



NIHR Global Health Research Group on Promoting Children's and Adolescent's Mental Wellbeing in Sub-Saharan Africa Project

1 INTRODUCTION

With £2.88 million in funding from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR), the University of Aberdeen, the University of Rwanda and Addis Ababa University are working together on a four-year project to design, deliver and evaluate the impact of a mindfulness intervention in schools on child and adolescent mental wellbeing in sub-Saharan Africa.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends preventative mental health interventions in schools. When children and adolescents focus on being mindful, they slow down, take their time, and focus on an activity or image in a way that is relaxing and stress-free. Practising mindfulness makes children and adolescents happier. It improves their attention span, helps them manage stress, increases their sense of well-being, and improves their communication skills. It also improves their school performance. However, most previous studies have been done in schools in Europe and North America. We do not know if mindfulness improves the well-being of children and adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is a need to know if it does so and if it would be a good use of government resources. We have designed a project which will help answer these questions.

WHERE WE WILL DELIVER THE PROJECT, AND WHO WILL DO IT

We will deliver the project in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and rural Burera District in Northern Province, Rwanda between 2022 and 2026. Rwanda and Ethiopia are two of the poorest countries in the world. The wellbeing of children is poor in both countries, and school attainment is low. Researchers from Ethiopia, Rwanda, and the UK will collaborate on the project. Our research team includes health experts, social scientists, and teacher educators. We have an international advisory board, including government officials



from both countries. Community members, including parents, teachers, children, and adolescents, and policymakers, will help us design the mindfulness intervention.

WHAT WE WILL DO

We will research ways of providing an affordable and acceptable mindfulness intervention that improves children's and adolescents' wellbeing. We will work with parents and policymakers to agree on delivering and testing it. Teacher-educators working with primary school teachers will develop an appropriate mindfulness intervention. Teachers involved in developing the intervention will train other teachers in their schools. Teachers will deliver the intervention as part of the primary school curriculum so that it reaches all children.

We will test the intervention to provide policymakers with high-quality evidence on how well it works. We will also look at the cost and benefits of delivering it in all schools.

The testing will include talking to children and adolescents, their teachers, and parents about their experiences of the intervention. We will also test children's and adolescents' mental wellbeing before and after we deliver the intervention to see what improvement it makes. We will also compare children who received the mindfulness training with similar children who did not. This will control for the effects of other changes in children's lives which may be going on at the same time.

We will provide feedback on all our findings to policymakers in Rwanda and Ethiopia. This will include the findings from an 'economic model' showing the potential cost savings and benefits of introducing mindfulness practices in all schools.

We will tell international organisations such as the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund about our findings. We will disseminate the findings through our website and social media in English and French. We will invite relevant organisations from across Sub-Saharan Africa to regular webinars disseminating information about the project.

