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The social aspect of mental illness among orthodox christians of the tigrinya ethnic group in Eritrea

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This study is situated within the sociocultural and religious context of Orthodox Christians of the Tigrinya ethnic group who inhabit in the central and southern plateau of Eritrea. With this ethnic group being ethno-linguistically and socio-culturally dominant and religiously conservative in comparison with the remaining eight ethno-linguistic groups and other Christian denominations in the country, this research project takes a closer look at how members of the traditionally and religiously bound Orthodox Christians of the Tigrinya ethnic group conceptualize or construct the notion of mental illness from socio-cultural and religious worldview. More importantly, attempts will be made to explore the impacts of the tightly held kinship systems, socio-cultural makeup and religious beliefs and practices of this ethnic group upon the treatment seeking behavior and treatment preference of Orthodox Christians towards mental illness and the bearers of the illness. Therefore, contrary to the dominant etiological conceptualization and diagnostic formulation of the biomedical model towards mental illness and the sufferers, this study argues that socio-cultural and religious beliefs or traditionally bound illness ideologies immensely determine the perception, treatment seeking behavior and treatment preference of Orthodox Christians of the Tigrinya ethnic group in Eritrea. Thus, this research inquires how such socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs specifically interrelate with the way Orthodox Christians of the Tigrinya ethnic perceive and treat mental illness? what are the various ways that socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs impact mentally ill persons and their families. And, what remedial and integration strategies could be devised to ameliorate the challenges posed by religion and culture on the bearers of the illness? As key themes and objectives therefore, this study attempts to; investigate the interconnection between mental illness and socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs and treatment preferences, explore the various ways where socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs impact mentally ill persons and their families, and to determine possible ways which can ameliorate the challenges posed by religion and culture upon persons with mental illness and that can ultimately result in self-sufficiency and empowering integration of persons with mental illness into the mainstream society. Ultimately, through the utilization of comparative and inductive approaches, this research project is expected to address cross-cutting themes and establish significant links between socio-cultural and religious factors on one hand and perception, treatment seeking behavior and treatment preference of Orthodox Christians of the aforementioned ethnic group on the other.