



Assessing Effects of Covid-19 Responses on Mental Health in Malawi

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 overwhelmed health systems in the least developing countries. Minimal evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on mental health in Malawi

The study had the following objectives

- To investigate the role of social/cultural norms in perceiving people with mental health problems.
- To assess the effects of COVID-19 responses on Malawi's mental health services demand and supply.
- To assess the effects of COVID-19 responses on healthcare workers' mental health (anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)).
- To examine the effects of Covid-19 responses on mental health (anxiety and depression) among adolescents.
- To implement an awareness campaign on the effects of COVID-19 on mental health and the importance of seeking mental health services.

METHODOLOGY

- Mixed-methods approach – quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews).
- Location – 6 districts (Blantyre, Mangochi, Lilongwe, Karonga, Zomba and Mzuzu).

Demographic Characteristic	Population group – n (%)			Total
	Health workers	Adolescents	General Population	
District				
Lilongwe	34 (31)	150 (44)	145 (43)	329 (42)
Blantyre	50 (46)	91 (27)	92 (27)	233 (29)
Mangochi	15 (14)	66 (19)	61 (18)	142 (18)
Karonga	10 (9)	33 (10)	43 (13)	86 (11)
Gender				
Male	46(42)	185(54)	153(45)	384 (49%)
Female	62(57)	155(46)	188(55)	405 (51%)
Total	109	340	341	790 (100)

