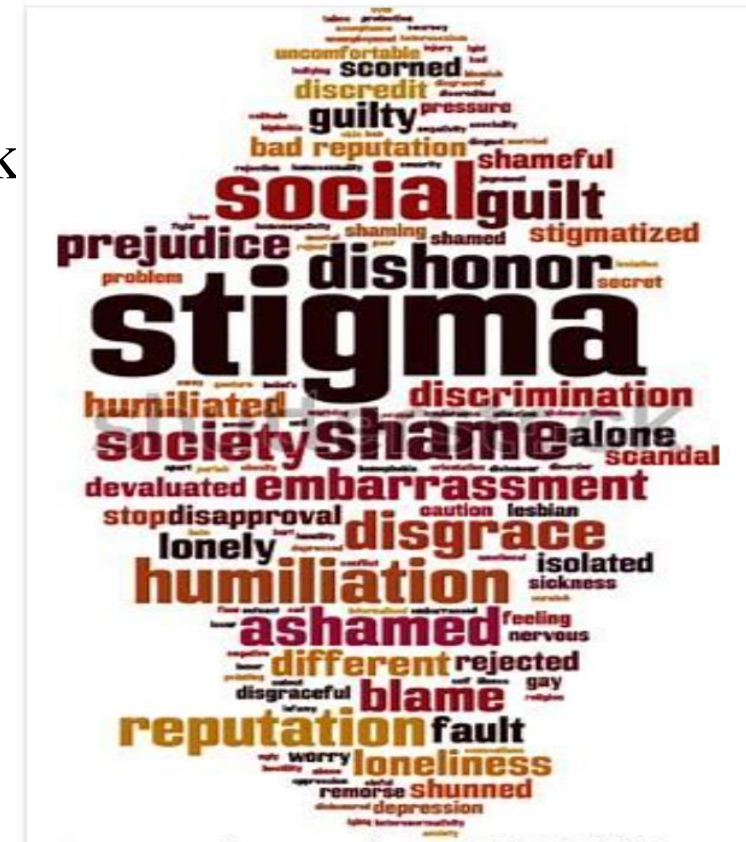
# Family as A Recovery Capital

- Participation by family members in recovery process is associated with better treatment compliance and outcome
- Makes them have better understanding of recovery process
- Better understanding of respective roles and goals
- Serves as support to one another in the recovery process
- Recognize and discontinue triggering interactions
- Accept limitations of living with a person in recovery
- Develop an individual, healthy, and balanced lifestyle
- Self monitoring and consciousness
- Be patient with the process of recovery



# Barriers to Supporting Families in Recovery- African Context

- Issues of social stigma and shame related to substance use
- The view of substance use as moral failure or spiritual attack
- Family denial
- Limited financial resources for SUDs treatment
- Limited facilities/access to treatment
- High rate of dropout from treatment
- The view on relapse as treatment failure
- Family frustration over repeated relapse
- Care are usually sought when complications would have arisen
- Limited number of professionals with evidence-based knowledge and skills for SUDs treatment



# The Burden

- COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the mental well-being of millions of people in Africa
- An increase in the level of disenchantment of families and care givers in recovery
- Shutdown and social distancing measures have made it difficult for those seeking guidance and treatment for SUDs to get help
- Africa has a history of heavily dependent on face-to-face health care delivery including treatment for SUDs
- Has a history of negative perception about people who use drugs
- Limited evidence-based approach to prevention and treatment of SUDs
- Some Africa countries, for example Nigeria, have 3 times global prevalence of substance use
- COVID-19 pandemic could therefore be described as a pandemic within a pandemic in Africa.

# Supporting Families in Recovery

- Supporting families in recovery entails:
- Having understanding of the four dimension of recovery
  - **Health:** Make informed and healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being
  - **Home:** Have a stable and safe place to live
  - **Purpose:** Engage in meaningful daily activities, such as a job or school, volunteering, caring for the family, or being creative
  - **Community**—having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope
- Understand the **six stages** of addiction **recovery:** precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and relapse and expectations at each stage.

# How is Africa Responding to the Challenges?

- Rebuilding the social network to enhance mental well being generally
- Developed digital support system – Telemedicine and telephone counselling. For example, the Drug HelpNet by the UNODC in Nigeria and similar initiative in other African countries.
- The digital support is, however, not without challenges:
  - Hastily improvised to address the needs of persons with SUDs and families.
  - Difficult to reach those with physical or cognitive comorbidities or health inequalities
  - This strategy also increased the risk of social exclusion among families and people with SUDs
  - Limited manpower for the services
- These challenges notwithstanding, the digital initiative has been helpful.
- Need to be evaluated for adaptation
- Need to develop new plans for care of people who suffer from SUDs in the “post-COVID-19 era” in view of their vulnerability
- Need to retrain practitioners

# Recommendations

- Support for families in recovery in Africa should put into consideration factors that are directly and indirectly linked to well being and recovery as it affects:
  - The economy
  - Women and Girls
  - Youth Population
  - Social network
- Healthcare and social care systems need to prepare to cope with a likely increase in demand in the domains of recovery:
  - Mental health
  - Housing
  - Access to medications & other fundamental goods
  - Social and self stigma
- Creating social policy to support vulnerable families will go a long way in preventing substance use and in supporting recovery
- Family welfare should be incorporated into the different sectors and settings, including workplace



# **Conclusion**

**COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the mental wellbeing of millions of people in Africa. The impacts are currently ‘hidden costs’. The long-term implications to substance use, disorders, recovery and policy will take time to unravel.**

*Thank You*

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