



Mental health

mhGAP: supporting Ebola survivors in Guinea

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Nzérékoré regional team at work -
Psychiatric Centre in Boma
Salma Tili - WHO Guinea

Mamadou and his wife had just married in Guinea when the couple contracted Ebola. Both were transferred to an Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) to receive care. Mamadou was the lone survivor. He becomes very emotional and tearful when his primary health doctor, newly trained with mhGAP, asks him to describe his experience since he was released from the ETU five months ago.

“My wife and other dead bodies were coming back in

my dreams, I couldn't sleep, I saw them, I saw my wife's dead body close to me, I didn't feel like eating, food had no taste anymore in my mouth, my heart was pounding in my chest and my head was burning. I was not going to work in the field anymore because my neighbours no longer wanted to work with me. They rejected me, I was very isolated, only my mother agreed to come with me.” Mamadou was convinced no one would be able to help him, especially after consulting two traditional healers who said that his dead wife's spirit had bewitched him and their treatments did not work.

Thanks to WHO's mhGAP training of 320 primary health doctors in the districts most affected by Ebola in Guinea, Mamadou was assessed and is receiving both medical and psychological treatment. One month after starting treatment, Mamadou is eating again and has gone back to work in the field.

The unprecedented epidemic of Ebola virus disease in 2014–2015 destabilized the existing social support systems in all Ebola-affected countries, having a severe impact on those directly affected by Ebola as well as those already at risk of independently developing

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mental health problems. The increased level of general psychosocial vulnerability and the psychosocial impact of the epidemic on survivors and other members of affected communities can be long lasting.

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An Ebola survivor

Training primary health-care providers with mhGAP methods is having a remarkable influence in Guinea. It makes valuable psychological support available not only for Ebola survivors but also for the entire community, including people with severe mental disorders. As a newly trained nurse explains, “The mhGAP training made me realize that we had unhelpful practices with mentally ill people. We were scared of them and we used to chain them for several days in isolated rooms. We won’t do that anymore.”

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