

Malawi Youth Mental Health Literacy: April 2022 Newsletter

Dear all,

This month's newsletter profiles people involved in helping us complete the national youth mental health literacy (MHL) survey for this project. We highlight their personal interests, backgrounds and how their involvement helped us achieve our project targets. We also give an update on completed activities and preliminary results, along with our current ongoing activities and expected implementation procedures.

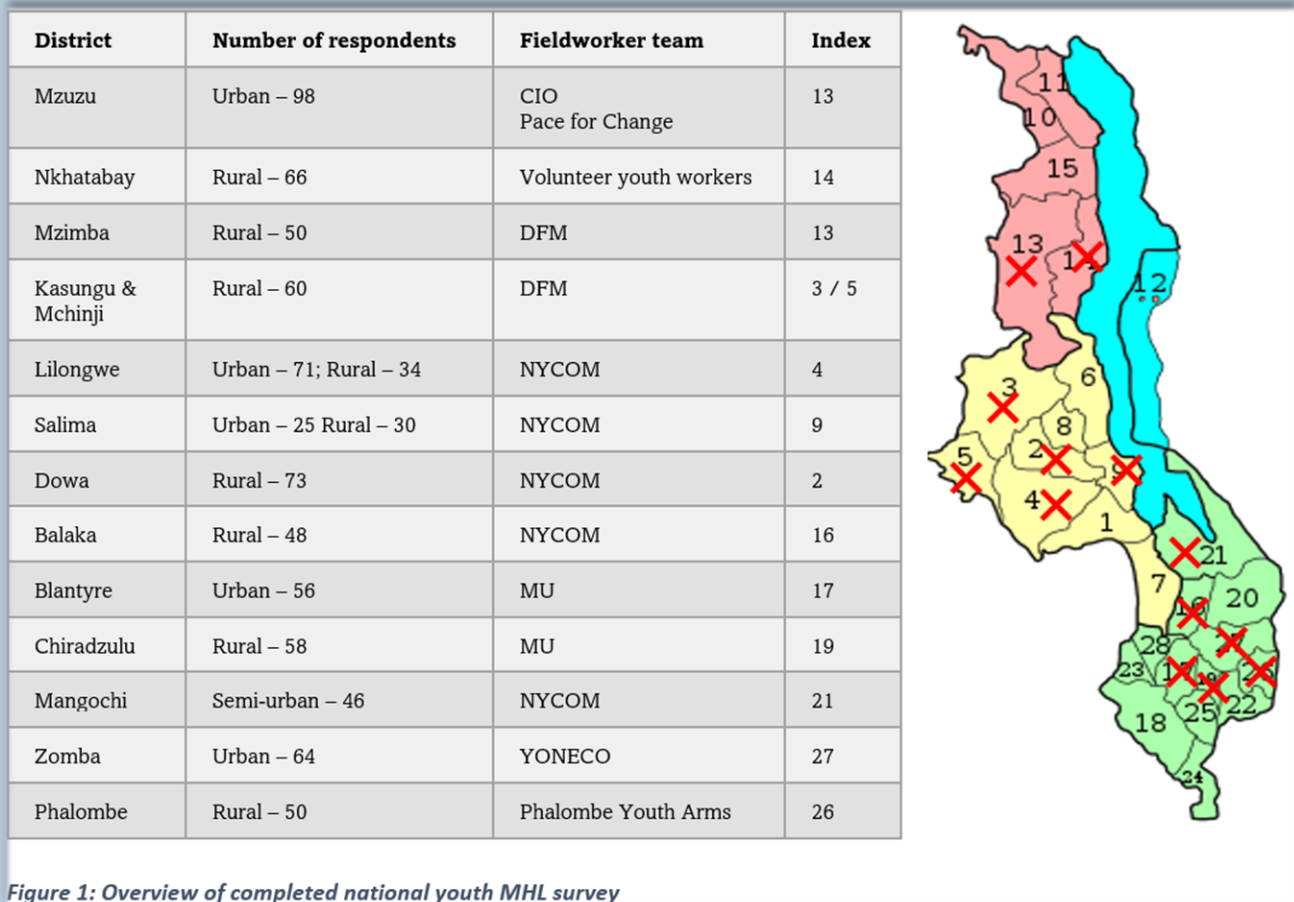


Figure 1: Overview of completed national youth MHL survey

The red X on the map in Figure 1 marks the 13 districts targeted for survey recruitment. The survey data is currently being analysed. The process of translating the original English MHL survey into Chichewa for rural communities highlighted the issue that there are no words to describe specific mental health terms in the local language. We also found approximately 50% of our Chichewa survey respondents who knew someone with a mental health problem had difficulties describing what the mental health problem was. This indicates lacking mental health knowledge. For more details on these issues, you can listen to a recent talk by Dr Jumbe titled '[Talking out the stigma](#)', which she gave at the London International Development Centre in January 2022, also available on [YouTube](#). You can also read our recently published article titled '[We do not talk about it](#)'.

Maryrose and Chimwemwe (featured below) are some of the fieldworkers who facilitated data collection of our youth MHL survey which was completed in December 2021.

Mary Rose Simbeye is head of the Monitoring, Planning and Evaluation Department at the **National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM)**. Dr Sandra Jumbe (Project lead) approached NYCOM to assist the MHL project with youth engagement. During the national youth MHL survey, she recruited 327 youth in the central and southern region (Salima, Lilongwe rural and urban, Mangochi, Balaka and Dowa). Quoting her words, “Mental health is very important because if you are not good in your state of mental health then there is so much you cannot do”. Maryrose believes discussing and addressing youth mental health is very because youth “are the drivers of the development agenda”.



Maryrose describes herself as a positive thinker and go getter who does not wait for someone to do things for her. She gets into it herself no matter how hard it is. Her positivity was influenced by her cousin, who introduced her to a book called The Power of Positive thinking. Ever since, she loves reading books that help one grow in wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

NYCOM was established by the Malawi government to facilitate national coordination, implementation, and evaluation of youth programmes in Malawi, following a mushrooming of youth advocacy organisations. The council exists as an implementing arm of the Ministry of Labour, Youth and Sports. [Click here to learn more](#)



