



# Women and girls: Empowerment through mental health





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# Executive summary

Over the past several decades, much progress has been made on advancing women's equality and empowerment in many parts of the world, however there is still a long way to go. At the current rate of progress, it will take nearly 300 years to achieve gender equality by ending discriminatory laws and closing gaps in legal protections for women and girls around the globe.<sup>1</sup>

This research study, funded by Kate Spade New York and conducted by Prospira Global, explores an area of increasing need, largely left off of gender equality and empowerment agendas, that could help accelerate progress: mental health.

Although it has been noted that mental health and empowerment are closely aligned facets of a woman's life, the relationship has not been extensively studied, and the prioritization of mental health within the global women's empowerment community has also been largely unknown.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by:

- 1 Presenting **research** that demonstrates the foundational role that mental health plays in women's empowerment and how it is currently integrated.
- 2 Sharing **practical examples and solutions** by highlighting case studies of organizations that are already integrating mental health into their women's empowerment work.



**3 Issuing a call to action** for all organizations working to improve the lives of women and girls worldwide, urging them to integrate mental health support into their work.

We hope that this report helps to lay a more sustainable foundation for future progress towards gender equality around the world.

We hope it is a tool for advocates in making the case to your organizations, funders, and policymakers that greater action is needed to support the mental health of women and girls to achieve long term empowerment.

**Women\* experience more stressors simply by being women in the world today. 90%** of practitioners surveyed agree.

**Mental health is foundational to women's empowerment. 97%** of practitioners agree that investing in mental health improves the sustainability of empowerment outcomes.

**Not enough is being done. 61%** of practitioners agree that mental health is not adequately integrated into gender equality and empowerment work.

**Funding is the largest barrier to progress. 82%** of gender organizations don't receive any funding for mental health work, despite this, **55%** of organizations now integrate mental health.

**Organizations need to start from within.** Practitioners need support for their own mental health. Women's empowerment advocates and practitioners are twice as likely to experience burnout.

**Good mental health is her right.** Investing in mental health is not only good for business, society and the women's empowerment movement, most importantly, it is good for her. The women's empowerment community agrees (**96%**) that women have the right to good mental health.

\*For the purposes of this report, the term women is used to refer to women and girls in all their intersecting identities.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Although previous research has noted that mental health and empowerment are closely aligned facets of a woman's life, this relationship has not been extensively or rigorously studied or documented.<sup>3</sup>

This research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the connections between women's mental health and empowerment from both an academic and practitioner perspective. The research methodology included:

- 1 **Reviewing the existing evidence on the relationship between women's empowerment and mental health.** A literature review was undertaken to consolidate the existing evidence that links women's empowerment outcomes with mental health.
- 2 **Conducting a survey to understand the current prioritization of mental health within gender-focused organizations worldwide.** Prospira Global conducted an online survey between January 30 and April 3, 2023, targeting gender-focused organizations and practitioners from the gender community. The aim was to gain insights into how implementers<sup>4</sup>, funders<sup>5</sup>, and practitioners<sup>6</sup> work at the intersection of mental health and women's empowerment<sup>7</sup>.
- 3 **Providing practical examples and solutions around how, together, we can better support women worldwide through the integration of women's mental health into empowerment frameworks.** Case studies have been developed and included to demonstrate these practical examples. All of these case studies are from grassroots women's empowerment focused organizations that have been supported by Kate Spade New York and the Kate Spade New York Foundation.

### ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY



319  
responses



respondents  
from  
75  
countries



55%  
engage in some  
sort of mental  
health work

### PRACTITIONER SURVEY



924  
responses



respondents  
from  
99  
countries



52%  
have lived experience  
of a mental  
health condition

<sup>4</sup> *Implementers*: used to describe organizations that are primarily responsible for implementing gender-focused programming.

<sup>5</sup> *Funders*: used to describe organizations that are primarily responsible for funding gender-focused programming. This includes both private and public sector funders, as well as individual philanthropists.

<sup>6</sup> *Practitioners*: used to describe the population of respondents that replied to the individual survey. This includes anyone that has gender as the focus of the work that they do and is inclusive of advocates.

<sup>7</sup> In the absence of a sample database, both surveys were circulated among Prospira Global and Kate Spade New York contacts, as well as the contacts of strategic partners listed at the end of this report. It was also shared on social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. No compensation was offered for participation. More details on the surveys, and the methodologies employed, can be found here: <https://prospira.global/wgementalhealth>

## Forward from Kate Spade New York

At Kate Spade New York, we believe that a woman and girls' mental health is foundational to her empowerment.

In 2013, we began investing in women's mental health and empowerment, starting with the On Purpose program in Rwanda and in partnership with Abahizi Community Benefit Corporation (CBC), our manufacturing partner.

At Abahizi CBC every employee has access to full time employment, a suite of life skills programming, and mental health support. In the early years of our partnership, it became apparent that by investing in women's mental health, empowerment indicators were not only sustaining themselves, but improving. This was later validated by Georgetown University in a 2017 report *A Social Enterprise Link in a Global Value Chain*.<sup>2</sup>

We reaffirmed our commitment to mental health efforts in 2018 when the founder Kate Brosanhan Spade died by suicide. Today, we continue to integrate mental health into our women's empowerment work globally.

In 2022, we set a goal to provide 100,000 women and girls with access to mental health and empowerment resources through our social impact work by 2025. We are also working closely with our social impact council to champion women's mental health globally and have begun our brand's work in the advocacy space. And while we are proud of our own progress, we know it is not enough.

Women's mental health does not receive the time, attention, or investment it deserves. We are on a mission to talk about it, invest in it, and bring more voices and support to the table. This is why we commissioned this research and hope it will support you in making the case to join us.

Thank you for all you are doing. We know this work is not easy but it is rewarding and important to take care of ourselves while we do it.

Whatever season you or your organization find yourself in, we encourage you to continue on the journey. We and many partners featured in this report are all in different stages and learning as we innovate and grow. We know we are on a journey and we are glad to be on this journey together.



Liz Fraser  
CEO and Brand President, Kate Spade New York



Taryn Bird  
Executive Director, Social Impact, Kate Spade New York  
Director, Kate Spade New York Foundation



# Abahizi Community Benefit Corporation

## On Purpose: The Power of Integrating Mental Health into Women’s Empowerment

On Purpose is Kate Spade New York’s social enterprise initiative. Our mission is to use our On Purpose supply chain to empower the women who make these collections, and in turn invest in the communities they call home. Through this work, we have seen that investing in a woman’s mental health positively impacts her voice, choice, and power.

