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Community health in rural areas in Ngaoundéré (Adamawa-Cameroon): Gada-Dang case

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Abstract

In a context where health issues occupy a prominent place in government concerns, the desire to improve the system and facilitate access to health care is of great interest to everyone, both at the national and community levels. This article aims to lift a veil on the problems and needs of community health in Gada-Dang, a small rural area located not far from the banks of Lake Dang, Ngaoundéré 3rd district in the Adamawa region of Cameroon.

Keywords: Health, Community Health, Rural Area, Problems, Needs.

Introduction

Health is an essential pillar of both human and socioeconomic development, and the community of Gada-Dang is no exception. Despite efforts to improve living conditions, the population of this community continues to face worrying health needs and problems. Infrastructure is often insufficient, human resources are limited, and access to care remains a major challenge. At the same time, the prevalence of infectious and non-communicable diseases highlights the existing gaps in the health system. This situation requires urgent attention to identify the specific needs of the inhabitants of Gada-Dang and develop effective strategies to improve their health. Therefore, reflecting on community health issues in Gada-Dang, which is a rural area, means highlighting the health needs and problems in this locality. To be clearly understood, we started with a conceptual clarification or, better, an operationalization of the concepts. After that, we briefly review the determinants of health. After having identified the problem posed by our subject, along with a problematic, we set ourselves an objective before adopting a data collection method that will lead us to conclusive results.

I- Conceptual framework

Before any reflection, it is necessary to begin, as Emile Durkheim says in The Rules of the Sociological Method with a definition. It is with this prescription in mind that we find it right and legitimate to begin this reflection by making more comprehensible the tangible and intangible concepts that relate to this subject, and whose understanding could lead to confusion.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, which does not consist only in the absence of illness or infirmity. This definition requires a revision or an adjustment if we would like to contextualize it. It is good to see the concept in a more global way. Then, it is clearly established that health is a way of thinking, a way of feeling and a way of acting. This immediately refers to the definition of Sociology in the Durkheimian sense: "is a social fact, any way of thinking, feeling and acting, external to the individual, endowed with a power of coercion by virtue of which it imposes itself on him" According to Marcel Mauss we can confer to the concept of health, the definition of "total social fact", to show and support the fact that health is a societal phenomenon around which the social, the political, the economic, the cultural and even the religious are intertwined.

Public health refers to the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting and restoring the health of the population through concerted collective action

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A Community, on the other hand, is a group of individuals who live together in specific conditions of organization and social cohesion, who are linked by common interests, aspirations and value systems

Community health, in turn, is a discipline related to public health that aims to identify priority health problems in a community and provide appropriate solutions with the full participation of the target population.

Community Participation as its name suggests, is a process by which individuals and families take charge of their own health, their own well-being and synergize their capacity for their own local development.

Community Diagnosis is generally presented as the process of identifying collective and priority health problems in a community through the analysis of health determinants.

Disease prevention, in turn, is defined as an activity that aims to anticipate the occurrence of a disease or any other health problem and its possible complications, by acting on risk factors and vulnerability factors.

As for the Determinants of health, these are factors or characteristics individual and collective likely to influence directly or indirectly on the state of health.

Finally, Health Promotion, which is also a very important aspect of community health, is presented as a process which gives populations the means to ensure greater control over their own health and to improve it

II. Brief reminder of the determinants of health

Health determinants are the factors that influence the health status of a population. These are either positive or negative. The main negative determinants, i.e., those that promote the occurrence of diseases or accidents, are classified into five main categories according to Blum.

- *Behavior*: lifestyles, food hygiene, drug use, sedentary lifestyle, risky sexual behavior
- *The environment*: climatic conditions, geographical barriers, professional situation (rice farming, fish farming), security instability in certain localities, atmospheric pollution.
- *The population*: Biological factors (predispositions of certain individuals to specific conditions), genetic and hereditary factors (defects that can be passed on from generation to generation), congenital malformations, age, sex;
- *Socio-economic status*: schooling, the mentality of the population towards health problems, customs and traditional beliefs (taboos, prohibitions, the practice of witchcraft), family income (poverty), the system of political governance (unemployment, tribalism, war);
- *of the health system* (availability of quality care, accessibility for populations *The health system (health care and services)*): health legislation, failures in health care)

III. Issue

The need for access to health services and care, especially quality health care, is a constant concern in rural areas. The various shortcomings, which appear numerous and varied, limit the health development of community members as much as possible, while thus jeopardizing the impetus for possible development. Given the many challenges, it is imperative to develop innovative solutions adapted to the specific needs of rural communities.