Table 1: Summaries of basic demographic characteristics

RESULTS

Objective 1

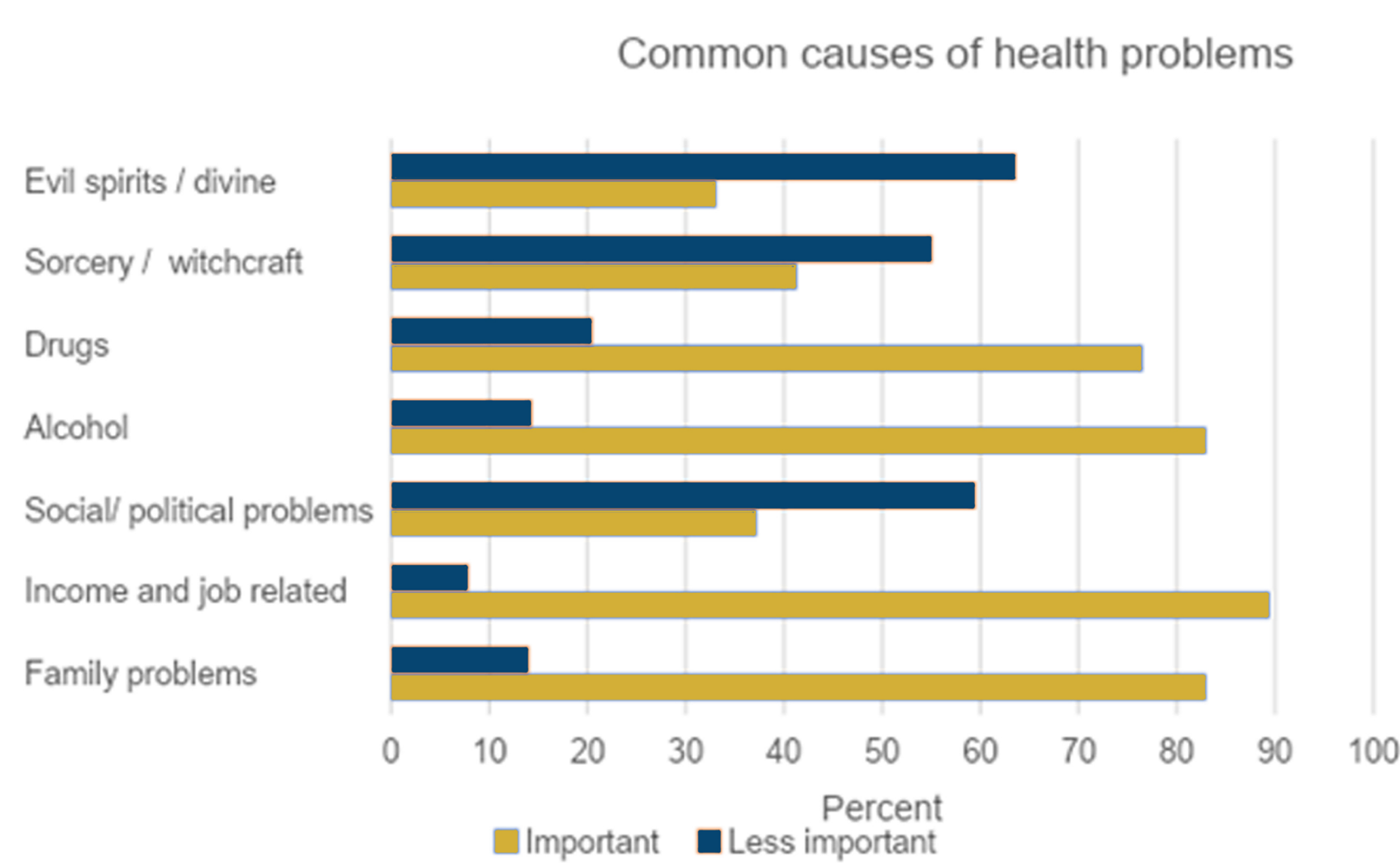


Figure 1: Perception of Respondents on Causes of Mental Health

“Mental health in Malawi is primarily understood from cultural and religious beliefs perspective”

- Culture and religion influence perceptions of people with mental health. Respondents said cultural and religious issues cause and heal mental health issues (Figure 1).
- COVID-19 affected cultural practices –funerals did not follow traditional procedures which allow communal grieving.

Output

Kainja, J., Ndasauka, Y., Mchenga, M., Kondowe, F., Maliwichi, L., & Nyamali, S. (2022). Umunthu, Covid-19 and mental health in Malawi. Heliyon, 8(11). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e11316>

Objective 2

ITEM/QUESTION	RESPONSE/ COUNT- n (%)			
	No	Yes		
Seek counselling before Covid-19	304 (89)	36 (11)		
Got counselling, treatment/medicine since Covid-19 started	309 (91)	18 (5)		
			1-2 times	3-4 times
How many times one sought mental health services before Covid-19	20 (59)	9 (26)	1 (3)	4 (12)
How many times one sought mental health services after Covid-19	13 (72)	2 (11)	1 (6)	2(11)

Table 2: responses on mental health utilisation rates before and after Covid-19

- Increase awareness and demand for mental health services.
- Public mental health structures faced numerous challenges – inadequate funding, a shortage of mental health worker experts and inadequate infrastructure (only one public facility provides mental health services).

Output

Mchenga, M., Ndasauka, Y., Kondowe, F., Kainja, J., Mmanga, C., Maliwichi, L., Nyamali, S. (forthcoming). Mental Health is Just an Addendum: Covid-19 and Provision and Utilisation of Mental Health Services in Malawi. PlosOne.

