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The Impact of Youth First on Teachers: Enhancing Teacher Mental Wellbeing through School-Based Mental Health Programming

Background:

Mental disorders are the world's leading cause of youth disability and early death. Kenya's youth are no exception: a recent Kenyan government task force called mental health a "ticking time bomb," yet found no widely-available mental health prevention and promotion services in Kenya. Youth First provides a solution as one of the first mental health prevention and promotion programs ready for scale in Kenya.

Youth First is a teacher-facilitated, school-based program that builds adolescents' social and emotional assets while improving their overall mental health. Youth First has been implemented in Kenya since 2018 and has reached more than 180,000 students and over 4,000 teachers. Multiple evaluations, including RCTs, have shown the impact of Youth First on student well-being, including on mental and physical health and education.

Youth First may also have a significant impact on teacher mental health and well-being, but fewer studies have focused on this possibility. Supporting teacher mental health and well-being is crucial in Kenya, where teacher burnout has become a significant concern. This presentation highlights recent research suggesting significant mental health and professional benefits for teachers who are trained to participate as facilitators in the Youth First program.

Method and Results:

This presentation reviews results of three studies about Youth First's impact on teachers conducted over the past six years:

1. A 2023 RCT, which revealed that teachers who received Youth First training and facilitated the program showed notable improvements in their growth mindset and internal locus of control, suggesting greater confidence in their abilities to influence student outcomes.
2. A 2022 pre-post teacher survey, which demonstrated significant gains in emotional resilience among teachers, with qualitative interviews revealing enhanced patience, listening skills, and an increased ability to address students' challenges.
3. A 2019 pre-post study, which showed significant improvements for teachers in burnout, mental health, emotional resilience, and classroom discipline.

Discussion and Conclusion:

These findings suggest that Youth First not only supports students' mental health and well-being but also enhances the mental health and professional growth of teachers. The results underscore the potential of school-based mental health programs to support teacher development, offering valuable insights for interventions aimed at promoting both student and teacher well-being.

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