



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: ~~2190~~ June 2018

African mothers to benefit from bid to boost mental health

A new initiative highlights that Maternal mental health across Africa must be addressed as a priority to combat significant human and economic costs, ~~a new study suggests~~

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh - working with colleagues from Malawi and South Africa ~~-- are building on existing found evidence found~~ that emotional and psychological problems in the weeks immediately before and after childbirth n the perinatal period are more twice as common in low-income countries as they are in prosperous compared to more prosperous nations.

The findings will inform a healthcare programme initiative, to be launched by the in- Malawian government on 19 June, which will bring brought together researchers, and agencies health and international development organisations, and government representatives from several African countries.

The new initiative -- the African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health -- will tackle a range of health and social issues with the aim of improving the mental health of women and their children. These include emotional and psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and post-birth psychosis, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Researchers have found that poor maternal mental health can disturb the mother-infant bond, impair mothers' ability to care for their offspring and reduced their use of health services.

Such stresses can be the result of gender-based violence, economic and gender inequalities, physical illness, or complications in childbirth or childcare issues.

The study initiative warns highlights that maternal mental health in Africa must be prioritised if the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved by 2030.

One of the project leads, Dr Angus MacBeth, from the University of Edinburgh's Department of Clinical and Health Psychology, said: "The mental health of a mother is essential to her wellbeing and that of her child, family and the wider community. Untreated maternal mental health problems frequently have long-term detrimental effects on the health, growth, and psychological development of infants.

He added: "Effective evidence-based interventions exist for the detection, prevention and treatment of maternal mental health problems. These are best delivered through integration of maternal mental healthcare into health programmes, supported by mental health services with specialist expertise."

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The African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health brings together researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh and Cape Town, Malawi's Kamuzu College of Nursing, and the Malawi College of Medicine. ~~alongside key s.~~

It is funded by the UK Medical Research Council's *Confidence in Global Mental Health* programme.

~~The alliance is working with the African Mental Health Research Initiative, funded by Wellcome.~~

The ~~project initiative~~ is also part of the Global Alliance for Maternal Mental Health – a group of international organisations committed to improving the mental health of women and children throughout the world.

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