This work aims to assess community health in Gada-Dang, a small town located in the Ngaoundéré 3rd district, not far from the banks of Lake Dang.

What are the health needs and challenges in the Gada-Dang community? This article will attempt to answer these questions. To achieve this, we have set ourselves a very specific objective, which we will not fail to detail here.

IV. Objective

The aim is to conduct an inventory of the specific health needs and problems of the Gada-Dang community through a community diagnosis. To achieve this objective, we adopted a methodology well-suited to this work.

V. Methodological approach

Our method was subdivided into several phases. First, we started by collecting written data. This phase consisted of going to the libraries of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Human Sciences, the Faculty of Sciences and the central library of the University of Ngaoundéré. We then went to the municipal library of Ngaoundéré, the library of the *Alliance Française* of Ngaoundéré and the archives of the Regional Delegation of Public Health of Adamawa. This was an opportunity for us, on the one hand, to identify as many documents as possible that, directly or indirectly, deal with our subject and, on the other hand, to read them to have ample knowledge on this subject to speak about it with mastery.

After this first phase, we went into the field for direct observation. This step was essential in this research. This means going to the study site to see, observe, better, to engage in the field as an "actor". It was an opportunity for us to go and see in the field what is happening there and what is related to the subject we are addressing. To observe means to examine carefully, to consider carefully to study. The term attention that appears in this definition translates to a focus on a fact, a practice, a situation. Thus, the observation that we made about the health needs and problems in the Gada-Dang community allowed us, on the one hand, to lift a veil on the sociologies realities that are experienced there in terms of health. We then carried out an armed investigation. The Dictaphone to record the interviews, a ballpoint pen, a notepad and then, a camera. We thus interviewed a sample of 25 people in this community, which allowed us, after analysis, to have the results of a qualitative study which are presented in the following paragraphs.

VI. Results

A health problem is a state of health that is deemed deficient by the individual, the doctor, or the community. On the other hand, a need expresses the gap or difference between an optimal state, defined normatively, and the current or actual state. In this sense, a need represents what is required to remedy the identified problem. A need is measured by estimating the gap from the norm. The greater the gap from the norm, the greater the health need. In other words, a need arises when there is a difference between a situation considered optimal and the situation currently observed.

NB: - A health problem gives rise to a health need

An unmet health need in the long run can lead to a health problem. From this clarification, needs have been classified into four types (Bradshaw 1977).

- Normative need: it is defined by the expert, professional or administrator in relation to a certain standard of desirability or optimality.
- Felt need: it relates to individuals' perceptions of their problems or what they want as a health service.
- Expressed needs: this is equivalent to the concrete demand for social and health services. However, it should be noted that a felt need may or may not be expressed by the population; the professional or expert must identify it.

Comparative need: this is a prognosis, here it is assumed that an individual or group should have the same need as other individuals to the extent that they all have the same characteristics.

A) Health needs in Gada-Dang.

Infrastructure needs

Healthcare infrastructure in Gada-Dang requires significant improvements to meet the growing needs of the population. Current facilities often lack essential resources and adequate maintenance. Modernizing infrastructure would provide a safe and comfortable environment for patients and medical staff. For example, renovating waiting rooms and consultation rooms would help reduce patient stress. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is also crucial for public health. In many health facilities in Gada-Dang, water supplies are limited, complicating hygiene and care. Investments in reliable water supply systems and adequate sanitation facilities are needed to prevent the spread of infections. This could involve the construction of water reservoirs and wastewater treatment facilities.

Furthermore, it is essential to improve the geographical accessibility of health infrastructure. Many rural communities are far from health centers, preventing them from accessing necessary care. The establishment of community clinics or mobile health units could help overcome this barrier. This would ensure that even the most isolated populations can receive medical care.

Another aspect to consider is the establishment of emergency services. Healthcare facilities in Gada-Dang must be equipped to handle medical emergencies, which requires adequate infrastructure such as emergency rooms and transportation equipment. Training staff on emergency management is also essential to improve crisis response.

