

Policy Brief 1



MAINSTREAMING GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH

Executive Summary

Mental health is one of the leading causes of ill-health worldwide and disproportionately affects low-and-middle-income-countries.

We provide evidence there are low hanging fruit opportunities to impact psychosocial wellbeing across Sustainable Development Goals via routine research project activities.

We provide understanding about the challenges of mainstreaming global mental health and how to undertake this work with our **Theory of Change** model.

Implications for **professional bodies** and **non- and inter-governmental organisations** representing academic disciplines, humanitarian sectors, and international peace-keeping include working with their stakeholders to identify how embedding mental health impact can facilitate achievement of their primary aims.

Implications for global challenges **researchers** across Sustainable Development Goals include collaborating with local communities, researchers, and service providers to embed sustainable psychosocial wellbeing impact.

Implications for **mental health practitioners** include developing a more inclusive and flexible language around mental health that bridges cultures and disciplines.

Implications for global challenge **funders** include providing strategic leadership to drive the mainstreaming of mental health in research across the Sustainable Development Goals.



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Background

Madill, A., Bhola, P., Brown, B., Colucci, E., Cooke, P., Croucher, K., Evans, A., Goswami, S., Graber, R., Hugh-Jones, S., King, R., Mirzoev, T., Plastow, J., Raghavan, R., Setiyawati, D., Shloim, N., & Taberner, S. (2022).

Project Website

<https://projectresilience.co.uk/projects/mainstreaming-global-mental-health/>
UKRI GCRF EPSRC

“it’s a vicious cycle. We don’t have funding so we don’t have a robust resource, so that’s why we do not have, you know, the data of policy relevance and we also do not have an active advocate group within the mental health field”

-Overseas collaborator, male, Health, E Med/SE Asia/Africa

“change the paradigm of development [...] we have to inform the young people going into this field that mental health is part and parcel of every single thing that we do”

-British Principle Investigator, female, Health, Africa

In a review of the evidence, the *Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development*¹ reports that mental health is one of the leading causes of ill-health worldwide and disproportionately affects low-and-middle-income-countries (LMIC). Moreover, the mental health workforce gap is huge.²

Mental health aligns most directly with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: Good Health and Well-Being. However, increasingly, mental health is considered of fundamental relevance across the global challenges represented by the SDGs.³ For example the *Lancet Commission* argues “for a dramatic reframing of mental health as not just a health issue, but as a crosscutting development issue” (p.19).⁴ This broad vision is reflected in the priorities outlined: extend the global mental health agenda to the general population; integrate the global response within other priorities and engage a wide range of stakeholders beyond health; target social and environmental causes; and innovative use of non-specialists to deliver mental health interventions.

Global challenges funders and researchers are a distinct set of stakeholders who have not yet been invited to consider mainstreaming mental health.



GCRF
Global Challenges
Research Fund

Mainstreaming Global Mental Health: Challenge Cluster

This project is seed-funded by the UK Research & Innovation Global Challenges Research Fund. We are a collaboration between universities in the UK and Partner Organisations in India and Indonesia. Our ambition is to trigger a step-change in how the research community thinks about where, how and by whom mental health in LMIC can be impacted. Specifically, we believe there is untapped potential for global researchers to impact psychosocial wellbeing whilst delivering their core (non-mental health) project aims and that this can be done without significant resource implications.

“co-benefits that allows people, children to go to school, people to earn a living, all those things. But how could you even evidence that because ‘A’ you never set out at the beginning to evidence at the end. ‘B’ you’ve never done that before and measured long-term outcomes”
-British Principle Investigator, female, People & Societies, Global

Our Work: Is there potential to embed psychosocial wellbeing impact in all global challenges research?

We completed a **scoping review** of implicit and explicit mental health activities undertaken in non-mental-health-focused GCRF projects, focusing in detail on 36 grants sampled for diversity. We also conducted **26 interviews** with non-mental-health-focused GCRF researchers and their collaborators across the globe, sampled for diversity.

Outcomes from the Scoping Review⁵

We provide evidence there are low hanging fruit opportunities to impact psychosocial wellbeing across SDG through routine research project activities.

- UKRI gateway-to-research was searched for GCRF grants until May 2020: only **3%** self-categorise as engaging with mental health.
- Thirty-six non-mental-health GCRF grants sampled for diversity were coded for relevant information: **50-70%** already engage implicitly, but non-strategically, with psychosocial wellbeing impact.
- **Psychosocial wellbeing** impact opportunities from most to least frequent are: community mobilisation, community-building, skills development, positive sense of self, positive emotions, and sociocultural identity.