As part of On Purpose, Kate Spade New York has been funding women’s empowerment work in Masoro, Rwanda since 2013 in collaboration with Abahizi CBC, a local handbag production facility. As the partnership began, and as the program grew, the need for empowerment and mental health resources within this community became increasingly clear.

To address this need, the Life Skills Empowerment Program was developed. This program includes substantive mental health and well-being components such as individual and group counseling, access to mind body well-being programs, and soft skills workshops, as well as traditional empowerment programming focused on improving knowledge and decision-making around family health, nutrition, financial planning, and language courses.

In 2017, Georgetown University conducted an external evaluation of On Purpose. Among other conclusions, this study found that the enterprise provided traditionally marginalized women with an empowering employment

experience. This experience, coupled with mental health counseling and training, amplified the positive impacts on employees’ mental health and empowerment.

These results were further validated by through Abahizi CBC’s annual employment survey, which measures mental health outputs such as self-identified anxiety scores, perception of role in household decision making, and overall self-perception of empowerment. The 2022 report found that 89% of employees reported feeling empowered, an increase of 14% from the year prior, and over half of employees (53%) said they felt mostly calm in their daily lives, while 22% reported feeling anxious, a decrease of 7% from the year prior.

Nearly a decade later, Kate Spade New York continues to invest in and source from Abahizi CBC, and in turn, Abahizi CBC empowers the over 250 women who work there through full-time employment, mental health and well-being support, training and counseling, and healthcare for each employee and their families.

After seeing the profound impacts of integrating mental health into On Purpose’s empowerment efforts, Kate Spade New York began to support mental health programming for the broader Masoro community as well.

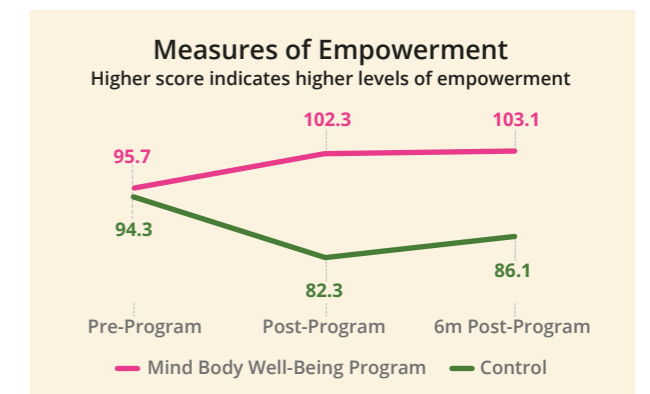
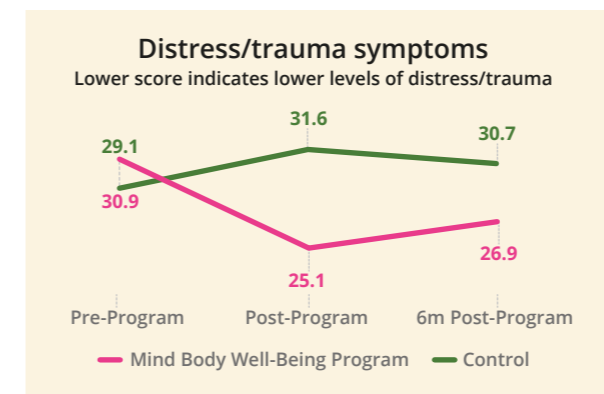
In 2018, Kate Spade New York partnered with Africa Yoga Project to bring the Mind Body Wellbeing (MBW) Yoga for Trauma training to community members in Masoro. The goal was to deliver a set of mind and body

practices and their associated mental health first aid tools, to help Masoro yoga students manage stress and support their wellbeing. Kate Spade New York continues to invest in the mental health of the community through continued MBW classes, and additional partner programming run by a Rwandan nonprofit, Isooko Community Development.

Through Kate Spade New York’s donor advised fund at the Tides Foundation, Isooko has been able to support over nearly 10,000 members of the Masoro community since 2019, 59% of those members identifying as women.

The results below are from an evaluation of the Africa Yoga Project, a program sponsored by Kate Spade New York as part of broader work in the Masoro community.

Compared to a control group, the women that participated in this program had lower levels of trauma and higher levels of empowerment, even six months after the program.



“When I joined Abahizi CBC, I had a high-level trauma from the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi... During my therapy sessions, I was able to open up to the counselor more than I used to do before because she showed me that she was listening. Today, I am able to speak out for myself, forgive people, and I learned to let go. I believe that healing is a process and all I can say is that I am progressing.”

Benimana, Abahizi CBC employee



“This report provides much needed evidence on the costs of structural inequalities and sexism on the well-being of girls and women and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Half the human family is experiencing stress and trauma simply because of who they are. This is unacceptable and untenable, particularly since those stressors and risks to women’s mental health and well-being are further exacerbated when we try to challenge them.”

Sia Nowrojee, Senior Director,  
Girls & Women Strategy, United Nations Foundation

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

# Women experience more stressors simply by being women in the world today

Women, and especially women from systematically disadvantaged and marginalized communities<sup>8,9</sup>, bear the brunt of many of our world’s greatest challenges. From uncompensated care work to lost income in economic downturns, heightened mortality during public health emergencies, limited access to resources as a result of the climate crisis, alarming high levels of gender-based violence, and elevated susceptibility during conflict to humanitarian disasters.

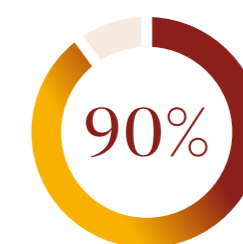
Many of the social and economic crises we now face have an outsized impact on women, a trend which is also reflected in our research. And, mental health is greatly shaped by these social and economic determinants – particularly social inclusion, access to economic resources, education, and freedom from discrimination and violence<sup>11</sup>.

These stressors often contribute to vicious cycles that hinder women from changing their circumstances. When mental health is not adequately supported or when trauma occurs, women suffer. This can create a difficult-to-break cycle, and women experience higher

**Systematically disadvantaged communities** are those for which the social conditions in which people are born and live do not ensure opportunities to be healthy and to flourish. They are disproportionately affected by disease, dysfunction and ill-being<sup>8</sup>.

**Underserved and marginalized populations** include people who experience discrimination of any kind and encounter barriers (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, economic, cultural, and/or linguistic) to accessing public goods and services<sup>8</sup>.

