

Mental Health Non-profit, Shamiri Institute, Testing Socioeconomic and Livelihood Impacts of a Character Strength Intervention for Kenyan Youths.

Shamiri Institute is conducting a data collection and analysis exercise to assess an array of socio-economic and livelihood outcomes from a simple psychological intervention delivered between 2018 and 2021.

NAIROBI, Kenya — Shamiri Institute is exploring the long-term socioeconomic and livelihood impacts of its flagship Shamiri intervention delivered to Kenyan high school youths since 2018. This will be one of the first tests of the effects of a character-strength intervention over an extended period of time. Positive findings from this study would add to the growing evidence base that low-stigma psychotherapy delivered by lay providers without clinical experiences have a meaningful impact in shaping the life outcomes for high school youths. Moreover, given the simplicity, brevity, and cost-effectiveness of the intervention, positive findings may lead to further replication in similar contexts across the African continent.

The Shamiri (Kiswahili for “thrive”) intervention consists of activities and discussions focused on three key character strengths: growth mindset (instilling the notion that our brains, personalities, and intelligence are malleable and can grow with intentional effort and strategies, even and especially in the face of challenges), gratitude (noticing and expressing appreciation for things present everyday), and value affirmations (identifying personal core values and using them to set personal goals and take values-aligned actions). All these elements are positively focused, which helps circumvent the stigma usually associated with psychotherapy and mental health on the African continent.

“Randomized control trials conducted over the past five years show that the group-based Shamiri intervention alleviates depression and anxiety symptoms in Kenyan high school youths for up to 7 months. This has been a significant finding in a context where there are only a handful of mental health experts for every 1 million Kenyans and almost 1 in 2 adolescents report elevated depression and anxiety symptoms. However, what we don’t know yet is the impact of our intervention over a longer time-period. How are participants from our sessions faring 2 – 5 years after having received our intervention? That is what we are now seeking to do with the support of the Agency Fund.” Tom Osborn (Harvard College ’20), Co-Founder and CEO of Shamiri Institute, remarked.

The team at Shamiri Institute have been tracking down hundreds of youths that have received the Shamiri

intervention or participated in an active control group since 2018. To generate evidence on socioeconomic and livelihood outcomes, participants are filling out surveys on measures including but not limited to income, educational attainment, savings, consumption, smartphone accessibility, and financial inclusion. Shamiri expects to see that youths that received the will have better socio-economic and livelihood outcomes than those in the control group boosting interest in character strength interventions in the scientific community and general public alike.

About Shamiri Institute

Shamiri Institute, a data-driven non-profit organization, uses tiered lay-psychotherapy to enable African youths to thrive. Shamiri combines rigorous social science research with deep contextual knowledge of the educational and mental healthcare systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mental health problems present a significant global public health challenge: they account for half of the global burden of disease among adolescents. In Kenya, and other Sub-Saharan African countries, 1 in 2 adolescents report mental health problems. Mental health problems lead to lifetime medical, educational, legal, and interpersonal problems yet adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot get help because of stigma, limited treatment options, and a lack of mental health experts. There is an urgent need for accessible, stigma-free, and evidence-based interventions for Sub-Saharan African youths. Since 2018, Shamiri has deployed its flagship Shamiri intervention to over 11,500 Kenyan youths.

About the Agency Fund

The Agency Fund seeks to fund innovations that expand people’s agency over their own lives. This expansion of agency’s can lead to remarkable impacts on educational, health, and poverty outcomes - even among people who face steep disadvantages and appear to have hardly any opportunities at their disposal. The Agency Fund funds approaches that build on data & technology, and on existing networks & platforms, to offer customized support at massive scale. Their long-term vision is a vibrant ecosystem of players continuously testing agency-oriented approaches, reaching hundreds of millions of people, and sharing insights across thematic and geographic silos.

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