

HIV & MENTAL HEALTH

STRONGMINDS®



WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is more than sadness; it's a debilitating disorder that can affect anyone at any time. Often described as enduring physical and mental exhaustion, it disrupts daily life, impairing a person's ability to focus, accomplish everyday tasks, and take steps to improve life.

Untreated depression can erode self-esteem and lead to interpersonal conflict, social isolation, poor health, financial instability, substance abuse, and high-risk sexual behavior, all of which can create feedback loops.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

HIV status and mental health are inextricably linked:

- Antiretroviral therapy (ART) adherence is **42%** lower among people with depressive symptoms.
- The odds of ART adherence are **83% better** when depression was treated.
- Untreated depression is also linked to high-risk sexual behavior and substance use, **both risk factors for HIV**.
- Conversely, depression recovery has a **protective effect** on HIV risk, particularly in adolescents.

THE NUMBERS

70% of all global HIV cases are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Of new HIV infections among adolescents, **3 in 4 occur in sub-Saharan Africa**, and adolescent girls are especially burdened.

15-30% of people living with HIV/AIDS also suffer from depression in sub-Saharan Africa.

ABOUT US

StrongMinds is a nonprofit founded in 2013 to provide life-changing depression treatment to low-resource communities globally, with a primary focus in sub-Saharan Africa.

Our evidence-based group talk therapy model (IPT-G) is delivered by trained lay community members, enabling us to reach hundreds of thousands of people each year.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

StrongMinds' group talk therapy intervention focuses on improving self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, and personal agency as key elements to recovery.

Over six weeks, clients participate in group talk therapy sessions led by lay counselors from their local community.

StrongMinds partners with governments and NGOs to integrate our depression screening model into existing health and education infrastructures. We offer comprehensive technical and training support to help partners implement depression treatment within their communities.

DEBORAH'S STORY

Deborah is a 34-year old widow and mother living with HIV. She lost her husband six years ago and is caring for his many orphaned children. Life had become meaningless after testing positive for HIV and she even thought of committing suicide. She suffered from frequent stress-induced headaches.

Although initially distrustful of group therapy, once Deborah realized that other group members were facing similar challenges, she became more involved and participated in weekly activities. Her fellow group members encouraged her to live positively, adhere to her HIV medication, and do productive work.

When Deborah's depression symptoms improved, she became more supportive to others in the group, giving suggestions and sharing her life experiences.

In therapy, she learned new skills and coping mechanisms to deal with her problems. Deborah's story is still in progress, and she is currently being mentored to run her own StrongMinds group. She now feels happy, hopeful, focused and energetic. "StrongMinds has transformed my life," she explained.

At the end of the program, she realized that she had not needed to take her headache medicine since she had been feeling better emotionally.

OUR PARTNERS

Hope Worldwide Kenya
Project Hope Ethiopia
CIDERZ/DREAMS (Zambia)

OUR RESULTS

StrongMinds has treated depression in more than **622,000** people in Africa to-date, of whom more than **28,000** were treated through partnerships with NGOs focused on HIV care and prevention.

On average, **74%** of clients who complete therapy are depression-free, with the results sustained six months later.

After therapy, **42%** of sexually active adolescents began using contraceptives.

LEARN MORE

www.strongminds.org

