



The **mental health** of a mother is **essential** to her wellbeing and that of her child, family and the wider community.

Across Africa, millions of women experience challenges to their mental health in pregnancy and the postnatal period. These challenges include gender-based violence, economic and gender inequalities, physical illnesses (including HIV),

complications of childbirth, and the stresses of childcare. Specific mental health problems that affect mothers include depression, anxiety and postpartum psychosis.

The consequences of poor maternal mental health include individual suffering, disturbance of the mother-infant bond, impaired ability to carry out infant care and feeding, and reduced use of health services including HIV treatment, family planning and infant vaccination. Maternal mental health problems and poverty often co-exist in a vicious cycle of disadvantage.

Untreated maternal mental health problems frequently have long-term detrimental effects on the health, growth, and psychological development of infants. Suicide is a tragic outcome of severe maternal mental disorder, and is now a leading cause of maternal death worldwide.

The **African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health (AAMMH)** is an alliance of organisations and individuals working together to improve the mental health of mothers in Africa. It is part of the Global Alliance of Maternal Mental Health (<https://globalalliancematernalmentalhealth.org>) and works in close collaboration with the Marcé Society African Regional Group (<https://marcesociety.com>).

AAMMH calls for multi-level action to tackle the causes of poor maternal mental health in Africa, and believes that this is critical to the success of efforts to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals on health (SDG 3), nutrition (SDG 2) and gender equality (SDG 5).

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 reproductive and child health programmes, supported by mental health services with specialist expertise.

What are the aims of the African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health (AAMMH)?

- To **educate** care providers and the wider community about the importance of the mental health of mothers, and about the recognition, prevention and treatment of maternal mental health problems.
- To **advocate** for maternal mental health to be prioritised in the strategies, policies and budgets of governments and NGOs, and in the teaching and research agendas of educational institutions.
- To **act** together to develop reproductive and child health services in which the mental health of the mother is centrally integrated, and to ensure that mental health services have expertise in the care of women throughout their reproductive lives.

Who can join the African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health (AAMMH)?

AAMMH is an umbrella organisation of stakeholders including:

1. *National* groups of reproductive, child and mental health care providers, educators and researchers, and mothers themselves, working together in their own countries toward the goals of AAMMH.
2. *Multi-country* organisations working in Africa in the field of reproductive, child and mental health that support the goals of AAMMH.

The initial objectives of the African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health (AAMMH) include:

- To establish a website and a forum for communication and networking between members.
- To encourage and advocate for the formation of a national maternal mental health alliance in every country in Africa.
- To map the current extent of maternal mental health services, policies, legislation and curricula across the continent.

If you would like to join AAMMH (as an organisation, or as a group or individual who would like to develop a national alliance in your own country) please email: robcastewart@mac.com