Chimwemwe Banda is the founder of **Citizen Impact Organization (CIO)**, a youth-led Malawian non-profit organisation that works to empower, lead, change and influence the social and economic wellbeing of youth, women, girls, and children rights. She describes herself as a gender equality advocate, human rights activist, social worker, sports mentor, entrepreneurship advocate and menstrual hygiene management activist. She advocates for disadvantaged individuals, groups, and families by serving as a voice for equality and agent for social change, focusing her energy on uplifting core values of social justice, dignity, and people’s worth, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence. You can find more information on CIO on [Facebook](#), Twitter, and Instagram.

She was approached by NYCOM to become a mental health champion on a WhatsApp group called Malawian Youth Activists and she immediately accepted because she believes it is important to promote mental health awareness in Malawi. She states, “Malawi is one of the countries which is affected by mental health issues. We talk of suicide issues, people with depression and people in mental hospitals due to various problems”. Chimwemwe knew becoming a NYCOM mental health champion will increase her access to information and

knowledge that she could use to support youth with mental health problems through her work as a counsellor and youth advocate.

After Dr Jumbe approached Chimwemwe about helping with our project's national youth survey, she managed to get 50 respondents as she was surveying in Mzuzu. She is motivated to bring change and awareness in mental health because "people in Malawi do not understand when we talk of mental health, what is mental health? How can someone be a victim of mental health? Because they believe having a mental health problem is nothing."

There is great need to develop infrastructures that enable people in Malawi to openly discuss mental health and learn more about it. This is part of our goal for this project - to ensure every young Malawian knows what is mental health, and is aware of the importance of mental health. We plan to use multiple strategies such as psychoeducation in educational settings as well as community events in both urban and rural settings, to ensure the knowledge is shared widely amongst Malawi's youth regardless of their literacy levels, and economic status. We also plan to encourage academic institutions to think of how they can work with the young communities they serve to tackle the mental health issues using existing resources. Other existing structures that we plan to use for mental health promotion include radio stations, social media and non-profit organizations like CIO and YONECO that do mental health advocacy work, alongside NYCOM, who are already key stakeholders in this project.

Data collected so far has given us clear insights on what we need to improve capacity for youth-centred mental health support. In future newsletters, we will share more specific results from the national survey data along with more fieldworker profiles. Meanwhile, appreciation goes to all our stakeholders for their support on this project.

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