

Lessons Learned on Implementation of Training, Support, and Mental Health Services for Key Populations in Southern, Eastern, and Western Provinces of Zambia

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Background

Key populations (KP) in Zambia face significant marginalization due to the legal environment and fear of criminalization, which can impact their mental health (MH). The discrimination KPs encounter at healthcare facilities leads to fear of, and challenges with, accessing quality and equitable care, including MH services. As part of the comprehensive wellness package, the Community Impact to Reach Key and Underserved Individuals for Treatment and Support (CIRKUIITS) project implemented a MH intervention in KP wellness centers for clients accessing HIV services in three provinces of Zambia.

Methods

- Beginning October 2021, CIRKUIITS implemented the KP Investment Fund model to support KPs in Eastern, Western, and Southern provinces through KP-led initiatives.
- Between October 2022 and June 2023, we mapped MH nurses, psychologists, and clinicians, to develop a referral directory and network of MH service providers.
- We conducted technical orientation and trained 61 HIV providers in KP sensitivity, safety, and security, along with conducting routine MH screenings using standardized tools (PHQ-4 for depression, GAD-7 for anxiety, and CAGE for hazardous alcohol use).
- All screening results were documented, and each client was classified based on the score they received– or level of severity – on the screening tools.
- All KP clients who were identified at the KP safe spaces as requiring additional MH services were referred to trained MH providers at the health facilities.

Lessons Learned

- 364 KPs were screened for anxiety and/or depression
- 236 KPs were screened for hazardous alcohol use
- Equipping healthcare workers with skills for routine MH screenings is crucial for successful implementation and referral of KPs to necessary services.
- Sensitivity trainings for MH service providers foster an inclusive and supportive environment for KPs to access services without discrimination and fear.
- Furthermore, establishing a network of MH professionals ensures KPs have access to specialized care, creating a comprehensive support system.

