

STRONGMINDS MENTAL
HEALTH
AFRICA

2015 Annual Report





StrongMinds: Treating Depression at Scale in Africa

Mission To improve the mental health of African women using simple, cost-effective, and scalable community-based group therapy.

Vision To treat and improve the lives of two million Africans with depression by the year 2025.

Letter from the Executive Director

StrongMinds is the only organization singularly focused on the number one mental illness and number one cause of disability for women in Africa—depression. There are an estimated 66 million depressed African women on the sub-continent, yet more than 85% of them have no access to effective mental health care.

StrongMinds' mission is to improve their mental health. In two years of work in Uganda, our group talk therapy model to treat depression has been extremely successful. Not only is our therapy significantly reducing depression in over 80% of our patients, but we also have gathered the evidence that when we help women to become depression-free, many other positive outcomes result. As you'll read in this annual report, when no longer depressed, these women are able to work and their families are strengthened because when you save a mother from depression, you save her entire family.

I am continually amazed by the difference our groups make for a depressed Ugandan woman in a 12-week period. In the first few weeks, our members exhibit all the symptoms of depression, including: low-energy and appetite, sadness, and problems concentrating. But, as the groups continue to meet and the therapy approaches the end-point, so many of our women show vast improvements in their demeanor and have significantly reduced depressive symptoms. By the end of our group meetings, many of the women are smiling and laughing—an outside observer would simply have no idea this was a group for depressed women. Importantly, the majority of our groups do not end at this point. Most women keep meeting, informally without StrongMinds, for the long-term, which means they can keep helping one another to manage their depression and hopefully prevent future episodes.

We've treated almost 1,800 women since 2014 in Uganda, and we are eager to reach over 5,000 women in 2016 as our program further expands outside of Kampala and into highly impoverished eastern Uganda. Our goal over the next decade, through 2025, is to reach 2 million depressed women throughout east Africa, as we expand through Uganda and into Kenya.

These are encouraging first steps for a young organization, but our true goal is more audacious—to bring an end to the depression epidemic in Africa, and to reach all 66 million women who suffer from this debilitating mental illness.

Thank you for your support as we move towards this goal.





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A photograph of a woman in profile, wearing a white mesh headwrap and a light-colored dress with a large floral pattern. She is sitting outdoors, and her hands are resting on a colorful, patterned fabric. In the foreground, the hands of another person are visible, holding a small pink object. The background is a bright green wall. The overall tone is warm and focused on the woman.

StrongMinds Overview

StrongMinds is a social enterprise founded in early 2013 that provides life-changing mental health services to low-income African women. We are initially focused on treating women of all ages in Africa who suffer from the most pervasive and debilitating mental illness: depression. We are guided by an ambitious and unique goal of treating two million depressed African women by 2025—restoring these mentally ill individuals and their families to healthy, productive and satisfying lives. We presently operate in Uganda, a post-conflict and highly impoverished country where 1 out of every 4 women suffers from depression.

The Need

Nature Magazine recently wrote, “depression is the biggest blight on human society—bar none,” and nowhere is that more clear than in Africa, where approximately 100 million people suffer from this disease. For African women, who are afflicted at twice the rate of men, depression is the number one cause of disability. Due to the lack of investment in mental health services in Africa, 85% of Africans with depression—including 66 million women—have no access to effective treatment.

Depression is not a simple feeling of sadness, which diminishes after a few days. Rather, it is a disease which disables more Africans than HIV/AIDS, cancer, or heart disease. This illness endures for weeks or months, and in some cases years. Symptoms include extreme fatigue, inability to concentrate or make decisions, feelings of guilt or anxiety, and a general loss of interest in life. An African woman with depression, compared to her healthy peer, suffers greatly: she is less productive, has a lower income, and has poorer physical health. If she is a mother, the negative impact extends to her entire family. Research shows that children of depressed mothers are more likely to have poor health, struggle in or miss school, and suffer from depression themselves.



The Model

StrongMinds implements an innovative, simple, and cost efficient approach to treat impoverished Africans who suffer from depression: group interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT-G) facilitated by lay community workers. IPT-G is a proven technique, supported by clinical trial success in Africa, which focuses on improving the interpersonal relationships of depressed group members. The therapy utilizes a structured model over several months to help group members identify and manage their interpersonal difficulties, ultimately reducing their symptoms of depression without the use of neuropsychiatric medications. Members of these IPT groups forge strong social bonds with their fellow depressed women, and most groups continue to meet after formal sessions end. These self-perpetuating groups permit members to reinforce the skills they have learned and enable them to manage and prevent future depressive episodes.

The Impact

Through 2015, StrongMinds has treated over 1,800 women with depression in Kampala, Uganda. Over 80% of these women were depression-free at the conclusion of treatment and the majority of these women showed strong gains in their physical health, employment, and the ability to save part of their income. Importantly, their children also benefitted by showing improvements in school attendance and nutrition. In 2016, the team will facilitate group psychotherapy sessions for over 5,000 impoverished and depressed Ugandan women of all ages—restoring them and their families to productive lives.



