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**PRESS RELEASE**

**The Official Launch of the African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health (AAMMH) will take place at Sunbird Capital Hotel, Lilongwe, Malawi on 19th June 2018**

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 in pregnancy and the postnatal period that can lead to mental health problems. These can have long-term detrimental effects on the health of both the mother and her infant. Effective interventions exist for the detection, prevention and treatment of maternal mental health problems, but these are not currently accessible for most mothers in Africa.

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.

**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).

**AAMMH** aims to:

* **E*ducate*** 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.
* **A*dvocate*** 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.
* **A*ct*** 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.

**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.

**AAMMH** is part of the Global Alliance of Maternal Mental Health (GAMMH) (<https://globalalliancematernalmentalhealth.org)> and works in close collaboration with the Marcé Society African Regional Group (<https://marcesociety.com)>.

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The **launch event** is organised by the College of Medicine, Kamuzu College of Nursing and other contributors. It will be attended by delegates from Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa and UK. Delegates will include representatives of government, NGOs, educational institutions, and mothers themselves. The launch event is funded by a UK Medical Research Council (MRC) grant to the University of Edinburgh NESP project (NEtwork to Study Psychological resilience in LMIC).

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To join AAMMH or for further information about establishing a national alliance, please email: **info.aammh.org**

Website (under construction): [www.aammh.org](http://www.aammh.org)

Twitter: african alliance@matmentalhealth Hashtags: #AAMMH #GAMMH

**Additional Notes to Editors:**

1. Additional Information about maternal mental health:

* 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.
* 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.

1. Evidence from the UK indicates that an alliance of multiple organisations from various different sectors with an interest in this field can significantly accelerate the availability of mental health care, e.g. the successful UK campaign [Maternal Mental Health Alliance-Everyone’s Business](http://everyonesbusiness.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Everyones-Business-Special-e-bulletin-pdf.pdf)
2. Maternal Mental Health: why it matters and what countries with limited resources can do [guidance in low income setting]: <https://globalalliancematernalmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ks31.pdf> and <https://globalalliancematernalmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Maternal-Mental-Health_Service-Guideline_PMHP.pdf>
3. The costs of perinatal mental health problems, London School of Economics and Centre for Mental Health Summary report: <https://globalalliancematernalmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Embargoed-20th-Oct-Summary-of-Economic-Report-costs-of-Perinatal-Mental-Health-problems.pdf>
4. **Full list of organising institutions:**

* College of Medicine, University of Malawi
* Kamuzu College of Nursing, University of Malawi
* University of Edinburgh
* St John of God Hospitaller Services
* Perinatal Mental Health Project – Cape Town
* Malawi Epidemiology and Intervention Research Unit
* Scotland Malawi Mental Health Education Project.

