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## Mental illness intervention among adolescents during the Covid 19 pandemic era

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### Abstract

According to the report done by the Population Council in 2021, 97% of adolescents reported having challenges accessing learning materials, 4% of 15-19 years' adolescent girls are pregnant, 75% of adolescents reported having missed meals, 52% of boys, and 39% girls reported experiencing physical violence and nearly half of the adolescence reported experience of depression symptoms due to Covid 19 complications. U-TENA in partnership with Brown University (USA) has been implementing the KUZA project since 2013. This project that targets young adolescents addresses the needs of girls on the frontiers of financial literacy and Sexual and reproductive health. In response to the effects of Covid 19, U-Tena in consultation with Brown University incorporated a mental health component in this intervention from October 2020. These two institutions came up with a mental health intervention project that sought to achieve the following objectives: create awareness on mental health through sexual reproductive health, capacity to build the support for adolescents to manage their mental distress and engage government and other partners to support young youths on mental health matters. Training and recruiting of mentors/counsellors were completed in January. With the consent of the parents and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (Health Program) One hundred and twenty adolescents in grade 5 who needed mental health intervention were recruited from several schools in the Viwandani informal settlements of Nairobi. Each of the eight mentors/counsellors was assigned fifteen mentees'. The first activity for the mentors was to conduct a Problem Management Plus pre-assessment test to assess the mental health level of mental distress. Each mentor had 15 mentees for focus group discussions that were conducted twice a month. The mentees who had scored about 15 points out of 20 on the pre-assessment were to undergo an individual problem management session of six sessions. For those that need more support referrals were made. Parents' sessions were done once every quarter. Parental sessions were required since most parents were struggling in providing psychological support to their children which led to some factors contributing to mental illness. Mode of implementation. In mid-November 2020 U-TENA conducted a survey in the fourteen villages of Viwandani interviewing three hundred and thirty adolescents on sexual reproductive health and mental health issues. The analysis was done by the brown student's team and inclusion in mental health intervention was highlighted as key as we offer SRHR mentorship to the adolescents. Out of 304 surveys conducted, 101 participants had difficulty sleeping, 73 participants had been physically, sexually or emotionally abused, and 25 participants had attempted to commit suicide. Within the first eight months of implementation, a drastic change had occurred among adolescents in their self-awareness and self-esteem.

**Keywords:** U-Tena youth organization, mentorship, mental health