Objective 3

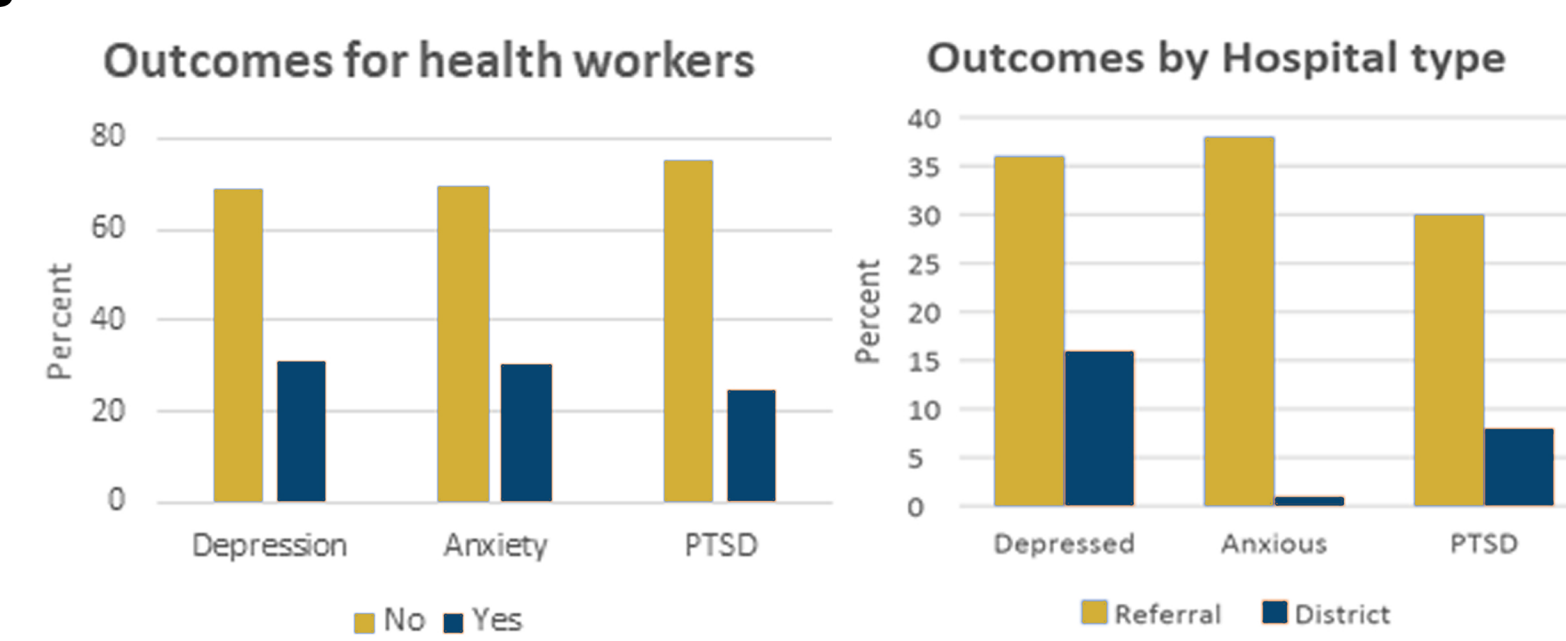


Figure 2: Depression, anxiety and PTSD outcomes for Health workers

- Significantly more healthcare workers with depression in referral hospitals compared to district hospitals ($p < 0.05$)
- Mental health effects were compounded by stigma towards health workers:

“...our landlords started discriminating [against] us; they said that we would bring corona [virus] towards their lives, and the interaction changed. There was a case whereby my association with my neighbours changed due to this pandemic. This affected me.”

Output

Maliwichi, L., Kondowe, F., Mmanga, C., Mchenga, M., Kainja, J., Nyamali, S., Ndasauka, Y. (forthcoming). Fighting COVID-19, Battling Discrimination: The Mental Health Toll of the Pandemic on Malawi's Healthcare Staff