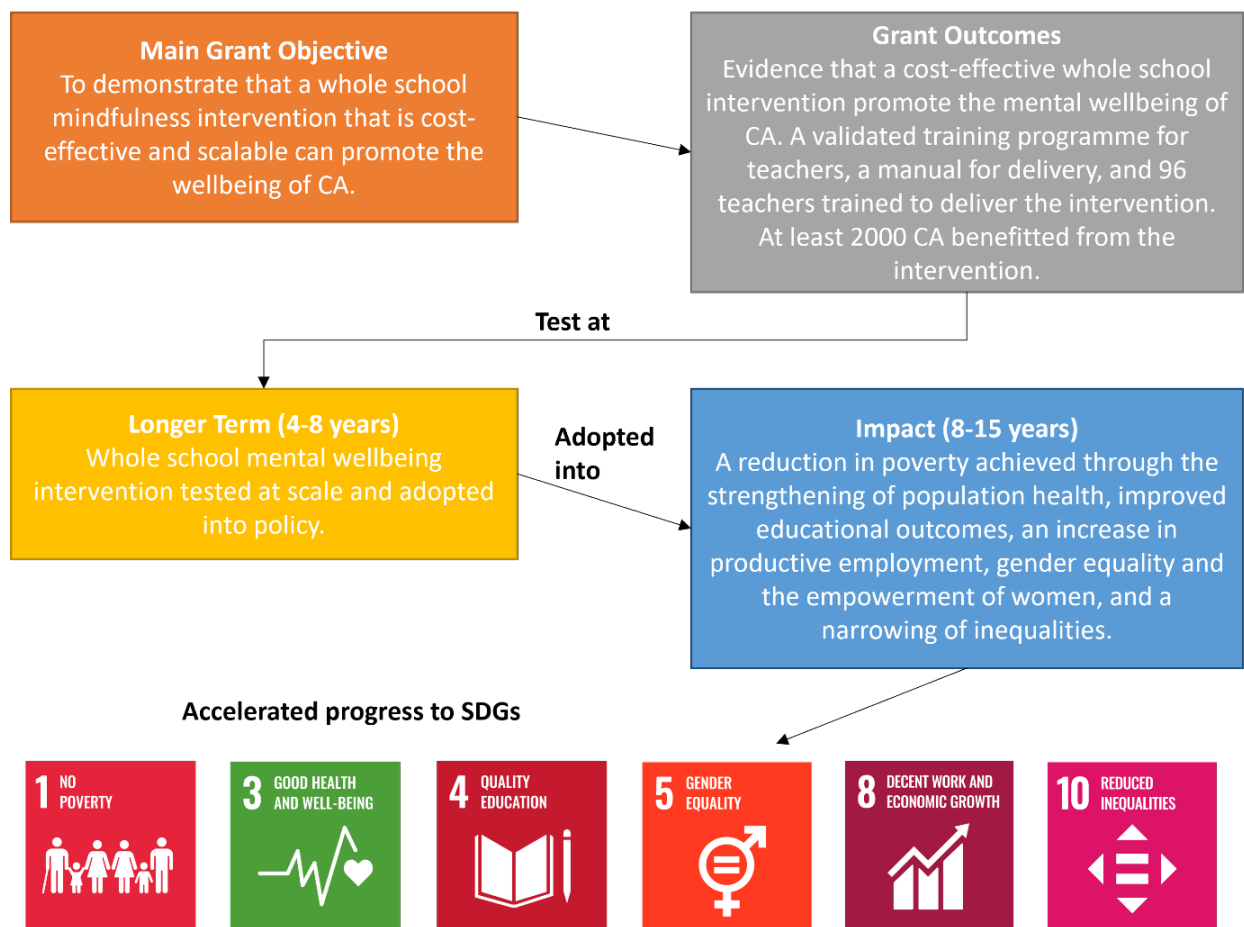
WHY THIS RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT

What happens during childhood has a strong influence on children's future mental health. Improving children's and adolescents' wellbeing will enable them to enjoy their childhood and develop to their full potential. It will also improve their lives as adults, making them happier,

less likely to develop mental and physical illnesses and better able to play a full role in society. It also reduces healthcare expenditure.

2 IMPACT

Our impact pathway shows how we will go from the main grant objective of demonstrating the effectiveness and scalability of a mindfulness intervention on CA mental wellbeing, to the accelerated progress of the Sustainable Development Goals.





3 CAPACITY BUILDING AND EXCHANGE

Our training programme will educate the next generation of researchers in transdisciplinary health research. The project is funding four PhD studentships and four post-doctoral researcher (PDR) placements. Early career researchers will be involved in every stage of the research, from design to the publication of the findings.

Our mindfulness intervention and research-related training materials and recordings are being published online open access at www.abdn.ac.uk/nihr-camw

© University of Aberdeen 2023

This research was funded by the NIHR (NIHR133712) using UK aid from the UK Government to support global health research. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK government, the Court of the University of Aberdeen, the Board of Directors of the University of Rwanda, the Board of Directors of Addis Ababa University, the Board of Directors of The Sanctuary, or our International Advisory Board.

Contact details:

Project central inbox: nihrcmw@abdn.ac.uk

Professor Wenceslas Nzabairwa: wzabairwa@gmail.com

Professor Pamela Abbott: p.abbott@abdn.ac.uk

Find us online:



ur.ac.rw | aau.edu.et | www.abdn.ac.uk



@Uni_Rwanda | @AddisAbabaUnie | @AbdnCGD



@UniversityofRwanda | @Addis-Ababa-University | @AberdeenCGD