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Zimbabwe: Mental Health in Adolescents and Young People (AYP)

THE SITUATION:

- Depression is one of the leading causes of disability in Zimbabwe
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among **15-29** year-olds. People with severe mental health conditions die prematurely
- Adolescent and Young People's (AYP) well-being requires urgent attention. Violence is at epidemic proportions and critically affects mental health
- The consequences include eating disorders, suicidal thoughts/attempts, low self-esteem, poor emotional well-being, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviours, teen pregnancies & STIs
- Access to health services by AYPs are hindered
- Mental health issues are acknowledged by AYP as a rampant problem, but buried by stigma

UNICEF TAKING ACTION ON AYP VOICES

- The 'blind spots' are mental health, injuries, substance abuse, skills for employability, connection & inclusion
- Awareness-raising campaigns targeting the general public are urgently needed to demystify mental-health issues, provide information and to fight stigma and denial
- Improvements in school/college curriculums - and school/college clubs - was emphasised as a crucial method for disseminating mental-health information and trainings
- There's a need to address drug and alcohol abuse as it is causing mental health issues in AYP
- More radio shows for youth empowerment and improving self-esteem were called for
- Engagement of survivors of mental illnesses is strongly called for, so as to broadcast reassuring, stigma-tackling messaging and encouraging dialogue
- Social media is venerated as a method of disseminating information, whilst simultaneously and contradictorily reported as a major cause of anxiety for AYP. AYP consultees were also cognisant that some no access to SM at all.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE INVESTED IN, ACCORDING TO AYP?

- Increased investment is required on all fronts: for mental-health awareness to increase understanding and reduce stigma; for efforts to increase access to quality, mental-health care and effective treatments; and for research to identify new treatments and improve existing treatments for all mental disorders.
- Participation in society by AYP is critical for nurturing mental health, along with an adequate recognition and addressing of, their needs
- Engagement of religious leaders in raising awareness on mental health issues: they are powerful voices for spreading correct information to entire congregations and encouraging health-seeking behaviour and halting superstitious beliefs
- Digitalization has proven to be key during COVID-19 and across the course of this consultation in engaging youths regardless of distance. But in cases where SM platforms are not yet available, e.g., peri-urban and rural areas, psychiatric centres and general hospitals which people frequently visit, could/ should provide mental services. Visual communication (IEC) materials could alert AYP to such professional services.

VOICES of AYP:

"Mental health is critical. Some pretend to be all healthy and okay, but it's only because there is no-one out there who cares. The society needs help, yes."

"There are university graduates who did social work and psychological studies; they should be encouraged to put what they learnt on the ground."

"Let there be peer mental health survivors to guide us"