Objective 4

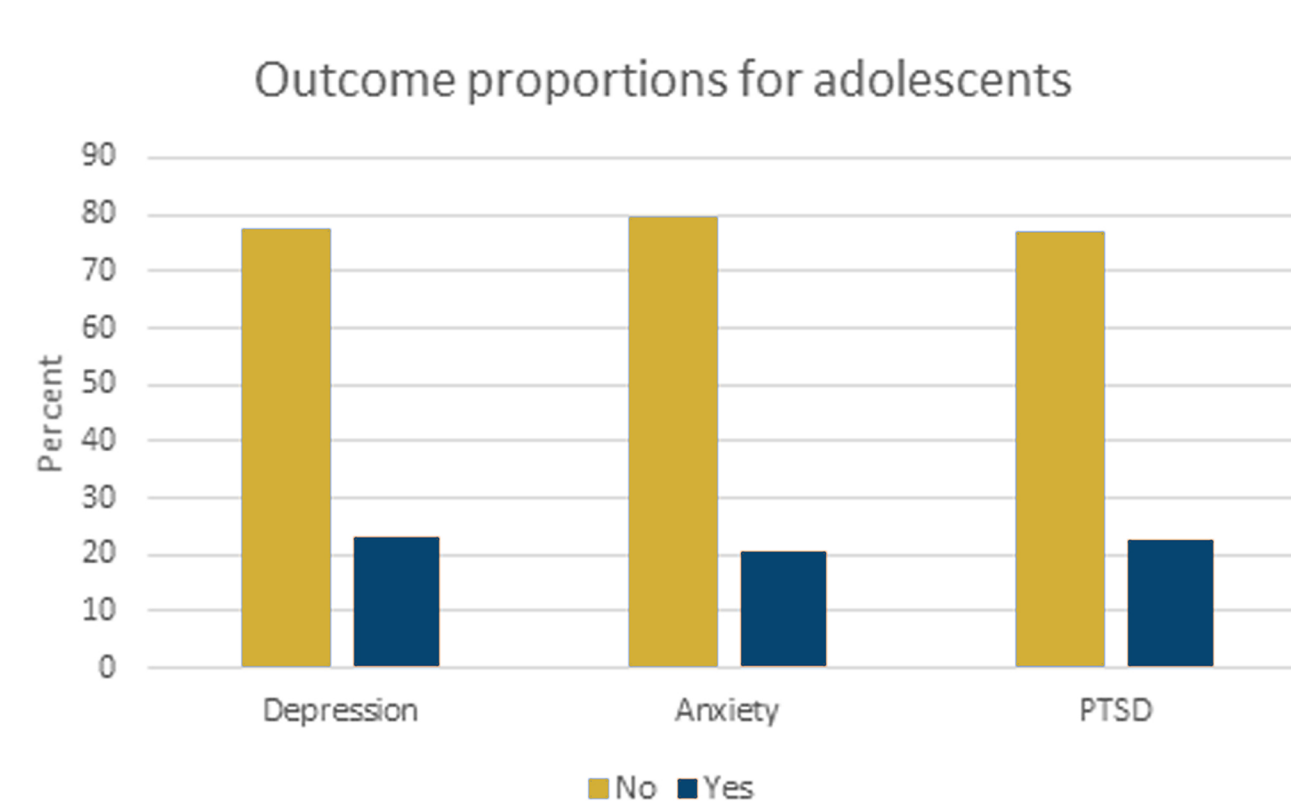


Figure 3: Depression, anxiety and PTSD outcomes for Adolescents

- No significant differences in proportion with outcomes in participants from cities and towns (all tests $p > 0.05$).
- The adolescents reported persistent discomfort, fear, sadness, hopelessness, worry and uncertainty regarding the pandemic
- Students failed to concentrate– girls dropped out of school due to pregnancies and lost interest in education.

