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At the coalface of collaborative mental health care: a qualitative study of governance and power in district-level service provision in South Africa

CITATION

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SUMMARY

Globally, there is an urgency to address fragmented mental health systems, especially in low-to- middle income countries. State and non-state mental health service collaboration is a central strategy to strengthen care. The study was undertaken to analyse the power in governance processes of public mental health service provision. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with state and non-state actors in mental health care in a South African district. Transcriptions were thematically analysed using the Framework for Assessing Power in Collaborative Processes. Findings suggested that collaborative processes were significantly state-owned, in terms of funding models, administrative and legislative jurisdiction, and state hierarchical referral structure. No formal agreements were in place, elevating the importance of key network actors to bring less-endowed NGOs into the service network. Fragmentation between the Departments of Health and Social Development was telling in district forums. Resistance to power structures unfolded, some participants sidestepping traditional hierarchies to leverage funding and support. The paper highlights the complexities and different facets of power in integrated mental health care in a South African district, adding to growing literature on the social mechanisms that influence collaboration.