Finally, community outreach is necessary to raise awareness of the services available and encourage people to use these facilities. Information campaigns can play a key role in promoting health services and the importance of access to care. This can also help reduce the stigma associated with certain diseases and encourage better use of available resources.

Human resource needs

Recruiting and training medical personnel is essential to improving healthcare in Gada-Dang. Currently, a lack of qualified personnel limits the ability of facilities to provide adequate care. Therefore, it is crucial to develop continuing education programs for healthcare professionals to ensure they are up to date on best practices and new medical technologies. This can include practical internships and training workshops.

Health awareness is also an essential component of building human capacity. Educational campaigns can help train community health workers who work directly with the population. These workers can play a key role in disease

prevention by educating people on health practices and encouraging regular medical visits. This can help reduce the prevalence of infectious and noncommunicable diseases.

Furthermore, working conditions and compensation must be improved to attract and retain medical staff. Competitive salaries and good working conditions are key factors in staff satisfaction and motivation. The government and NGOs must collaborate to ensure sufficient resources for funding salaries and work infrastructure.

Psychological support and stress management for medical staff are also crucial. Healthcare professionals often face high workloads and stressful situations, which can lead to burnout. Implementing wellness and psychological support programs can help maintain staff mental health, which, in turn, improves the quality of care provided.

Finally, encouraging specialization in certain health areas is essential. Specific training on common diseases in Gada-Dang, such as malaria and diabetes, can improve professionals' ability to treat these conditions. It can also strengthen community confidence in the local health system.

Technical platform requirements

Medicine availability is a major health issue in Gada-Dang. Many health facilities suffer from frequent stockouts of essential medicines, hampering patient treatment. It is imperative to establish efficient supply systems and invest in suitable storage infrastructure. This could involve partnerships with pharmaceutical companies to ensure a regular and reliable supply.

At the same time, diagnostic equipment is essential for effective patient care. The lack of modern equipment, such as laboratory and imaging devices, limits doctors' ability to make accurate diagnoses. Investments in medical technology, as well as staff training in its use, are necessary to improve healthcare services. This may include purchasing diagnostic equipment and establishing collaborations with more advanced healthcare centres.

Regular maintenance of medical equipment is also crucial. Faulty or outdated equipment can compromise the quality of care. Therefore, it's important to establish maintenance and repair protocols to ensure all equipment is in good working order. This may require training local technicians to perform these tasks.

Additionally, educating healthcare professionals on the proper use of equipment is essential. Improper use of medical tools can lead to misdiagnosis and complications for patients. Regular training sessions on new technologies and best practices can help mitigate this problem.

Finally, creating a system to monitor and assess medical equipment needs is essential. This would help identify gaps and prioritize investments based on the community's specific needs. A proactive approach will ensure that healthcare facilities always have the resources they need to provide quality care.

B) General information about Health problems

Community health problems in rural areas are numerous and varied. These include:

- Limited access to health services: Rural areas are often far from urban centres, making access to health services, including specialists and sophisticated medical equipment, difficult.
- Health workforce shortages: Rural areas often struggle

to attract and retain health professionals, leading to a shortage of qualified personnel.

- Inadequate sanitation infrastructure: Sanitation infrastructure in rural areas is often inadequate, with dilapidated buildings, obsolete equipment and problems with water and energy supplies.
- Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation: Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is often limited in rural areas, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases and infections.
- High prevalence of chronic diseases: Rural areas often have higher rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.
- Mental health issues: Rural areas often have higher rates of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.
- Lack of access to health information and education: Rural areas often have limited access to health information and education, making it difficult to make informed health decisions.
- Age and mobility issues: Rural areas often have an elderly population and mobility issues, making access to health services difficult.
- Lack of financial resources: Rural areas often have limited financial resources, making it difficult to implement health programs and provide health services.
- Environmental issues: Rural areas are often exposed to environmental problems, such as water and air pollution, which can have negative impacts on health.

C) Health problems specific to Gada-Dang

Infectious diseases

Infectious diseases pose a significant public health threat in Gada-Dang, with conditions such as malaria and typhoid affecting many people. Malaria is particularly prevalent due to the presence of mosquito vectors and climatic conditions favorable to their breeding. Intensified prevention efforts, such as the distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets and awareness campaigns, are needed to reduce the incidence of this disease.