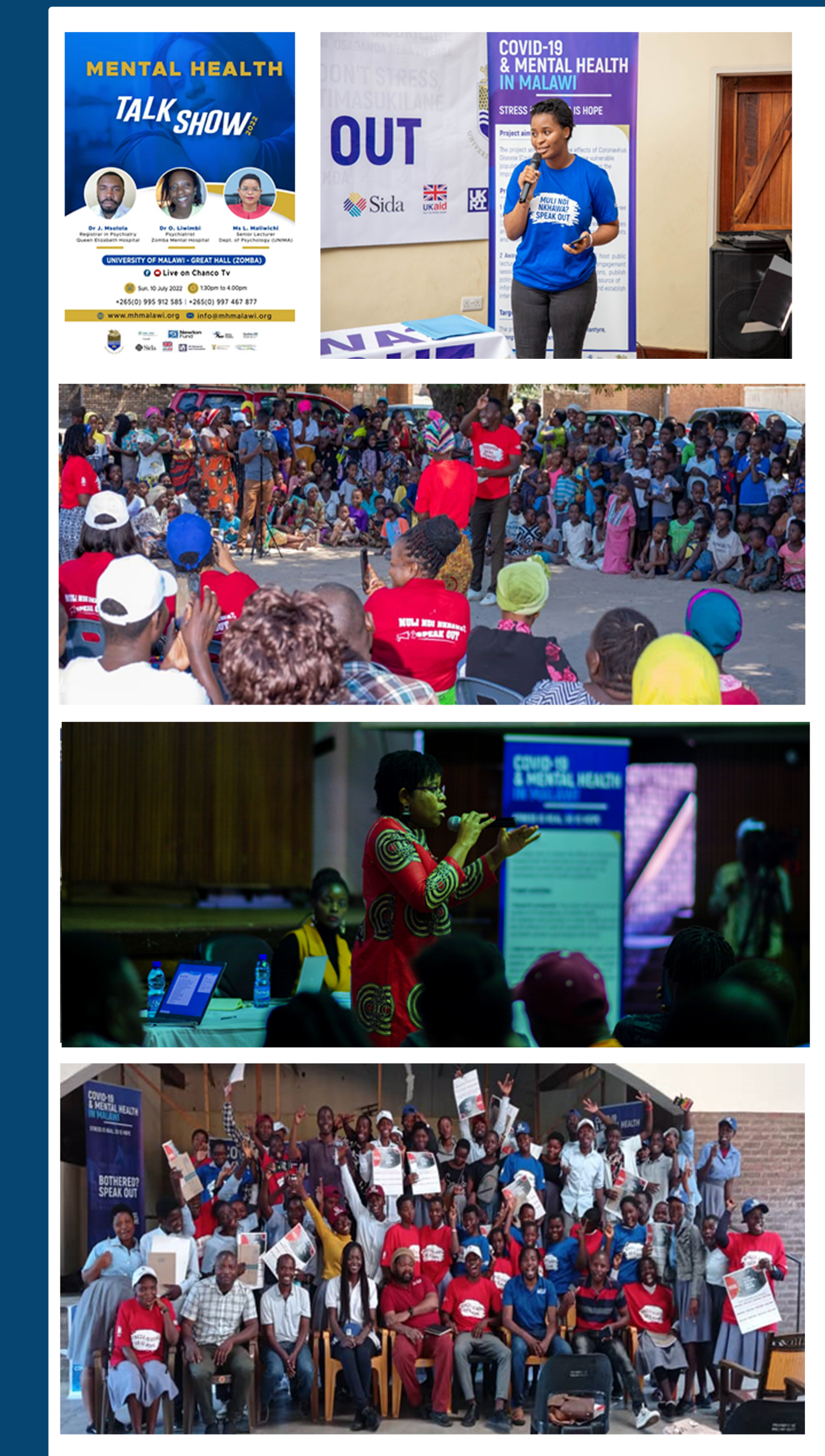
“As for me, while the schools were closed for seven months, I got pregnant, and I'm now having a baby, and I dropped out of school.”

Output

Mmanga, C., Ndasauka, Y., Kainja, J., Kondowe, F., Mchenga, M., Maliwichi, L., & Nyamali, S. (2023). The world is coming to an end! COVID-19, depression, and anxiety among adolescents in Malawi. Frontiers in Psychiatry, 13, 1024793. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.1024793>

Objective 5

The project implemented awareness campaigns in the four districts: Lilongwe, Mangochi, Karonga, and Zomba.



