

## **Rural realities in service provision for substance abuse: a qualitative study in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

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**Rationale:** Substance abuse is recognised as a worldwide concern, contributing significantly to morbidity and mortality in South Africa. There is minimal research that has considered influences in mental health care service delivery in rural and disadvantaged communities of South Africa.

**Methods and objectives:** A qualitative study with substance abuse service providers in uMkhanyakude rural district of KwaZulu-Natal was undertaken to gain insight into the experiences and challenges in service delivery. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including mental health care teams ( $n = 29$ ) in the rural district.

**Results:** The findings of the study suggest that service providers experience challenges in service delivery in this rural area. The effects of culture (amarula festival and ancestral worship) exacerbate the use of substances; the high rate of unemployment and poverty lead to the produce of home-brewed substances for sustainable living; a lack of resources poses threats to service delivery; and the poor prioritisation of mental health care services and a lack of monitoring and evaluation of services in the district were highlighted in this study.

**Conclusions:** Despite this being a single district study, findings reflect the need for a district, provincial and national standard for substance abuse rehabilitation services in addition to the improvement of monitoring and evaluation for quality improvement. There is also a need to respond to the gaps that exist in after-care and occupational therapy community-based or decentralised substance abuse services that are essential in under-resourced areas due to the high prevalence of substance users.