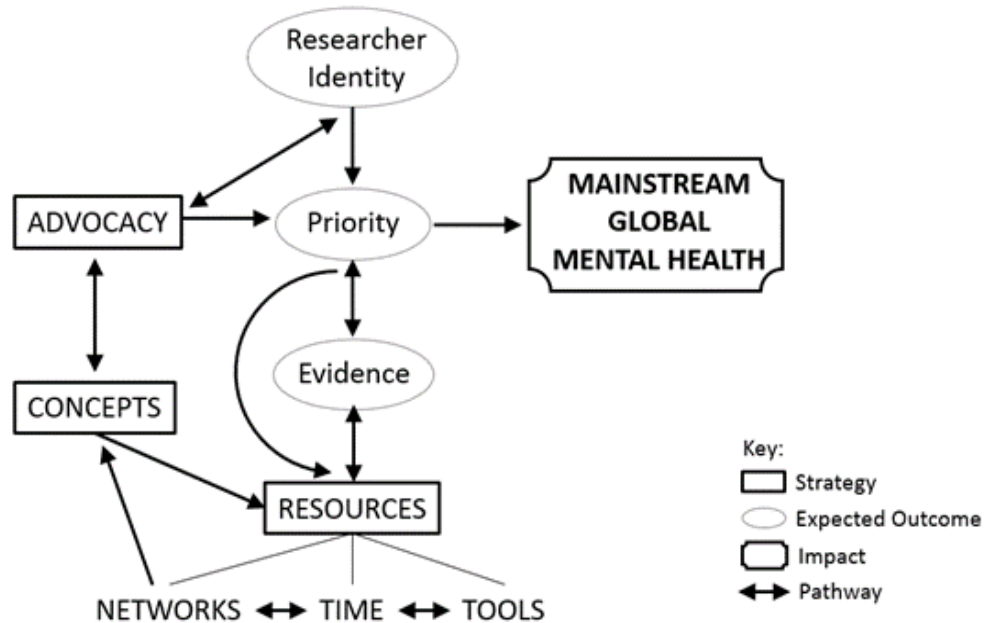
Outcomes from the Interviews⁶

We provide understanding about the challenges of mainstreaming global mental health and how to undertake this work.

- Thematic Analysis of the 26 interviews produced a trajectory from the **challenges** of incorporating mental health impact in non-mental-health-focused SDG research, to potential **solutions** and, finally, to **support** needs.
- This analysis was organised further into a **Theory of Change** designed to promote the mainstreaming of mental health in global challenges research.



“we are in the stage where we appreciate importance of psychosocial wellbeing as you’ve posed it as an outcome of economic and social conditions, like more structural conditions, like family income, employment, perhaps even like educational or social opportunities, so that it’s not the other way around. I think we don’t appreciate it as a condition for a better quality of life”
-Overseas collaborator, male, Education, Americas



“I actually talk to people and say, ‘OK how are you experiencing food security?’ What is going on in this household scale or the community level? And it’s in that sphere that you’re going to come across where people are really looking at this mental health aspect”
-Overseas collaborator, female, Planetary Health, W Pacific

Implications for Policy

More work is needed provide guidance and to learn from projects across the range of SDGs which are already achieving mental health impact as part of their routine activities without overstressing project expertise or resource.

Implications for **professional bodies** and **non- and inter-governmental organisations** representing academic disciplines, humanitarian sectors, and international peace-keeping include:

- working with their stakeholders to identify how embedding mental health impact can facilitate achievement of their primary aims; and,
- sign-posting resources supporting this work.

Implications for global challenges **researchers** across SDGs include:

- recognising the potential of their projects to have psychosocial wellbeing impact in LMIC;
- taking ownership of this aspect of their work by building mental health impact into projects from the start; and,
- collaborating with local communities, researchers, and service providers to embed sustainable psychosocial wellbeing impact.

Implications for **mental health practitioners** include:

- spear-heading the development a more inclusive and flexible language around mental health that bridges cultures and disciplines;
- providing tools and guidance that democratises the process of effecting psychosocial wellbeing impact in context-appropriate ways; and,
- engaging with researcher networks to offer mentoring.

Implications for global challenge **funders** include:

- engaging with the desire of researchers to contribute more broadly to the psychosocial wellbeing of the communities with whom they work;
- supporting this through greater flexibility for within-project adjustment and innovating ways of sustaining long-term impact;
- grappling with the challenges of real partnership working in LMIC; and,
- providing strategic leadership to drive the mainstreaming of mental health in research across the SDGs.



“you’d need a pretty long-term perspective wouldn’t you to do something sensible on, I don’t know, on mental wellbeing”
- British Principle Investigator, male, Planetary Health, SE Asia/W Pacific

“it’s too late for gateways. We shouldn’t make this palatable. I think it’s like, you have to do this”
- British Principle Investigator, female, Health, Africa

References

1. Patel, V. et al. (2018). The Lancet commission on global mental health and sustainable development. *The Lancet*, 392(10157), 1553-1598.
2. Raviola, G., Naslund, J. A., Smith, S. L. et al. (2019). Innovative models in mental health delivery systems: Task sharing care with non-specialist providers to close the mental health treatment gap. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 21, 44 (2019).
3. De Silva, M. J. (2015). Making mental health an integral part of sustainable development: The contribution of a social determinants framework. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 24, 100-106.
4. Ryan, G., Lemmi, V., Hanna, F., Loryman, H. & Eaton, J. (2020). *Mental Health for Sustainable Development: A Topic Guide for Development Professionals*. K4D Emerging Issues Report. London and Brighton, UK: Mental Health Innovation Network and IDS.
5. Madill, A., Shloim, N., Brown, B., Hugh-Jones, S., Plastow, J., & Setiyawati, D., (2022). Mainstreaming global mental health: Is there potential to embed psychosocial wellbeing impact in all global challenges research? *Applied Psychology: Health & Well-Being*, 1-24.
6. Madill, A., Bhola, P., Colucci, E., Croucher, K., Evans, E., & Graber, R. (2022, in press). How can we mainstream mental health in research engaging the range of sustainable development goals? A Theory of Change. *PLOS: Global Public Health*.