Belonging to such groups or even being perceived to belong to them heightens the risk of inequalities in terms of access to rights and use of services and goods in a variety of domains, such as access to education, employment, health, social and housing assistance, protection against domestic or institutional violence, and justice<sup>9</sup>.



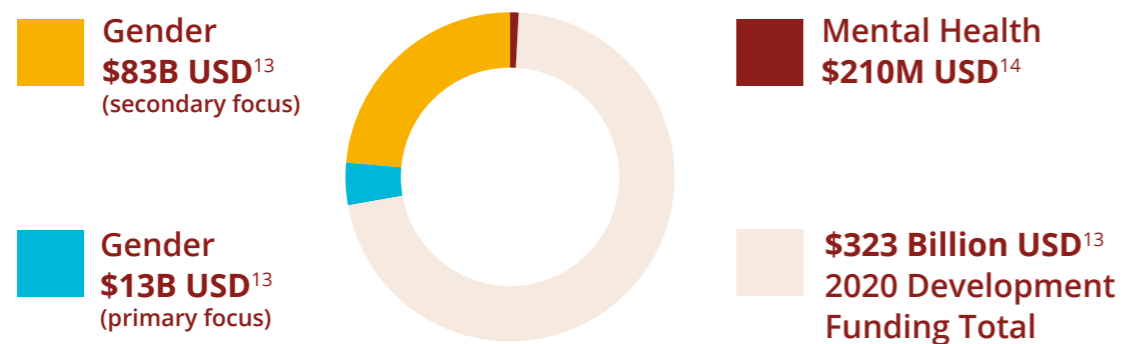
**believe that women experience increasing stressors simply by being a woman**

levels of mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which women experience at twice the rate of men<sup>10</sup>

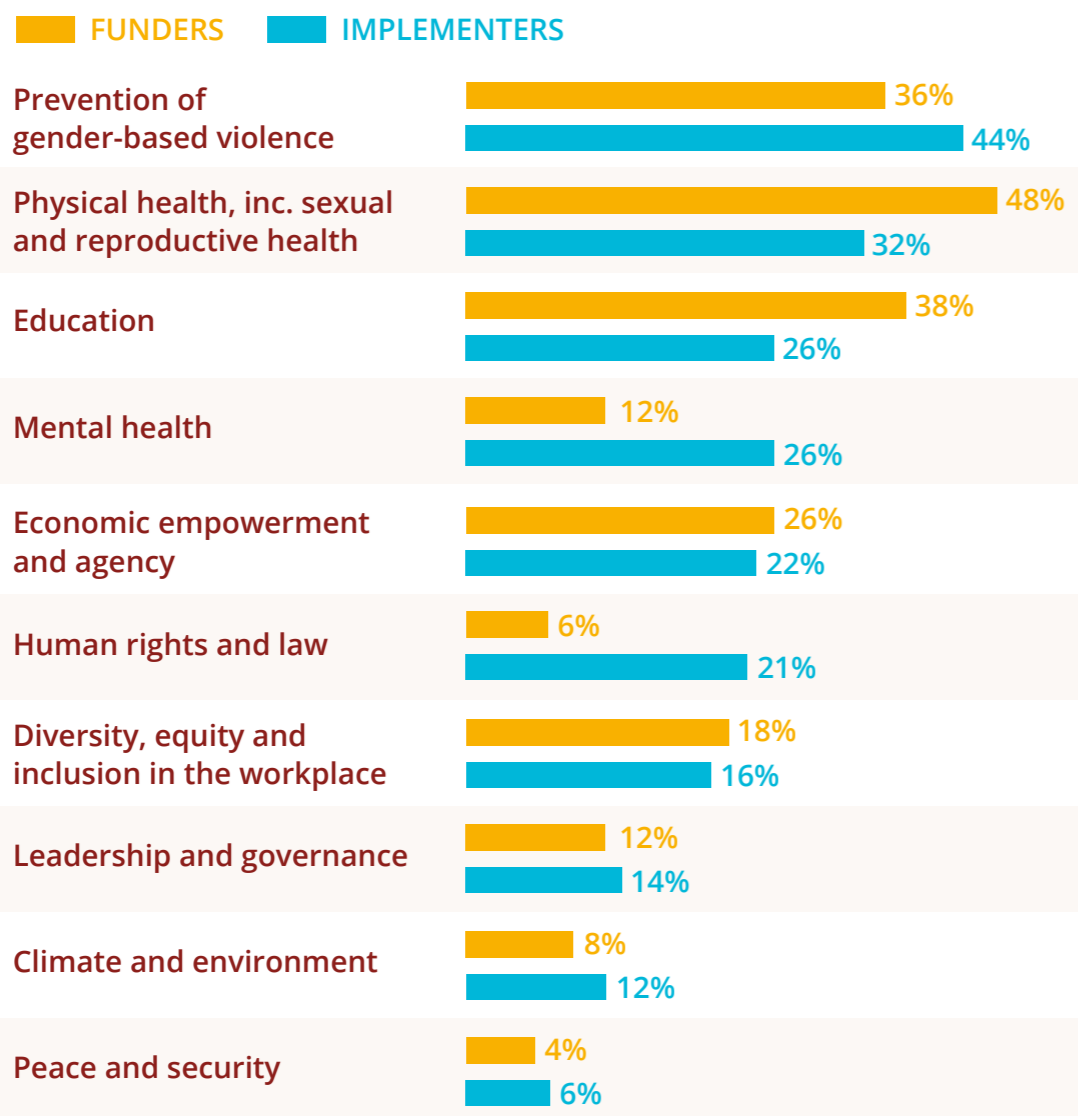
Nearly all practitioners surveyed (90%) agreed that women experience increasing stressors simply by being a woman in the world today. As Maliha Khan, CEO of Women Deliver, said in September 2022 at an event hosted by Kate Spade New York alongside the United Nations General Assembly, “for women, life is trauma”.