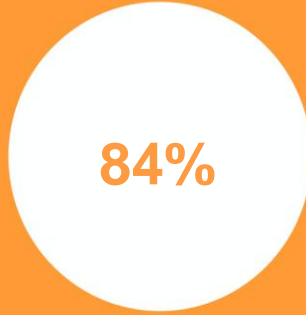


Impact to Date

Women Treated



1,298 women with depression treated in 2015 up from 514 in 2014



84% of treated women were free of symptoms of depression



66% of the small groups continued to meet even after the program ended

Women's Well-being



Medical care visits decreased by 28% during a specific time period



Consumed three meals a day has increased by 245%



Reported they had someone in their life who shows them love and affection increased 114%



Sought medical care for chronic conditions decreased by 28%

Average age is 33 years and average family size is seven.



Economic Empowerment

22%

Self-employment of women increased 22%



Women had 63% increase in ability to save income



Women in their primary occupation increased by 20% and reported far greater satisfaction with their jobs

67%

Unemployment of participants was reduced by 67%

Impact on Their Families and Children



Children who missed days of school decreased by 23% during a specific time period



Families that did not eat over a 24-hour period decreased by 74%



Families sleeping in protected shelters increased by 28%



Our Key Partnerships



Ministry of Health in Uganda

We partnered with the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Uganda to perform independent evaluations of the program. Outside program evaluations greatly improve program quality.



Medic Mobile

We are launching Medic Mobile's cost-effective mobile SMS technology that improves StrongMinds' patient communication and data collection and analysis.



International Rescue Committee (IRC)

We partnered with IRC to pilot depression treatment for women refugees in Kampala. With the collaboration with IRC, our ultimate goal is to treat tens of thousands of female refugees suffering from depression throughout Uganda.

**Beyond 2015:
What the Future Looks Like**





Our vision is to treat and improve the lives of 2 million Africans with depression by the year 2025.
To begin to reach this goal, we aim to:

2016

Treat **5,100** depressed women by the end of **2016**
Launch a major pilot of training volunteers to lead self-perpetuating talk therapy groups

2017

Scale efforts in more areas of **Uganda in 2017**

2018

In **2018**, expand in neighboring **Kenya**

Impact Stories

Women Overcoming Depression





Sarah

Sarah's husband has been missing for over two years, she was at risk of being evicted from her small plot of land, and her tiny business of selling tomatoes and onions was simply not enough to support her nine children. All of these challenges triggered in Sarah a severe state of depression.

StrongMinds convinced Sarah to join the StrongMinds talk therapy group, leading to rapid positive change in her life. Group members encouraged her to negotiate with her landlord in order to push back her eviction. The group also gave her the courage and some strategies to find and reach out to a long-lost relative who was able to help Sarah support herself and expand her business and income.

Today, Sarah is much better, stronger, independent and no longer depressed. Her kids are healthier and back in school. She wanted to give back, she wanted to help other depressed women who were going through what she had survived. With StrongMinds' training and support, she now leads her own group sessions, helping her peers remain depression-free. "My life is so much better now," she tells StrongMinds. "Thank you so very much."

"She wanted to give back, she wanted to help other depressed women who were going through what she had survived."



Angela

"She realized that there were other people like her."

Angela, a 60-year-old widow in Uganda, contemplated suicide due to financial problems. In 2014, StrongMinds diagnosed her with severe depression and welcomed her into a talk therapy group. She realized that there were other people like her. Her group members eventually helped Angela build the courage to ask her family members for financial help, so that she could begin to repay some of her debts. Today, Angela's depression symptoms are completely gone and her financial problems are behind her. She has even started several small businesses. Once she had lost hope and faith in her life, but now Angela continues to meet weekly with her therapy group members, helping other women stand on their own feet.

Aisha

“StrongMinds changed my life,” said Aisha, a 43-year old mother in Kampala. A longtime depression sufferer, Aisha successfully completed 16-weeks of group talk therapy with StrongMinds in 2014. At the end of her group talk therapy sessions, Aisha became depression-free for the first time in several years. “The group helped me learn how to solve my problems and now my life is much easier,” she tells StrongMinds.

Aisha now wants to help other women with depression in Uganda by forming her own talk therapy groups. She has volunteered with StrongMinds and began receiving training in group talk therapy. After her training, she can facilitate her own group talk therapy sessions and treat other women with depression—helping StrongMinds in its mission.

“She has volunteered with StrongMinds and began receiving training in group talk therapy.”





Articles & Press

The New York Times

Opinionator: A Depression-Fighting Strategy That Could Go Viral Tina Rosenberg, 4 December 2014



FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

“Get Happy, Get Rich” Catherine Thomas and Johannes Haushofer, 21 April 2015



TEDx

“Solving the Depression Epidemic in Africa”
TEDxCulverCity, June 2015



global health tv

“Huge Gap Between Need and Funding of Mental Health in Africa” David J. Olson, 29 June 2015



PIONEERS POST

“Dealing with Depression on the StrongMinds Way”
Fergal Byrne, 29 December 2015

StrongMinds US Team



Sean Mayberry
Executive Director



Kim Valente
Operations Manager

StrongMinds Uganda Team



Thank you to all our partners and individual donors!



Child Relief International Foundation

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Martinshorn Foundation

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- Nancy Remington
- Daniel Shetler
- Kevin Starr
- Kylie Stern
- Anne Weiss



Take Action

StrongMinds' vision is to treat and improve the lives of 2 million African women with depression.

You can help turn this vision into a reality.

To make a cash donation, click here:

<http://strongminds.org/take-action/>

For check donations, you can send to:

StrongMinds
515 Valley Street, Suite 6
Maplewood, NJ 07040

Thank you for your generous support.

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