



Cultivating Resilience: SWISS's Community-Led CARE Model for Mental Health Justice Among Widows

Background

In Embakasi West's informal settlements, baseline screening of 150 widows revealed 78% with moderate-to-severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥ 10 ; scale range 0–27) and 65% reporting high social isolation (UCLA Loneliness Scale ≥ 45). Cultural violence—property seizure and forced “widow cleansing”—combined with economic exclusion, intensifies post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation (SWISS Strategic Plan, p.10). SWISS's CARE model—Community Advocacy, Resilience, Empowerment—was designed to reduce depression and isolation by 50% and double counselling uptake over a six-month follow-up period.

Methods

From January to March 2025, four multidisciplinary teams (8 Community Health Promoters, 15 trained paralegals, TB/HIV champions, and CHMT liaisons) implemented:

Advocacy (WORD): Five community justice hubs resolving property and GBV cases

Psychoeducation (WHIP): Grief and SRHR workshops co-designed with AMREF

Economic Action (WISEEP): Table banking circles tracked via KoboToolbox

Assessments at baseline and six months used PHQ-9, GAD-7, UCLA Loneliness Scale, WHO-5 Well-Being Index, and NVivo-coded qualitative data.

Results

Depression prevalence dropped from 78% to 42% (Δ PHQ-9 = -7 points; $p < 0.001$)

Isolation scores decreased by 65% (UCLA)

38% of participants improved from “low” to “moderate” well-being (WHO-5)

Counselling uptake increased from 22% to 85%

92% of WISEEP participants earned $\geq$ KSh 5,000/month

Over 120 property restitution cases were resolved

92% of participants rejected “widow cleansing” practices

ROI: Clinical costs averted / program cost = $3.1\times$

Conclusions & Next Steps

SWISS CARE demonstrates that training widows as paralegals and peer educators reduces depression, dismantles cultural stigma, and strengthens economic resilience. Embedded in CHMT systems and formalized through the Embakasi West Widow Protection Guidelines (2025), the model is scaling via a real-time digital M&E dashboard.

Next steps include expansion to two additional Nairobi wards and alignment with Kenya's County Mental Health Strategy.

Keywords

widow mental health · cultural trauma · community paralegals · savings groups · Nairobi

Primary author: Mrs AUDO, Zilpher Renalda (smart widows support system (swiss cbo))

Presenter: Mrs AUDO, Zilpher Renalda (smart widows support system (swiss cbo))

Track Classification: Securing the Future: Holistic Approach to Mental Health for Generations:
Community Approaches: Advocacy, education and addressing cultural issues