

BasicNeeds-Ghana



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Press Statement from the Alliance for Mental Health and Development

in commemoration of

World Maternal Mental Health Awareness Day – 5th May 2021

Theme: *Journeys to Recovery*

The Maternal Mental Health Awareness Day will be celebrated on 5th May 2021. The event is meant to raise awareness, influence policy, and change attitudes towards maternal mental health issues. This year's theme – '*Journeys to Recovery*'— is intended to highlight how much the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way maternal and mental health services are delivered.

The Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week was first celebrated in 2014 by the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, a group of organisations and individuals, including women with lived experience, who came together to raise awareness of maternal mental health in the UK. This movement has since gained prominence and added many more advocates to its numbers. We, the Alliance for Mental Health and Development (Mental Health Alliance), made up of individuals and organisations with a shared interest in promoting mental health development in Ghana, are proud to join this global moment of reflection.

Pregnancy and childbirth are among a woman's most anxious moments in life. Without the proper care, this natural and joyful period can potentially bring untold pain and hardship upon women, their families, and the society. Women of every culture, age, income level and race can develop perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Symptoms can appear any time during pregnancy and the first 12 months after childbirth. In many countries, such as Ghana, as many as 1 in 5 new mothers experience some type of perinatal mood and anxiety disorder. These illnesses frequently go unnoticed and untreated, often with tragic and long-term consequences to both mother and child¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also been particularly stressful on pregnant women and new mothers. Apart from the fear of contracting the COVID-19, most pregnant women and new mothers have also experienced disruptions to their routine clinical visits, especially during periods of COVID-19 restrictions.

It is, therefore, a matter of grave concern that many women and their families are painfully oblivious of how pregnancy and childbirth could impact the mental health of women. As a society, Ghanaians have not yet come to fully appreciate the role our mental health plays in our daily lives. As a country, no standard mental health screening protocol has been deployed to aid the early identification and treatment of perinatal mental health conditions.

¹ <https://www.awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/world-maternal-mental-health-day-2021>

REGISTRATION DETAILS

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Ignorance, and the fear of being stigmatised or discriminated against are among the major reasons many women do not immediately seek mental health care especially when they are pregnant or after delivery.

Perinatal mental health information and services are unavailable to many women during their ante-natal or post-natal hospital visits. Those who exhibit symptoms of mental illness during this period are sometimes made to feel they are lazy and irresponsible women by their family members or even trained health professionals. Those who, unfortunately, commit infanticide are quickly tagged as witches or criminals and punished as such by society without ascertaining their mental health status.

Given the current situation of Ghana's health system, Ghana cannot hope to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 which, among others, aims to reduce maternal and child mortality.² Without effectively integrating mental health into maternal and child health services, Ghana cannot also hope to achieve the SDG 5 target to '*Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.*'³ By building public awareness, we can prevent pregnancy-related mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, postpartum psychosis, among others, from affecting women's quality of life. We can support those affected to seek effective and well-researched treatment options to aid their recovery.

Even though Ghana has made progress towards achieving Universal Health Coverage⁴ (UHC) there is the need to improve the quality of care for women experiencing all types Perinatal or Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorders. The government needs to invest significant resources towards increasing public awareness about maternal mental health issues to reduce the stigma attached to maternal mental illness.

The Alliance for Mental Health and Development has been a staunch collaborator of the Maternal Mental Health Project, which was funded with UK aid of the British people, led by CBM UK, and implemented by a consortium made up of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Gub-Katimali Society (GKS), Centre for People's Empowerment and Rights Initiatives (CPRI), and MIHOSO International Foundation — all of whom are members of the Alliance. This project, since its inception in 2016, has piloted some interventions aimed at demonstrating just how maternal and child health can be improved by enhancing access to mental health services throughout the perinatal period. Even though implementation of this project has come to an end, the Alliance for Mental Health and Development is committed to advocating for the integration of mental health services within Ghana's maternal and child healthcare services.

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal3.html>

³ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal5.html>

⁴ <https://www.moh.gov.gh/ghana-finalising-roadmap-towards-uhc/>

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It is for this reason that the Alliance is calling on the Ministry of Health and allied agencies to urgently design and implement protocols aimed at early detection and treatment of Perinatal or Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorders.

The Alliance for Mental Health and Development will soon publish a Maternal Mental Health Advocacy Action Plan which was developed with the support of UK aid as part of the Maternal Mental Health Project. This advocacy action plan aims to build upon the objective of the Maternal Mental Health Project of ensuring that poor and vulnerable women, including pregnant women, mothers, and their babies in Ghana have improved mental health and livelihoods.

The Alliance for Mental Health and Development is using this celebration to encourage all health professionals, friends and relatives of pregnant women and new mothers to take keen interest in their mental health and support them to seek help. The Alliance for Mental Health and Development wishes all of you a fruitful Maternal Mental Health Awareness Day.

Signed:

Peter Badimak Yaro

(Executive Director, BasicNeeds-Ghana)

National Convenor – Alliance for Mental Health and Development

For further inquiries, please contact

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