



POLICY BRIEF FOR FUNDERS

Great Training, but where are the jobs?:

Creating sustainable research in global mental health in low and middle-income countries

The problem: Despite considerable international investment in building research capacity in low and middle-income countries (LMIC) in mental health, we identified that there are few pathways for attaining long-term research careers in these settings largely because of lack of research infrastructure and funding to LMIC institutions.

Our ask: We call on global mental health research funders to do more to support LMIC research institutions to write, receive, and manage their own grants.

Background:

- The past decade has seen an increase in global mental health research funding, focused on developing interventions in LMICs.
- In Africa, this funding has also supported capacity-building for early career researchers, funding the development of an MPhil programs in public mental health; numerous PhDs, MPhil, and post-doctorate fellowships; and expanded clinical teaching capacity in academic psychiatry departments.
- As a result of these capacity-building interventions, there are many early career African researchers with training and experience in global mental health.

Our study:

- Aim: Explore the career pathways and the funding environment for early career mental health researchers from Ethiopia, Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe
- Methods: We conducted qualitative interviews with early career researchers, policymakers, service users, and academics from the four countries and representatives from international funding agencies that support global mental health research.
- Results:

- Early career researchers want to continue working in mental health research, but while there are select examples of successful researchers, most early career researchers see no clear path for developing a research career. They are often pulled into clinical or teaching roles.
- Both university faculty and early career researchers, particularly clinician-researchers, emphasized that they had little protected time for writing grants.
- Academics recognized that their universities do not have the capacity or administrative staff to support administration and writing of large grants.
- Funders described efforts to develop the capacity of LMIC institutions in grant writing and management, and few indicated that they gave grants directly to these institutions, but most gave grants to high-income country (HIC) universities, placing them in charge of grant management.

See publication: Langhaug, Lisa, et al. "["We need more big trees as well as the grass roots': Going beyond research capacity building to develop sustainable careers in mental health research in African countries."](#) *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 14:66 (2020).

Recommendations:

International funders have a central role to play in shifting the center of power in global mental health research.

1. International funding organizations should support the development of offices of grant management and administration at LMIC universities and should provide training in grant administration and financial management.
 - a. This type of institutional infrastructural capacity-building has been done in other fields, such as when international funders supported the building and staffing of national HIV laboratories in Africa. These labs enabled HIV basic science research to occur in these countries.
2. Research capacity-building initiatives should include training in grant writing and funding for post-doctoral and early faculty positions (beyond degree programs). This could help early career researchers have more time for research, away from clinical or teaching responsibilities.
3. International funders should prioritize giving grants directly to LMIC institutions, either without HIC institutions on the grant or with HIC institutions as supporting partners.

Representative quotes

“It’s amazing to see how [a UK university] can pull together a team and bring in an extra consultant before you have even got the money to help put this huge grant together.” – Early career researcher, South Africa

“But [our funding and reporting] process ... is very involved. And domestic researchers have generally an office of sponsored programs or grants management, that helps them. That doesn’t often occur in low- and middle-income countries. Researchers there have to do all of those pieces themselves.” – International funder

“It’s really hard to do really strong, rigorous ...quality research on nights and weekends.” – International funder

About us

This study and policy brief were part of the African Mental Health Research Initiative (AMARI), a collaboration between four African universities (University of Addis Ababa, University of Cape Town, and University of Malawi College of Medicine, University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences) and King’s College London that aims to support the development of high-calibre MNS researchers who conduct research that meets the needs of the four host countries. AMARI recruited and is training 46 MNS research fellows at master’s, PhD and post-doctorate levels, with the intent of equipping them with the necessary research, teaching and leadership skills to build a viable and sustainable research network in the African region. With fees and stipend from AMARI, fellows enroll in a PhD or master’s program at an African university, then attend short courses on research methods, leadership, and academic writing that may not be available at their home institutions.

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