Typhoid, on the other hand, is often linked to drinking water and sanitation problems. Outbreaks of infection typically result from a lack of access to clean water and poor hygiene practices. Improving water supply infrastructure and raising public awareness about the importance of personal and dietary hygiene are essential to combating this disease. Typhoid vaccination programs could also be considered to protect at-risk groups.

Infectious diseases can also lead to serious complications, particularly in children and the elderly. Child mortality is often linked to untreated or poorly managed infections. It is therefore crucial to improve access to medical care, particularly through community clinics and screening campaigns. This would allow for the early detection and treatment of infections, thus reducing their impact on public health.

Another problem related to infectious diseases is antibiotic resistance. The inappropriate use of these drugs contributes to the emergence of resistant strains, making infections more difficult to treat. It is imperative to educate healthcare professionals and the public on the proper use of antibiotics, as well as to strengthen prescribing protocols.

Finally, epidemiological monitoring is essential for

identifying trends and clusters of infection. Establishing surveillance systems can help detect infectious disease outbreaks and respond quickly. This requires collaboration between healthcare facilities, local authorities, and community organizations to ensure an effective and coordinated response.

Non-communicable diseases

Non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, pose a growing health challenge in Gada-Dang. These conditions are often linked to lifestyle factors such as diet, physical activity, and stress. Therefore, promoting healthy lifestyles within the community is essential. Nutrition education programs can help residents make healthier food choices and understand the importance of regular exercise.

Diabetes, in particular, requires ongoing care. Early diagnosis and regular monitoring can prevent serious complications associated with this disease. Healthcare facilities must be equipped to conduct screening tests and provide advice on diabetes management. Awareness workshops can also help inform the public about the signs of the disease and the importance of blood sugar monitoring.

Hypertension is often called the "silent killer" because it can go unnoticed for years. Raising awareness of this condition is therefore crucial. Community blood pressure monitoring campaigns, combined with advice on salt reduction and stress management, could help reduce the prevalence of hypertension.

Noncommunicable diseases can also have economic consequences for families and the community. Healthcare costs associated with these conditions can be a financial burden. It is therefore important to promote long-term prevention and management strategies, involving partnerships with local organizations and government programs.

Finally, psychological support is essential for people living with non-communicable diseases. The stress and anxiety associated with managing these conditions can affect quality of life. Establishing support groups and community resources can provide a space for people to share their experiences and seek advice, thereby promoting better health management.

Maternal and child health

Maternal and child health is an area that requires special attention in Gada-Dang. Access to prenatal care is fundamental to ensuring the health of mothers and babies. Unfortunately, many women lack access to quality care during pregnancy, which can lead to serious complications. It is essential to organize awareness campaigns on the importance of prenatal visits and to establish accessible health services.

Infant mortality also remains a major problem. Children are particularly vulnerable to infections and malnutrition, requiring immediate attention. Vaccination and nutrition programs can help protect children from birth. Furthermore, education on breastfeeding and newborn care can have a significant impact on reducing infant mortality. Training community health workers on maternal and child health is crucial. These personnel play a key role in raising awareness and monitoring pregnant women and young children. Proper training enables them to identify potential risks and refer patients to specialized care when necessary. It is also important to address socioeconomic factors that

affect maternal and child health. Access to education and economic resources can influence women's ability to seek care. Initiatives aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of families, such as women's empowerment programs, can have a positive impact on reproductive health.

Finally, monitoring maternal and child health indicators is necessary to assess the effectiveness of interventions. Collecting reliable data helps us better understand challenges and implement appropriate health policies. A well-established monitoring system can also facilitate coordination between different health stakeholders and ensure that resources are used optimally.

Conclusion

In short, the health needs and challenges in Gada-Dang are interconnected and require a comprehensive approach to be effectively addressed. Improving infrastructure, building human capacity, and ensuring the availability of medical equipment are essential interventions to address health challenges. In addition, increasing health awareness and preventive programs can help reduce disease prevalence. To ensure a better future for the residents of Gada-Dang, it is imperative that local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and the community itself combine their strengths and potential to implement effective and efficient (sustainable and tailored) solutions to the specific needs of this community.

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