Breaking the cycle of depression

In Africa, depression is the leading cause of disability for women. When a woman is depressed, it affects her whole life and the lives of her children who are less likely to attend school, are at greater risk of illness and more likely to develop depression themselves. StrongMinds trains community workers to become mental health facilitators and lead group talk therapy sessions for women with depression in poor communities. We’re supporting StrongMinds to expand its operations from Uganda to a new African country where over 1,200 women will be treated in two years.

**DURATION:** 2018-2019  
**FOCUS AREA:** Women’s Social and Economic Development  
**COUNTRY:** Uganda  
**PARTNER:** StrongMinds

**CONTEXT**

At least 66 million women suffer from depression in Africa, the leading cause of disability for women in the continent. Most of these women are simply ignored or ostracized. When a woman is depressed, it affects her whole life and the lives of her children who are less likely to attend school, are at greater risk of illness and more likely to develop depression themselves.

In developing countries, like Uganda, where mental health services are chronically under-resourced or unavailable, up to 90% of people who suffer from depression don’t seek treatment: social stigma and lack of awareness, resources and health-care providers are just some of the barriers they face.

**ACTION**

StrongMinds trains community workers to become mental health facilitators and lead group talk therapy sessions for women with moderate and severe depression in poor communities.
Empirically tested in Uganda in 2002, and subsequently endorsed by the World Health Organisation as a first line treatment for depression in low and middle-income countries, group interpersonal psychotherapy is the model used by StrongMinds. StrongMinds’ simple, evidence-based and cost-efficient unique model of group talk therapy includes:

- The recruitment, training, supervision and mobilization of mental health facilitators;
- The screening and enrolment of 10-15 women for weekly 90-minute group therapy sessions for 12 weeks;
- The support of the participants to establish trust, identify the triggers of depression, share strategies to overcome their depression symptoms and build long-term resilience.
- Women who complete the talk therapy groups not only resolve their current depressive state - they also learn coping strategies to help prevent future depressive episodes.

The therapy group’s benefits are far-reaching. Once free of their symptoms of depression, participants eat better, are physically healthier, take better care of their children, and are more adept at seeking help in other areas of their lives.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Establish StrongMinds’ model in Zambia and treat 1,250 women in 2019.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

The StrongMinds approach is a low-cost, culturally-sensitive, non-pharmacological, scalable and proven methodology that has reduced depression symptoms in over 80% of the women treated in Uganda (more than 25,000 to date). By leveraging partnerships with other international non-governmental organisations, StrongMinds is continuing to expand through Uganda and beyond.

In addition, StrongMinds is working to empower women who have successfully completed a StrongMinds Therapy Group to run their own Peer Therapy Groups. These women are selected and trained in an adapted StrongMinds’ curriculum to become Peer Facilitators. Volunteers go on to lead their own Peer Therapy Groups within their communities. This model is an extremely low-cost way for StrongMinds to reach potentially millions of depressed African women in the years ahead.