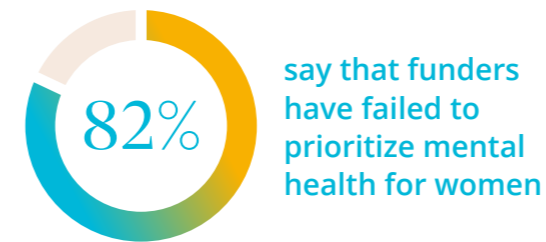
## GLOBAL FUNDING NUMBERS FOR GENDER AND MENTAL HEALTH



## AREAS THAT ARE A TOP THREE PRIORITY FOR GENDER ORGANIZATIONS



## Mental health has historically been neglected, underfunded, and undervalued



Funding for women’s mental health has historically been underfunded and undervalued by both national and international systems worldwide. And, within current approaches to women’s empowerment, mental health does not have a clear role and has not been prioritized in research or practice<sup>12</sup>, and the gender community agrees with this. Nearly two-thirds of practitioners (61%) agree that mental health is not adequately integrated into gender equality and empowerment work, and 82% of practitioners agree that funders have failed to prioritize mental health for women.

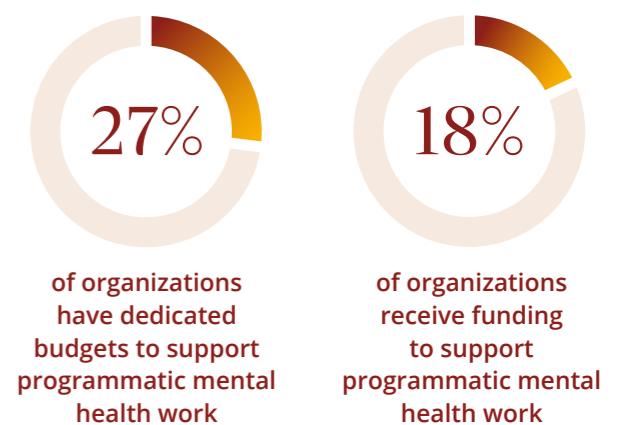
In 2020, out of the \$323 billion USD spent on global development worldwide, only 27% (\$86 billion USD) was spent on programs that had gender as a primary or secondary focus<sup>13</sup>, compared to just \$210 million USD spent on mental health<sup>14</sup>.

Over half (55%) of organizations participating in this survey said that they do mental health work as part of their broader gender equality and empowerment programming. However, the number of organizations doing mental health work (as well as prevention of

GBV) was substantially lower among funders, who were more likely to focus on physical health, education, or economic empowerment and agency – suggesting a misalignment between interests of funders and implementers.

When asked about the top three organizational priorities according to budget spend, only 26% of implementers consider mental health a top three priority. This number was even lower among funders (12%), further indicating misalignment between those who fund the work and the implementers.

This may be due to lack of budgets, as only 27% of all organizations have a dedicated budget to support programmatic mental health work, and just 18% receive any funding to support programmatic mental health work.

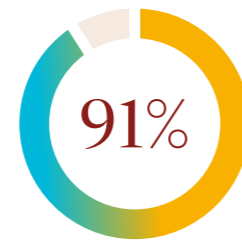


“Mental health has been missed as a foundational component of gender empowerment and equality for too long. Gender funders are falling behind in their prioritization of mental health, both for organizations and the people they serve, and must step up to support the mental health of women and girls as a crucial enabler of empowerment.”

S. Mona Sinha, Global Executive Director, Equality Now and Board Chair, Women Moving Millions

# Yet, mental health is foundational to women's empowerment

As part of this study, an extensive desk review was conducted on the intersection of mental health and women's empowerment. The results, summarized below and presented in a separate cited research framework, unequivocally support the assertion that mental health is foundational to women's empowerment, and 91% of practitioners surveyed agreed.



think that mental health is foundational to women's empowerment

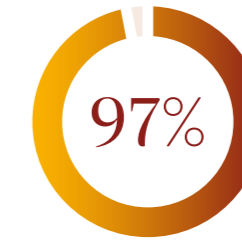


In the analogy of this framework, mental health is foundational to women's empowerment. It is the roots from which empowerment grows. Even though you cannot see the roots of a flower, they are foundational to its growth. And, just like the flower, women's mental health needs nourishment as foundation for her empowerment.

Mental health is greatly shaped by social and economic factors—like social inclusion, access to economic resources, education, and

freedom from discrimination and violence. These factors are entrenched in social and economic realities and they nourish the soil and allow good mental health to take root.

Good mental health can result in women developing more positive attitudes and mindsets about themselves as well as demonstrating healthier behaviors and promoting greater control and agency, supporting women in developing the agency, resilience, and self-efficacy to more fully participate in their lives across individual, community and societal levels.



believe integrating mental health into women's empowerment results in more sustainable empowerment outcomes

These strong roots help to develop self-esteem and confidence which is the enabler that ultimately allows empowerment to take seed. This leads to the expansion of choice and the strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so women have more control over their lives and futures.

We believe that taking this approach and integrating mental health into women's empowerment results in more sustainable empowerment outcomes, and 97% of practitioners agree.

## THE FRAMEWORK

- Inputs:** Integrating mental health into women's empowerment and equality frameworks and practice.

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- Outputs:** Through access to targeted programs and interventions, improvements are made to the conditions that affect women's lives.

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- Outcomes:** Women develop more positive attitudes and mindsets about themselves and demonstrate healthier behaviors. They fully participate in their lives and as a result develop greater self-esteem and confidence.

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- Impact:** By putting mental health at the foundation of empowerment, the ultimate impact is the sustainable expansion of choice and the strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so women have more control over their lives and futures.



View the full Women's Mental Health and Empowerment Framework





## Despite challenges, gender organizations are integrating mental health



Among the 55% of organizations that include mental health work as part of their broader gender equality and empowerment programming, nearly half (46%) of these organizations say that the amount of mental health work they do has increased over the last year. When asked why, the majority of organizations cited shifts in demand and organizational priorities, with funder priorities lagging behind.

At the same time, the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>15</sup> and others have observed a growing



prevalence of mental health conditions worldwide. Over a billion people globally suffer from a mental health disorder, with the majority being women. In many countries, these statistics are increasing.

Indeed, 84% of all organizations that participated in the survey (both those that are currently doing mental health work and those that are not) are interested in increasing the amount of mental health work they do. Similarly, 84% of practitioners think the funding for mental health within the gender space needs to increase.

### REASONS WHY MENTAL HEALTH WORK HAS INCREASED



Mental illness is a leading cause of the global burden of disease. It causes more years lived with disability (32%) than any other health condition. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety and depression prevalence has increased at least 25%.

**World Health Organization<sup>15</sup>**

Since there is a cyclical relationship between adversity and mental illness, we can expect that numbers will continue to grow as increasing numbers of people are impacted by large global crises, many of which disproportionately impact women.

