Title: The Relationship between Mental Health and Socioeconomic Status: Depressive Symptoms among Adults in South Africa

Presenter: Kinyanjui Mungai, PhD, UWC.

Presenter biography: Kinyanjui Mungai is currently an economics PhD student at the University of The Western Cape. He completed a Masters in Commerce (Economics) at UWC in 2016. Much of the presentation will include some of the research he conducted as part of his dissertation which was supervised by Dr Amiena Bayat. Kinyanjui Mungai also has a Bachelor of Commerce and Honours in Economics at the University of The Western Cape. His current research interests are in financial inclusion.

Abstract

Mental disorders are estimated to be experienced by one out of three South Africans in their lifetime. (Stein, Seedat, Herman, Moomal, Heeringa, Kessler & Williams, 2009:3). Empirical studies indicate, that people, who are poor, live in impoverished neighbourhoods, have lower education levels and are subsequently more likely to have mental disorders. This study focuses on depression. Empirical studies point to depression being negatively correlated with socioeconomic determinants, but is this the case in South Africa?

From a theoretical standpoint the study considers how socio-structural aspects such as poverty and educational outcomes (amongst other socioeconomic variables) can lead to the prevalence and persistence of depressive symptoms. The main question the study aimed to investigate was whether depression was negatively related to socioeconomic status, and through which pathways does socioeconomic status affect depression.

This study used panel data from the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) to examine the socioeconomic determinants of depressive symptoms. Waves 1 (2008) and 4 (2014/2015) of the NIDS data were used to answer the research question. Depressive symptoms were assessed using the 10-item version of the Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). The scale measured depressive symptomatology. The cut off that was used was a score of 10 or higher, which indicated the occurrence of significant depressive symptoms. In order to assess which socioeconomic determinants increase the probability of experiencing significant depressive symptoms, a probit model was used to make this investigation.

The results of the study indicate that, despite the recent increase in depression in 2012 and 2014/2015, the overall prevalence of depression in South Africa has declined significantly between 2008 and 2014/2015. Socioeconomic status was found to be negatively associated with depression. In particular, a low income and occupational status were associated with a significantly greater probability of being depressed. Disparities in depression outcomes followed the disparities in socioeconomic status. Hence the study found that women and Africans were particularly vulnerable to depression as they were socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Date: 10 October 2017

Time: 12:50 – 14:00

Venue: CSSR Seminar Room 4.29, Level 4 Leslie Social Science Building, Upper Campus

Lunch will be served from 12:30

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