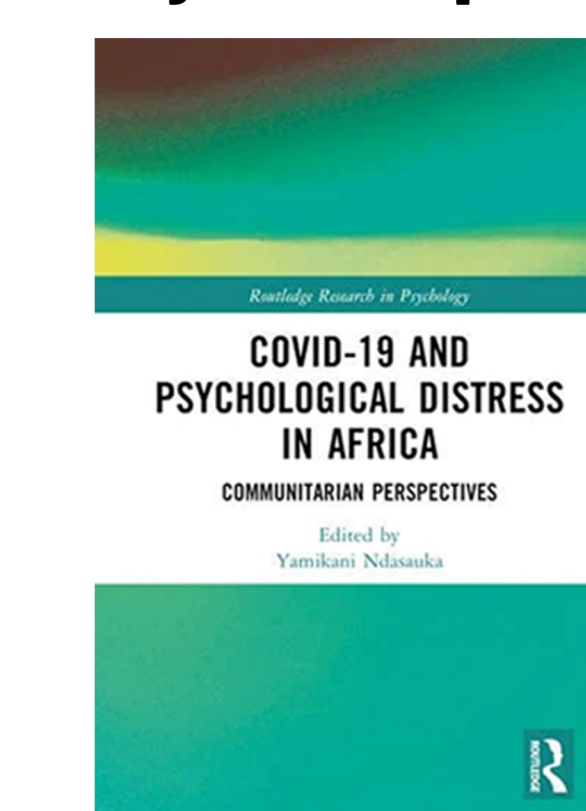
Poster of the UNIMA Talk Show. One of the participants recites a poem at the KUHES Talk Show.

TfD performers are engaging the community in Mangochi.

Mental Health Talk Show in Zomba

Students strike a pose after a variety show in Karonga.