**The Lancet<sup>16</sup>**

“Supporting mental health is not a demonstration of weakness but rather a testament to our inherent humanity. It extends beyond mere acts of kindness; it is an investment in the well-being of individuals and the resilience of our communities. Through understanding, empathy, and resource allocation, we have the power to nurture a global environment that embraces mental health, dismantles stigma, and ensures that each person is seen, heard, and supported.”

Caroline Makara, Chief Financial Officer,  
Abahizi Community Benefit Corporation

## Mental health programming is mainly focused on promotion

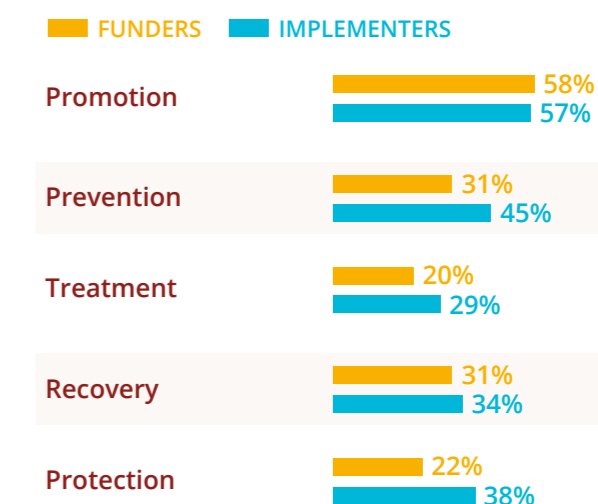
When it comes to the type of mental health work that is being done, the focus is overwhelmingly on general public education and awareness. Programming and service delivery were more prevalent with organizations based in higher income countries<sup>17</sup>. And yet, research has shown that the majority of people living with mental health conditions in our world that require treatment live in low and middle income countries.

Despite the high number of organizations now integrating mental health into their gender empowerment work, far fewer organizations said that they offer or fund treatment of mental health conditions or recovery and rehabilitation from mental health conditions. This is particularly true for the organizations that fund mental health and gender work, echoing similar patterns of funding priorities lagging behind need.

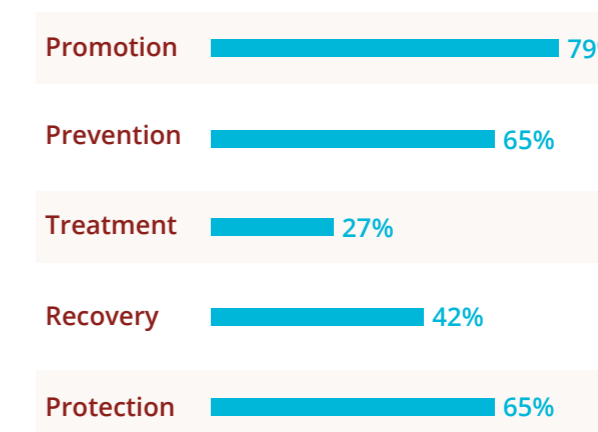
The need for greater support for treatment in particular from practitioners is clear. Almost all (96%) of practitioners agree mental health is about more than just well-being, women need access to trained mental health support.

This gap is also apparent when looking at the frameworks organizations use. When asked if their framework for empowerment included measures for mental health, less than two thirds of organizations (63%) said that it did. Among the group of organizations that integrate mental health as part of their gender work, this number rose to 70%. However, when asked what components of mental health are included in the framework, a similar trend emerges, with the focus being on promotion<sup>18</sup>, prevention<sup>19</sup>, and protection<sup>20</sup>.

### TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMMING OR FUNDING SUPPORTED



### ASPECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH INCLUDED IN FRAMEWORKS



<sup>17</sup> Classifications for higher income (high income and upper middle income economies) countries and lower income (lower middle income and low income economies) countries were taken from the World Bank's country economy classification system.

<sup>18</sup> Promotion of good mental health involves actions to strengthen the policy environment and the use of strategic communication for network building, stakeholder engagement, enhanced mental health literacy, and behavior change. Mental health promotion interventions improve overall well-being and are delivered in the settings where people live, work, learn, and thrive. These include school and workplace mental health programs, early childhood interventions, social support and community engagement, women empowerment, anti-discrimination programs, and other interventions that address the social determinants of mental health.

<sup>19</sup> Prevention of mental health conditions focuses on stopping people from developing mental health problems, supporting those at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems, and helping people living with mental health problems to stay well. Examples include anti-stigma campaigns such as Mental Health Awareness Week or teaching school children about emotions and mental ill health.

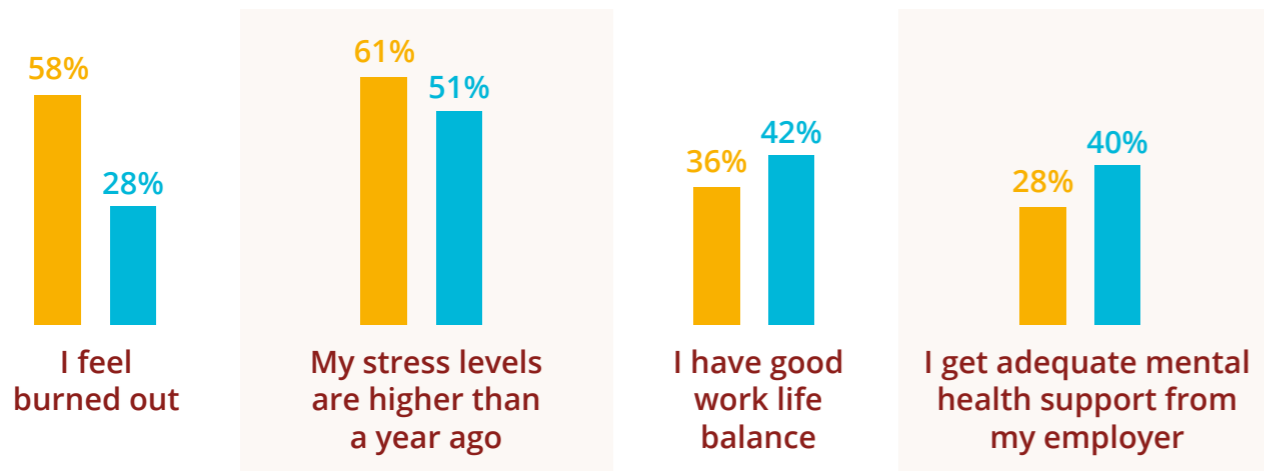
<sup>20</sup> Protection of human rights for people who experience mental health conditions focuses on ensuring every person with a mental illness has the right to exercise all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## More support is needed for those championing gender equality and empowerment

The other stark finding from this research is the need to support the mental health of those on the frontlines. In the practitioner survey, questions were asked that aligned to the Deloitte Women at Work Global Study<sup>21</sup> to compare the stress experiences of practitioners with those of a broader population.

