

# NEWSLETTER

RESEARCH NETWORK FOR DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH INTERVENTIONS AND POLICIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (DASH)

## DASH ANNUAL MEETING 2024



The much-awaited DASH Annual Meeting took place on 22-23 January 2024 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, marking the first year of a groundbreaking 5-year project mission to improve adolescent health in the sub-Saharan African (SSA) region. With the participation of 13 partners from 8 countries, the meeting served as an exceptional platform to deliver the one-year progress report from each working group and highlighted plans for the upcoming year.

The focus of the 2024 DASH Annual Meeting was on the challenges faced by each working group and the best strategies for moving forward into the second year. The meeting attendees also discussed the various light-touch interventions that will be implemented this year in the areas of nutrition and physical activity, mental health and violence, and sexual and reproductive health.

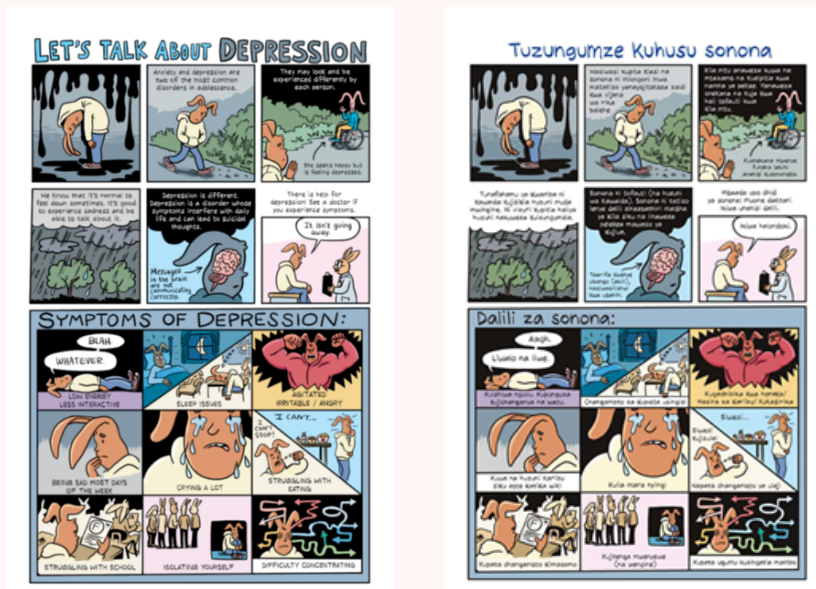


# ADOLESCENT WORKSHOP ON MENTAL HEALTH IN TANZANIA



Members of the DASH research team were lucky enough to visit a local school, Salma Kikwete Secondary, during the January DASH Network meeting in Dar Es Salaam this year. During this school visit, ten students volunteered to take a look at one of the potential interventions that will be used in the DASH project to increase mental health literacy.

The original comic book titled “Let’s Talk About It” is a 28-page Graphic Guide to Mental Health that was originally co-created by the Cartoon Studies Lab for the Ohio State Department of Health (USA) to use with middle and high school students (see the link to the full comic book [here](#)). This tool has also been translated into Spanish for use in primarily Spanish-speaking communities in the United States.



THE ENGLISH AND SWAHILI VERSION OF THE 'LET'S TALK ABOUT DEPRESSION'

The DASH team worked to translate the Depression section to Swahili. One of our DASH Principal Investigators, Dr. Azan Nyundo who is a Psychiatrist and Researcher at the University of Dodoma, validated the translation to ensure the meaning of the original English version was carried across in the Swahili version.

Members of the DASH team presented this translated comic book to ten adolescents who were aged 15 to 18 years old. The students read through the comic book on their own and discussed what they thought about it.



The key takeaways from that discussion were as follows:

- The students expressed that they were unaware of the symptoms of depression, especially the symptoms of a change of appetite and issues sleeping
  - The students had favorable connotations of the rabbit, most had seen a rabbit in real life and described their general thoughts on rabbits as “cute”, “good”, and “not scary”
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- Students had many follow-up questions regarding the causes of depression, what they should do if they think a family member or friend has depression, and what someone can do to improve depression symptoms
  - Students shared that a comic book instead of a flyer with only written text seems much more appealing, especially for younger adolescents



Overall it was very encouraging spending time with the students, and their participation and engagement were highly appreciated. The DASH team has since translated and validated the ‘Let’s Talk About Anxiety’ section of the comic book and plans to administer this alongside the Depression section of the questionnaire to hundreds of adolescents in Tanzania. Other partner sites within the DASH project are also interested in administering the Anxiety and Depression comic to adolescents in their country and efforts are ongoing to ensure each translation is validated by a local mental health expert. We expect that additional pages of the comic will be translated and disseminated to thousands of adolescents throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

# STAKEHOLDERS FORUM ON ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTHS HEALTH POLICIES IN AFRICA



One of DASH Network's partners, the University of Ibadan Research Foundation (UIRF) in Nigeria successfully conducted the Stakeholders' Forum on November 13, 2023. The UIRF is actively engaged in fostering partnerships and emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts to enhance research in addressing health challenges faced by adolescents and youth.

Prof. Adebowale, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, stated: "The forum is designed to provide pathways toward generating valuable tools to develop sustainable solutions that will empower the nation to translate evidence into asset-based, impact-driven policy options and actions that will drive positive changes for adolescents and youth. The forum also represented a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to come together, share knowledge, exchange experiences, and collaborate on strategies that will ensure adolescents thrive during their life".

The forum underscores the UIRF's commitment to leveraging partnerships across various sectors to advance research that can significantly improve the health outcomes of adolescents and youths in Africa.



*The involvement of diverse stakeholders from governmental, international, private, and academic spheres highlights the multidisciplinary approach the UIRF is taking to address these critical health issues.*