Depression



Anxiety



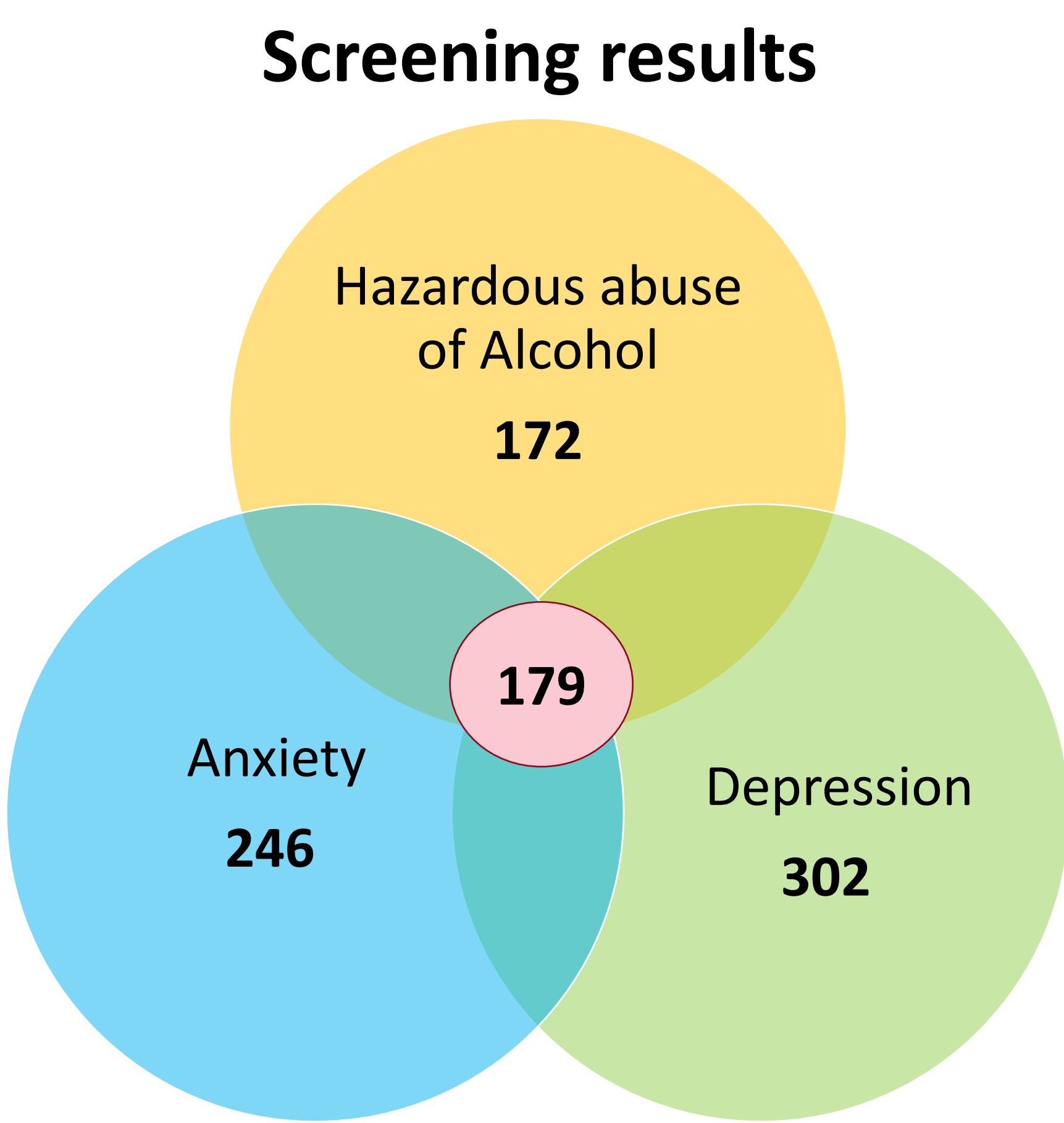
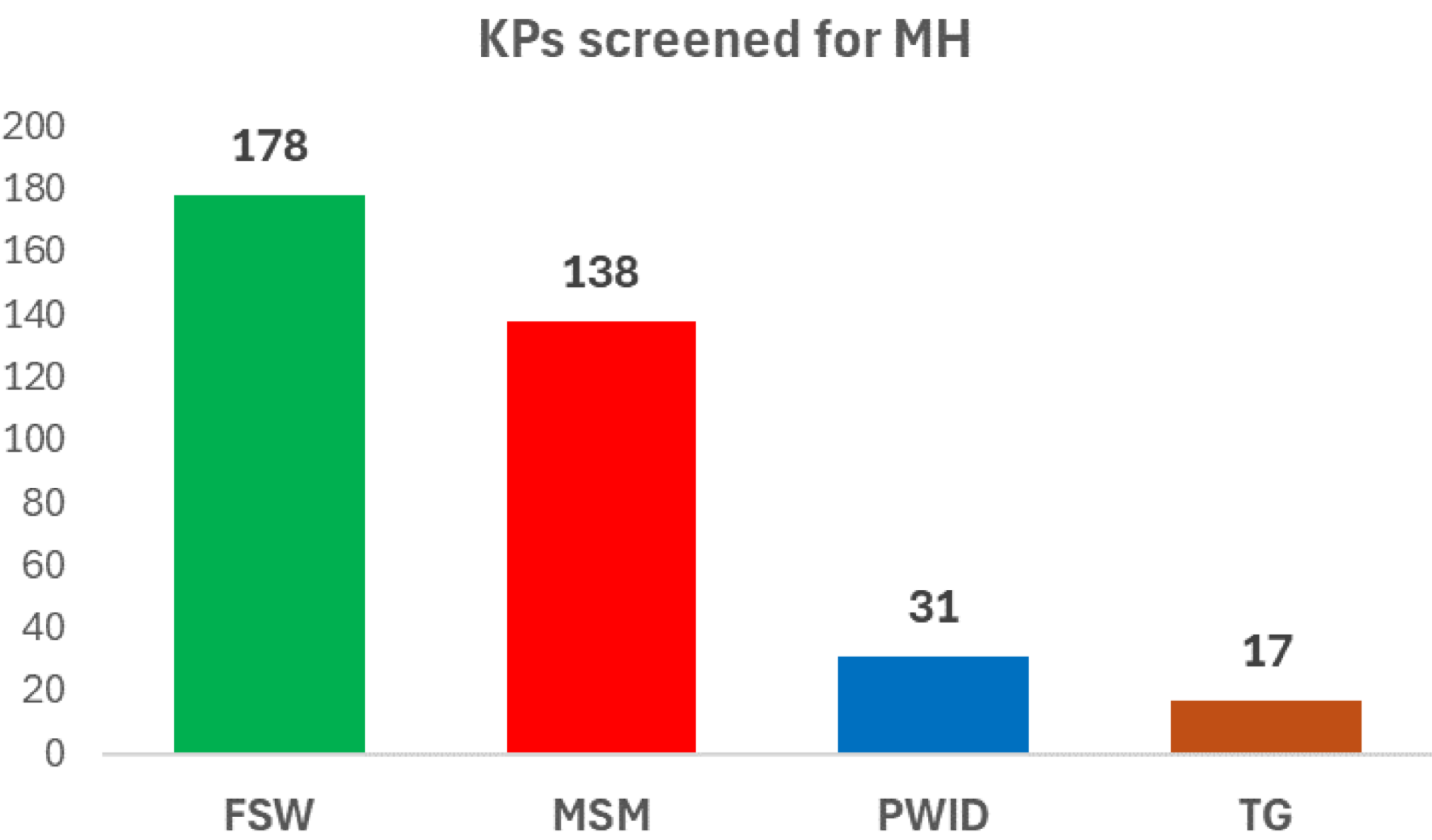
Alcohol Use



Levels of Severity:

Mild, Moderate, Moderately Severe, and Severe

Figure. Number of referrals made after mentorship and sensitivity training to the network (Oct 22 – Sep 23)



Conclusions

High-quality mentorship and training for providers on mental health and screening creates a friendly environment to reduce stigma and discrimination. Collaboration with diverse stakeholders is essential for adapting MH initiatives into local contexts and broadening the positive impact on the health of KPs.