Practitioners were more than twice as likely to say they feel burned out compared to the respondents in the Women at Work global study. They were more likely to say they feel more stressed, and less likely to say they have good work life balance.

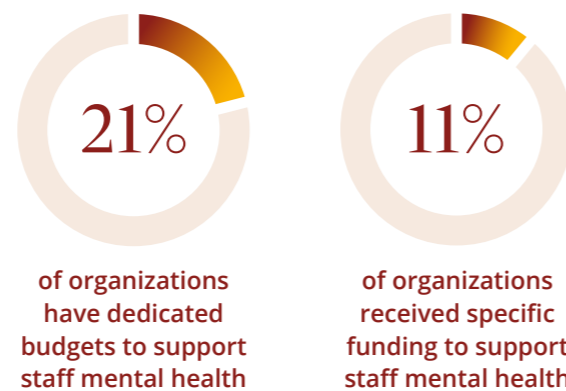
GLOBAL GENDER COMMUNITY SURVEY DELOITTE WOMEN AT WORK GLOBAL SURVEY



This trend is particularly true for practitioners with lived experience of mental health and those that identify as part of historically marginalised or oppressed communities, who were far more likely to feel burned out (63% and 68%, respectively) and more stressed than a year ago (65% and 73%, respectively).

Additionally, practitioners were far less likely to report they get adequate mental health support from their employers. This finding aligns with the organizational survey, where just 21% of organizations doing mental health work as part of their gender portfolio have dedicated budgets to support the mental health of their staff, and only 11% said they receive specific funding to do so.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that practitioners unanimously agree on the essentiality of investing in mental health to support long-term gender empowerment outcomes (85%).



## There are excellent examples of how to integrate mental health into women's empowerment work in a culturally competent way

Among the organizations that offer treatment for mental health conditions as part of their gender portfolio, the overwhelming majority are offering community based care (77%), whether it is clinical (56%) or non-clinical (56%). This approach aligns with the second objective from the World Health Organization's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan<sup>22</sup>.

In most cases, community-based care takes a person-centric approach by engaging individuals, families, and communities as active participants in care, rather than passive recipients. In this way, community-based and

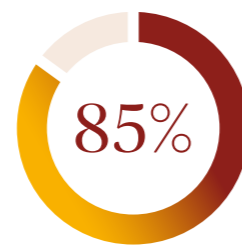
person-centric care strives to understand, respect, and adapt to people's cultural understandings of mental health in order to provide long-lasting and sustainable mental health benefits for all.<sup>23</sup>

On pages 4-5, 18-19 and 22-23 of this report we provide case studies of gender-focused organizations that have integrated mental health into their empowerment work. Additionally, we have provided an empirically-backed conceptual framework that shows mental health as foundational to women's empowerment (pages 12-13).



## Funding is the largest barrier to progress

Still, organizations and individuals that work in this space report facing significant challenges in integrating women's mental health into current empowerment programming. The vast majority of organizations (85%) said that something was holding them back from furthering the integration of mental health into their gender work.



**85%** of organizations have something holding them back from further integrating mental health

The top reasons were those that are funding related – unsurprising given previous findings that many organizations are undertaking mental health work without dedicated budget or funding to do so.

**41%**  
Have tried to secure funding, but not been successful

**33%**  
Insufficient access to external expertise to support programming

**15%**  
Not included in our current organizational strategy

**31%**  
No knowledge and/or awareness of funding opportunities

**30%**  
Insufficient internal expertise to support programming

**11%**  
Not included as part of the framework on gender equality and empowerment

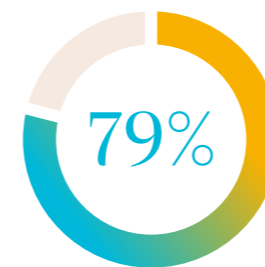
**23%**  
Insufficient research to make the case for support for funding internally

“Effective integration of mental health into women’s empowerment programs requires collaborative efforts from practitioners, implementers, and funders within the gender community. The recommendations put forth in this research serve as a robust foundation to initiate this work.”

**Norette Turimuci, Gender Advisor, Naya Consulting**



Abahizi CBC, Rwanda



**79%** of organizations say they need access to more mental health funding opportunities

When asked what they need to improve this, organizations cited more funding, more expertise, and practical guidance are needed.

This research strives to make the case for supporting women's mental health as part of their journey towards empowerment in order to improve the integration of mental health into gender work.

**Access to more funding opportunities** **79%**

**Practical guidance on how to integrate mental health into gender work** **52%**

**More expertise in mental health** **48%**

**Evidence to support the importance of mental health for gender empowerment** **46%**

**Help identifying and vetting trusted partners** **42%**

In the remainder of the report, we provide case studies of gender-focused organizations that have integrated mental health into their empowerment work, as well as an empirically-backed conceptual framework that shows mental health as foundational to women's empowerment.

# Rising Tide Capital: Starting from within

Rising Tide Capital (RTC) was established in New Jersey in 2004 with a mission dedicated to increasing economic strength, resilience, and opportunity for low-income families and communities through entrepreneurship.

In 2019, RTC began to explore the idea of adding mental well-being and resilience support (known as Flourishing Programming) to the full-time staff and entrepreneurs that they work with.

We spoke with Alfa Demmellash and Dr. Joynicole Martinez from Rising Tide Capital about their journey to supporting the mental health and well-being of those they work with, the impact it has had, and the challenges they have faced along the way.

## When and why did you begin to integrate mental health into your work?

We found that the reason many of our entrepreneurs would stop pursuing their dreams was often related to an intolerable level of stress, anxiety, and depression. And so we started reframing what resilience looks like, not so much from a perspective of economic resilience, but rather the ability to manage a business, responsibilities at home, and being civic participants.

During conversations about how to support the mental health and well-being of our entrepreneurs we realized

that we ourselves, as supporters at the frontline, were not supporting our own mental health and well-being. This is when we realized to do this work we had to start from within.

