

## Malawi Youth Mental Health Literacy: Preliminary Newsletter

August 31, 2021

Hello everyone,

I believe we are fine and staying safe during these times of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In this copy of the newsletter, you will find a status update on how the project titled '**Increasing capacity for mental health literacy to improve mental health for young people in Malawi**' is going since we started earlier this year.

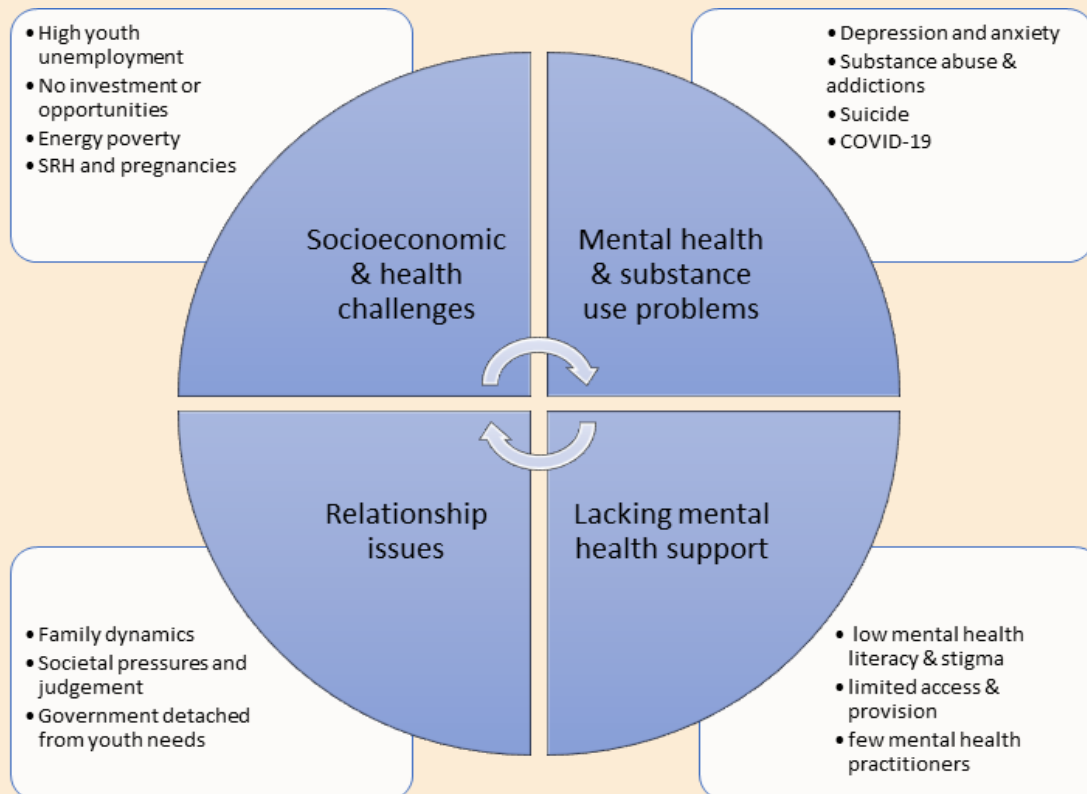
Looking at Malawi in general, with a single example; depression which has a 21% prevalence rate in adolescents shows how prominent mental health problems are to this particular population. But do people really realize what this means? Do they know anything about mental health? If they do, what do they believe are the actual causes of mental health problems? What are the impacts of not knowing what mental health is? These are just a few issues this project aims to address and implement solutions for. The country's chronic lack of mental health services and healthcare professionals amplifies limited treatment access, knowledge, and negative attitudes. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic; from its negative economic impacts i.e., the shutting down of businesses and job losses; disease experience, physical distancing, stigma and discrimination, all this has a great toll on our wellbeing, and is increasing mental health and related problems. Therefore, we are conducting a systematic review to better understand the determinants of substance use among the youth in Africa [[click here for article](#)]

There isn't much information on how to deal with mental health problems. Now looking at the growing population engaged in the drug and substance abuse at such times of COVID-19 amidst a financial crisis and the various adverse effects it has had as discussed above, the project will head on tackle mental health literacy among Malawian youth which makes up 24% of the population. This is identified as a solution to safeguarding the mental health of young people. The importance of this is protecting the future of Malawi and its generations as mental health will be normalised knowledge. Promoting mental health awareness and increasing mental health literacy at an early life stage will also have wide ranging social and economic benefits for these individuals as well as their communities.

The image shows a few common mental health problems. Which one are you aware of? How can you identify them? Does the native tongue have a description for any of this? Our reflections on these issues have been published in the London International Development Centre (LIDC) Blogs [[click here for blog](#)].



On a positive note, the focus groups that were done online earlier this year with young people from university and community settings are currently being analysed by the Project Lead, Dr Sandra Jumbe, and they are deemed to be a core part of this research as they have informed content of the developed mental health literacy e-curriculum. An outline of the main findings is illustrated below, and we hope to publish a more detailed report in an international journal soon. We thank all those who took part in the focus groups for their time and valuable insights.



We also have continuous activity of a national mental health literacy survey. The National Youth Council of Malawi and Drug Fight Malawi are providing both intellectual and hands on support to help us complete this work of which we are grateful. Out of our targeted, 400 responses have been collected so far from Salima, Mchinji, Dowa, Kasungu and Mzimba. This preliminary data is currently being analysed by senior medical statistician, Dr Christopher Newby based at Nottingham University, another project collaborator. The survey data collection activity is still underway, expected to be done by the end of September in which the mental health literacy workshops are supposed to begin.

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