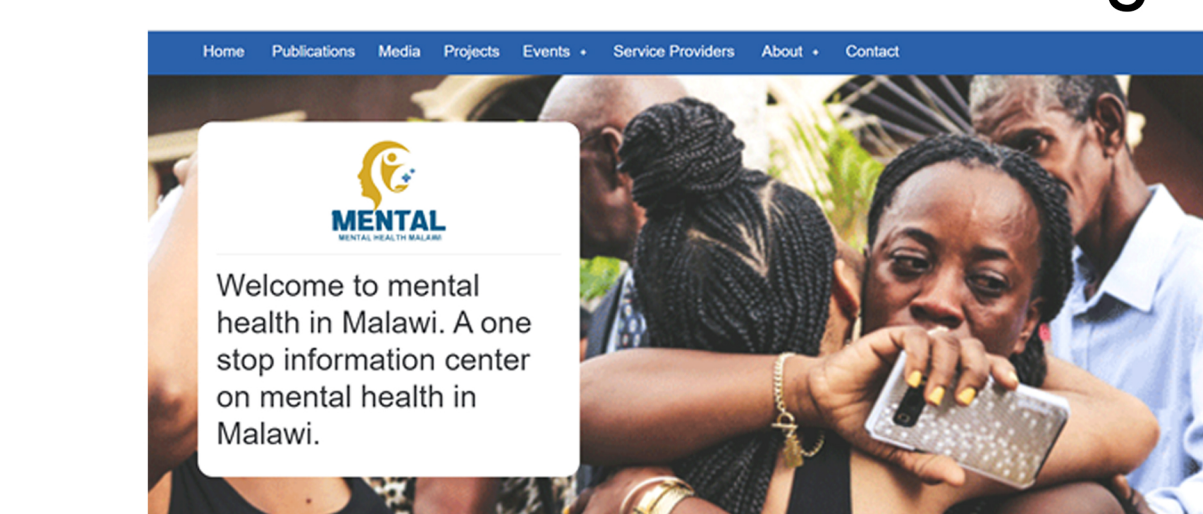
Project Output



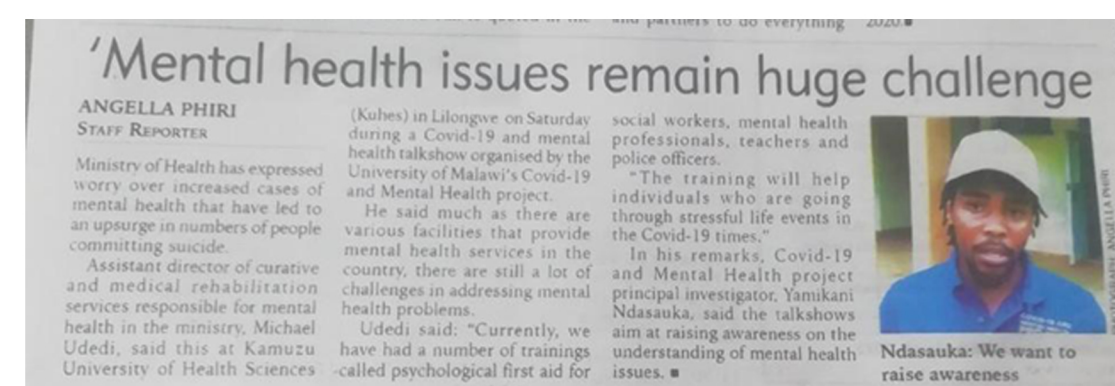
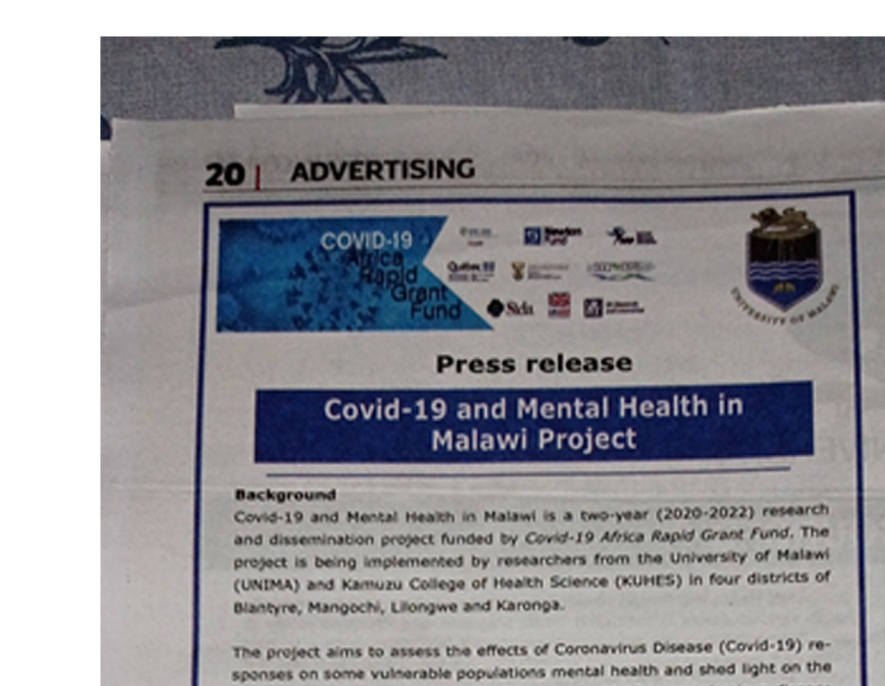
Ndasauka, Y. (2023). COVID-19 and Psychological Distress in Africa: Communitarian Perspectives. Routledge Publishers.

Dissemination

- Website: www.mhmalawi.org.



- Social media:** Twitter handle @mhealthmalawi.
- Three policy briefs in two newspapers–** The Nation and Malawi News.
 - Effect of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Adolescents in Malawi;
 - Effect of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Healthcare Workers in Malawi;
 - Covid-19 and Provision and Utilisation of Mental Health Services in Malawi
- One press release in two newspapers,** The Nation and Malawi News.



Outcomes

- Increased engagement with critical stakeholders on mental health and COVID-19.
- Increased awareness of COVID-19 and its effects on the general population's mental health.
- The Project reached approximately 100,000 people.