## What impact has Flourishing Programming had on the work you do?

We have a lot of tools for supporting mental health and recognizing how people respond under pressure and under trauma. And as an outcome, we have people who are able to talk about their mental health, their level of satisfaction, their depression, their anxiety, and then there's potential for support.

In fact, in our first full year of this work, **80% of those who responded to our survey reported feelings of reduced conflict and stress, and over 90% said they felt more engaged.** Approximately 94% of participants in the community-based framework training targeting those with mild to moderate depression or anxiety reported feeling better prepared to cope with their own feelings of anxiety and to recognize symptoms of crisis and depression in their immediate circle of influence.



## What tips do you have for gender organizations beginning their journey to integrate mental health into their work?

- 1 Senior level support is critical.** There needs to be a decision at a leadership level to recognize that this is an important and profound part of the work.
- 2 Start with surfacing and creating space.** People need to express how they are feeling. This could be as simple as sending an email that says *"is anyone feeling burned out?"* or starting a meeting with *"I want to make space for us to address anything that might be bothering someone"*. We have found that even taking those five or ten minutes helps us go faster in the remaining time.
- 3 Trust and boldness are required to shift the narrative with funders.** Instead of using strength and success as the justification for additional resources, consider being forthcoming about burnout and long-term sustainability.
- 4 Don't rush the process.** It takes time and support to recognize unhealthy truths and patterns, begin breaking them, and rebuilding. It may even require rethinking the way you work. There is no shortcut. If there was, we would have taken it.

Rising Tide Capital's Flourishing Programming is supported by the Kate Spade New York Foundation. RTC is committed to the resilience and flourishing of its team members, Community of Coaches and Instructors and Rising Tide Entrepreneurs. You can learn more about Rising Tide Capital here: [www.risingtidecapital.org](http://www.risingtidecapital.org)

## FLOURISHING PROGRAMMING AT RISING TIDE CAPITAL

Integration of morning resilience practices

Creating space for staff to express how they are feeling and get support if they need it

Conducting training on ways to manage stress and activate a culture of flourishing in the workplace

Using a community-based framework to identify and support individuals with symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety

Providing an external counselor for individual-level support

Operating on a seven week cycle – six weeks of work and one week of reflection and rest

Integration of trauma-informed practices across the organization

Certifying front-line workers in Mental Health First Aid

Including resilience and flourishing standards into the Community Business Academy offered to entrepreneurs



# The Lower Eastside Girls Club: Creating space

The Lower Eastside Girls Club (LESGC) amplifies the inner power of young women and gender-expansive youth in New York City.

In 2022, the LESGC launched the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness (CWBH) which provides wrap-around wellness services to all genders and generations with the aim of fostering collective healing, promoting psychosocial well-being, and sharing lifelong skills that ensure members and their families thrive.

We spoke with Ebonie Simpson, Co-Executive Director of the LESGC about their journey to opening the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness, the impact it has had, and the changes they have seen as a result.

## How did the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness come to be?

The element of wellness has always been a part of our programming because for women and girls, mental health is so connected to our environments and the role we play in society. It's hard to show up as your best, most aligned self if you're not able to understand what your lived experiences are and how they're impacting your day to day decisions. And so we try to help the young women that we work with do this.

## How did demand impact the design of the Center and the support it offers?

Around 2017 we started to hear young people and their families vocalizing their need for more support, which of course increased as a result of the pandemic. The beauty of talking about mental health and mental wellness is that there are so many ways to work on it. It's not a one size fits all, one person may need to see a therapist, another needs to go on a run, or meditate. The Center offers all of these tools, and more, to help women and girls in the communities we work in feel connected and heard, and start to heal.

## I know it's still early, but what impacts have you seen since the Center opened in Fall 2022?

The impact of having a physical space has gone far beyond what we thought it would be. Our girls and their community love being in such an immersive and intentional space, from our brand-new Mind & Body Studio to exploring the library and making tea in the Wellbeing Lounge. They love having tools in their toolbox to help them navigate life. And I think that's always been our goal - to have the space for young women to explore their dreams and their passions, but also be able to deal with life's challenges and learn how to support each other and themselves.

Young people all have such different stories, experiences, struggles, and trauma. But the young people we work with all have a unifying experience of a community that saw their full potential and supports them in every way, staff who really care for them and advocate for them, members who will show-up for them.



Photo by Kelly Adams

## What tips do you have for gender organizations beginning their journey to integrate mental health into their work?

- 1 Create space.** Having a community to return to and the support that comes with it has given the young people we work with the confidence and reassurance to become thriving adults.
- 2 Take time to listen.** Community needs aren't always expressed directly, but creating space often leads to the surfacing of needs among groups that directly benefit.
- 3 Ensure care is culturally relevant.** Mental health work is not one size fits all and will look different in different communities, with different norms and lived experiences.

The Center for Wellbeing and Happiness is supported by the Kate Spade New York Foundation. The Lower East Side Girls Club is committed to providing mental health resources to the young people and communities they work with. You can learn more about LESGC and the Center here: [www.girlsclub.org](http://www.girlsclub.org)

“I needed a connection with women that could help me find my voice. I always wanted to speak out, but I never had a platform or I never felt like no one saw me or heard me, so peer support gave me that and not only did it give me that, it helped me to be able to learn my voice and know that my voice matters. It's not just for me, it's helped get me in a place where I can be helpful for women who don't have a voice, and somehow advocate for them and give them support to be able to speak out on what they're dealing with.”

Tanya, CWBH Member

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT OFFERED:

- Mind and Body (including yoga for all abilities and tai chi)
- Movement and dance
- Wellness coaching
- Nutrition and healthy cooking
- Social services support
- Community art programs and gallery
- Community support groups
- Workforce development and economic wellness
- Community organizing hub

# Conclusion and next steps

Through this research, we learned it is not just us that believe in this critical connection between women's mental health and empowerment – the evidence is clear that others do too.

The results in this research provide the gender community with understanding of where we are now, and our hope is that it serves as a strong baseline for accelerated progress in the future.

We hope more funders and implementers around the world join this effort to put mental health where it belongs, at the heart of women's empowerment, and create a community of acknowledgement, support, and care, for the mental health of women and girls around the world.

Many organizations, including Kate Spade New York, provide employees and partners with opportunities to become certified in Mental Health First Aid as a practical way to create community and support around mental health.

Just as CPR helps assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid helps assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis.

