

ONE THOUSAND CONSECUTIVE ATTENDEES OF A NIGERIAN PSYCHIATRIC EMERGENCY SERVICE: CLINICAL AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

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Introduction: The Psychiatric Emergency service occupies a strategic position where crucial interventions can be initiated and coordinated in linkage with other services in the mental health network. However, there is dearth of information on users of psychiatric emergency in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa.

Objectives/aim: To determine the clinical and socio-demographic characteristics, pattern of presentation and disposal of patients attending a Nigerian psychiatric emergency unit.

Methods: One thousand Patients consecutively presenting to the emergency unit of the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria from January 2012 were prospectively assessed. Following a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation, clinical, socio-demographic and other relevant data regarding their presentation and disposition were recorded into a pro-forma and subjected to statistical analysis.

Results: The majority were females (54.7%), single (65.6%), and unemployed (62.9%), with a mean age of 36.4 (± 14.7) years. Less than two-thirds (62.0%) were new patients. Only 10.8% of the new patients were formally referred to our facility. The most common diagnoses were schizophrenia (34.3%), depression (16.5%) and substance use disorders (11.4%). The patients were predominantly (89.4%) managed as out-patients.

Conclusion: The emergency room is a major port of entry into mental health care and could be prone to over-subscription by patients with non-acute problems, especially when alternatives are not readily accessible. Multipronged interventions, including community based care with relevant linkages, may facilitate appropriate utilization of mental health services and reduce the potential for overcrowding of the psychiatric emergency room.