

# Measurement of Mental Health among Adolescents (MMHA)

## Roadmap 2018-2019

### Background

Mental health issues constitute one of the greatest burdens of disease for adolescents globally. An estimated one in five adolescents will experience a mental disorder. Self-harm is the third leading cause of death for adolescents, and depression is among the leading causes of disability in this age.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescence is a crucial period of development, where exposures and behaviors can set the trajectory for an individual's mental and physical health in later life.<sup>2</sup> Fully half of individuals who will suffer from a mental disorder in their lifetime will face its onset during adolescence.<sup>3</sup> Mental disorders can be severe and disabling, and are associated with grave social and economic impacts. Yet, adolescent mental health has often been overlooked in global health programming. During the SDG period, however, mental health is taking an important place in the global health agenda. This is a key step toward reducing preventable deaths among adolescents, and reducing the global burden of disease attributable to mental disorders. Currently, data concerning mental health conditions



among adolescents, especially in low- and middle- income countries, is lacking and is urgently needed. The data used to extrapolate estimates for the prevalence and burden of adolescent mental disorders are based on few studies, offering a very narrow snapshot of the situation for adolescents globally. The true burden of mental health disorders among adolescents could be direr than estimates suggest.

UNICEF, in collaboration with key partners, is working to fill this crucial data gap by creating a methodological framework for the development of tools for data collection on adolescent mental health. Improved data and evidence on the prevalence and burden of mental ill-health among adolescents, as well as on exposure to risk factors and access to interventions, is an essential step towards planning more effective and supportive programming and identifying vulnerable populations at higher risk.



### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 3

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



1. WHO and partners (2017) *Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!).* Geneva 2017

2. Sawyer SM, Afifi RA, Bearinger LH, Blakemore SJ, Dick B, Ezechi AC, Patton GC. *Adolescence: a foundation for future health.* *Lancet* 2012; 379: 1630–40.

3. Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. *Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication.* *Arch Gen Psychiatry.* 2005; 62:593–602.

## The Roadmap to Measuring the Mental Health of Adolescents

The proposed road map that will lead to the development of a tool for the measurement of adolescent mental health consists of the following steps:

1

### Desk review of existing instruments and of prevalence



A desk review was conducted to assess the current level of evidence in peer-reviewed literature. Epidemiological studies concerning prevalence of mental disorders among children and adolescents in low- and middle- income countries were evaluated. Subsequently, a mapping of existing data collection tools was undertaken to document the attributes of validated scales and instruments used to measure adolescent mental health.

2

### Development of a conceptual framework



A conceptual framework was developed by UNICEF to illustrate relevant factors in regards to measurement of mental ill-health of adolescents at the population level, risk and protective factors, and access to mental health support or treatment. This model will be further refined to inform various aspects of this work.

3

### Technical consultation with key partners and experts



The First Technical Experts Group meeting was held at UNICEF Headquarters in New York, in March 2018, to convene key partners and experts and present the road map to the measurement of adolescent mental health at the population level.

4

### Development of indicators on adolescent mental health



The development of indicators of adolescent mental health was begun at the First Technical Experts Group meeting. The proposed indicators put forth will be further developed and refined with input from the Technical Advisory Group.

5

### Creation of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on mental health measurement among adolescents



A small group of advisors will be assembled to provide technical expertise throughout the selection, adaptation, and finalization of a tool for the measurement of adolescent mental health. The TAG will also guide the refinement of the conceptual framework, as well as the development of key indicators on adolescent mental health.

6

### Selection of instrument



The TAG will provide input and recommendations including criteria to inform the selection of a validated scale or instrument to measure adolescent mental health at the population level.

7

### Translation, validation and piloting of the instrument



The selected scale or instrument to measure adolescent mental health at the population level will be translated, adapted, and piloted in selected test countries. The final protocol for instrument translation and validation, and evaluation of its psychometric properties will be refined in consultation with the TAG.

8

### Finalization of a tool to measure adolescent mental health in national-level surveys



Upon completion of the steps listed above, the tool for measurement of adolescent mental health will be disseminated and promoted for use in national household surveys. Data collection may begin in each country, followed by compilation of results in UNICEF global databases. These population-level data, collected as a component of comprehensive household surveys, will allow disaggregation of the findings by demographic and socio-economic characteristics, as well as subnational geographic areas.