Mental Health First Aid is a course that teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives participants the skills needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.

There are many more examples of mental health programs around the world that raise awareness, reduce stigma, and provide participants with basic skills and knowledge about mental health.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTERS:

### 1 Start internally

- a) Take a critical look at internal policies and practices and ensure internal teams have access to mental health support and culturally-competent care.
- b) Create safe space for your teams to safely discuss their mental health, while exploring ways to build your organization's mental health culture.

### 2 Listen and learn from constituents

- a) Engage in conversations with those you are serving to understand the challenges they face and what solutions may address them.
- b) Ensure solutions implemented respond to constituent needs specifically, are community-based and person-centric, and are implemented with the guidance of experts.

### 3 Learn and support each other

- a) Use the framework and this research report to advocate for increased action and funding within your organization and as a community.
- b) Connect with, support, and learn from other gender organizations and practitioners working to integrate mental health into their empowerment and equality work.

“The report has the potential to stimulate changes in policy, practice and research with positive effects on women's lives across the world.”

Helen Herrman, Professor, Orygen and The University of Melbourne



Abahizi CBC, Rwanda

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS:

### 1 Listen to your partners

- a) Recognize that women's mental health is likely already part of the work being done by your partners, whether you are actively funding it or not.
- b) Ask the organizations you are funding what they are already doing to support the mental health of their teams and consistencies, and what support they need.

### 2 Reconsider your funding priorities

- a) Dedicate funding both to staff and programmatic mental health work, making funding for women's mental health more easily available and accessible as part of broader gender initiatives.
- b) Be open to locally-driven and community-based solutions that integrate mental health into your existing women and girl's empowerment work.
- c) Dedicate funding to new and innovative work, remembering that for many implementers and funders the integration of mental health as a key component of women's empowerment and equality is relatively new.
- d) Ensure the mental health work you are funding is centered on best practice principles including being community based, human centric and culturally competent, and evidence based (including the development of new evidence).

### 3 Learn and advocate together

- a) As a new area for many funders, consider how your funding can strengthen the evidence base for investing in mental health for women and girls' empowerment.
- b) Measure and publicly report on your funding impacts, inclusive of the lessons you are learning.
- c) Actively encourage other funders to join you in co-funding, learning and catalytic initiatives to accelerate investment worldwide.

We hope this report serves as a reminder that investing in women's mental health is not only important because of the beneficial contributions to society and business, but also because it is a woman's right.

Every woman and girl worldwide has the right to good mental health, and the gender community is united in agreement (96%).

It is now time to be united in action, and we all have a part to play.

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## CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Co-Impact  
The Female Quotient  
Mindful Philanthropy  
The Spotlight Initiative  
United Nations Foundation  
Women Deliver

Thank you to the 300+ organizations that completed the organizational survey that informed this research. On the opposite page, we have listed those that agreed to be credited.

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Wedu Together As One Kithirune Community Based Organization Visionaria Network (USA) and its sister organization Visionaria Peru (Peru) Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia (ANHBC) ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality, Lebanon African Mind Empowerment Foundation Access Youth Initiative Uganda Solidarité pour l'Encadrement et Lutte Contre la Pauvreté (SELP) in DRC Youth Engaged for Development and Social Progress Pwani Youth Network Fight Against Aids Guinee West Africa(FAAG) Red Umbrella Fund Partners In Health Liberia Community Association of Women and Children with Disabilities (CAWCD) Operation Smile Glasswing International Groupement Féminin Pag-La-Naam Women Win Positive Women's Network Collaboration of Women in Development (CWID) Rosemond Girl Child Foundation (RGCF) Enriching Life Initiatives Badabon Sangho Programme d'Actions pour le Développement au Congo asbl (PADCO) National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE Ghana) Her Dream Initiative Centre for Women Empowerment in Technology (CWE-TECH) APIN Public Health Initiative UNFPA Amka Africa Justice Initiatives Thrive Well Girl Up Discover Gallad Relief and Development International Centre for Youths Integrated Development (CYID) Usbin IT Concept Rising Youth Mentorship Initiative Women and Children Welfare and Development Organization Youth Initiative for Change and Development (YCD) Fagligt Fælles Forbund (3F) Fundación Frida Kahlo Sub Rang Society Girl Effect Rwanda Youth Voice for Change Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW) YMPAI Foundation UNICEF Platform LAYALAT Global Women in STEM Inc. Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association ONG EL HANANE Centro de Promoción de la Mujer del Norte (CEPROMUN) Goodbirth Network YWCA of Hamilton (NZ) Women in Moov Find Your Anchor Shama Ethnic Women's Trust MUB - Home Foundation Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Alliance Safe Community Youth Initiative A.R.T. Fusion Yagebanal Ethiopia Charity Association Les Essentielles UKOO Human Rights Movement : Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan Banka BioLoo Limited Hogg Foundation for Mental Health Bhojpur Mahila Kala Kendra (BMKK) Association of women living with HIV/AIDs in Nigeria (ASWHAN) PaRiter EMpower, The Emerging Markets Foundation Justice And Prosperity For All L.O.V.E. Mentoring Program EDER (Environnement, Développement et Énergies Renouvelables) The U.S. End FGM/C Network MCLD Liberia Inc. Liberia's Initiative for the Promotion of Rights, Identity, Diversity and Equality (LIPRIDE) Women's Centers International Community Association for Vulnerable Persons Friendship Bench Climate Smart Agriculture Youth Network (CSAYN) One Health Plus International FIGO 2 Division Medical Services/Hospital (2DMSH) Crisis Text Line Movement For Education And Advocacy Network Salone (MEANS-SL) World Organization of the Scout Movement Justice And Dignity For the Women Of Sahel Althaë Strategy IM Swedish Development Partner SEEK-GSP Initiative International Youth Summit Sierra Leone Grace Foundation Gambia Educating Girls and Young Women for Development (EGYD) Almanah Hope Foundation Global Law Thinkers Society Women Relief Aid Destined Women Green String Network (GSN) AfriYAN Rwanda Youth for Mental Health The New York Women's Foundation



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“There is wide appreciation – more than I had realised before this - that good mental health and empowerment for women are mutually reinforcing.

The more that people, businesses and governments understand this link, the more possibility there is for fundamental changes to women’s lives everywhere, as well as to the contributions women can make to their families, communities and societies.

Women’s mental health and empowerment are everybody’s business.”

**Helen Herrman, Professor, Orygen and The University of Melbourne**

