



Selected Papers of #AoIR2021:
The 22nd Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Virtual Event / 13-16 Oct 2021

INTERNET USE, PERSONAL NETWORKS, AND MENTAL HEALTH IN LOW INCOME AREAS: AN ANALYSIS OF URBAN SLUMS IN GHANA AND KERALA

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Prior research has shown that mental health in urban slums is associated with the proportion of older individuals in personal networks (Shrum et al, 2021). This presentation will examine the extent to which that association is mediated through Internet and social media use.

While over 71% of the urban population of sub-Saharan Africa live in slums, and the high disease burden among slum residents is well known, mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, have been generally neglected (Kyobutungi et al., 2008; Saris et al., 2017). Scarcity of both clinics offering mental health services and resources to pay for them, mostly from their network of social capital, might imply that informal networks are even more important than in higher income locations.

Recent work in sub-Saharan Africa shows that the expected negative association between network size and the severity of mental health issues is positive, suggesting an alternative mechanism at work in disadvantaged areas and calling into question the generalizability of the relationship between network size and mental health.

In the summer of 2018 and 2019, we conducted face to face interviews with residents (minimum 18 years) in two high density, low income areas of Accra (West Africa) and Trivandrum (Kerala, India). Gender and age (18-30, 31 to 50, 51+) quotas were provided.

Our preliminary results show that mobile phones are primary way in which respondents communicate with members of their core networks. Further, it shows no general association of larger networks with reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Second, older individuals are strongly associated with depression and anxiety

Suggested Citation (APA): Shrum, W., Yevuyibor, J. T., Thakkar, S. (2021, October). *Internet Use, Personal Networks, and Mental Health in Low Income Areas: an Analysis Of Urban Slums in Ghana and Kerala*. Paper presented at AoIR 2021: The 22nd Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Virtual Event: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.