

Pilot Program Evaluation

Zimbabwe Mass Media Activities

Executive Summary

Grassroot Soccer piloted and evaluated a mental health-focused mass media initiative in Zimbabwe to assess the reach, relevance, and effects of multimedia content (including radio dramas, podcasts, and influencer skits) on youth mental health knowledge and attitudes. The evaluation combined quantitative pre/post surveys (n=204 matched responses) conducted via WhatsApp with qualitative interviews and focus groups with adolescents, radio staff, influencers, and other key stakeholders across Bulawayo and Harare.

Key Findings:

- High Reach & Engagement: On average, participants listened to 6 radio drama episodes. WhatsApp group discussions and follow-up sessions with GRS Coaches further extended engagement.
- Strong Acceptability & Relevance:
 - 94% of youth said they “strongly agreed” with liking the media content.
 - Radio content was praised for being relatable, accessible without data/airtime, and effective at sparking conversations, especially when paired with Coach-led discussions.
 - Parents reported improved communication with adolescents around mental health.

“My grandson struggled a lot with confiding in his mother, but after listening to the radio drama sessions, he has gained the skills to openly express his feelings and emotions.” - Guardian of adolescent participant, Bulawayo

- Perceived Appropriateness: The content was viewed as highly suitable for youth, offering practical strategies such as resisting peer pressure, managing emotions, and reducing stigma. Youth appreciated messages like *“It’s OK not to be OK.”*
- Early Evidence of Positive Effects:
 - While pre-survey knowledge levels were already high, post-survey data showed modest improvements overall (+4%).
 - The most notable change was an 88% increase in youth reporting they had talked with somebody outside of the program about mental health in the past month.

Recommendations from evaluation respondents (adolescents, radio staff, influencers, parents/guardians, and other key stakeholders):

- Involve more young people in content creation
- Increase repetition of episodes at multiple time slots or through different platforms
- Expand distribution via schools, communities, TikTok, and WhatsApp
- Make the content more interactive (live shows, influencer involvement)

Conclusion:

The MindSKILLZ media pilot demonstrated strong promise as a scalable, youth-friendly mental health intervention. While quantitative change was modest due to high baseline knowledge in the sample cohort, qualitative findings point to deep engagement, behavior change, and potential for broader reach and sustained impact. The most significant quantitative change was an 88% increase in the number of participants who reported talking to someone about mental health in the past month - suggesting the mass media approach may contribute particularly to encouraging help-seeking behaviors related to mental health.

Overall objectives

- Understand the reach, acceptability, relevance, and appropriateness of a GRS package of mental health-focused media activities for young people
- Examine preliminary effects of GRS media activities on mental health knowledge and attitudes of young people

Data sources:

- Pre- and post-survey delivered via radio station whatsapp group: 204 matched responses
- Qualitative methods:

Qualitative data collection methods:

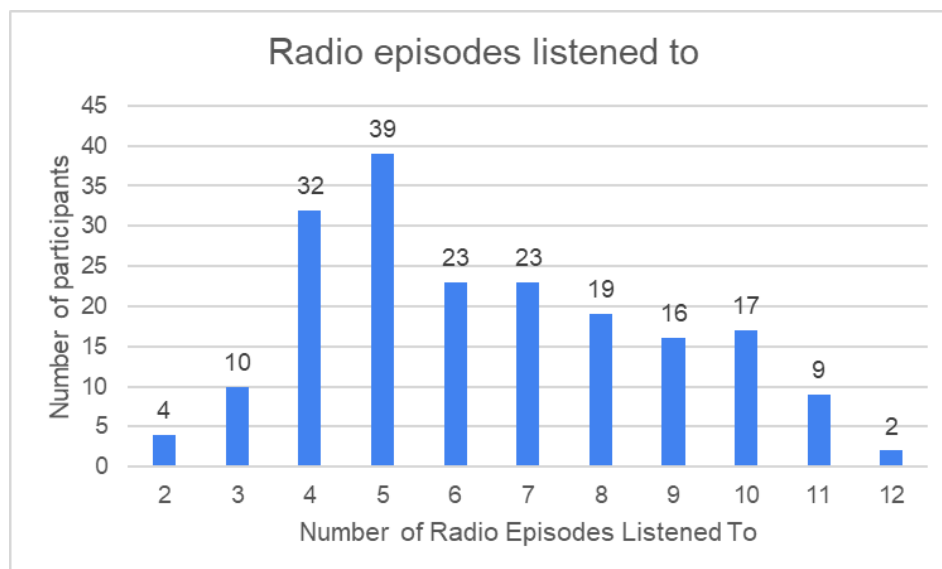
Method	Respondent type	Bulawayo	Harare
Focus group discussions*	Youth in radio whatsapp groups	n= 1 group	n= 1 group
Interviews	Radio staff/presenters	n=6	n=2
Interviews	Parent/guardian of youth engaged in radio pre/post or MindSKILLZ	n=4	n=2
Interviews	Other key stakeholders (teacher, District AIDS Council, Ministry of Health)	n=3	n/a

*Adolescent FGD participants completed written feedback form in addition to discussion

Initial Results:

Reach:

- Among participants who completed the pre/post (n=204), 194 reported the number of radio episodes they listened to: minimum = 2 episodes, maximum = 12, mean = 6 episodes
 - The highest number of participants listened to 5 episodes



- Among adolescent participants in the focus group discussion (n=18), half of them reported that they listened to 2 or 3 radio drama episodes:

Number of radio drama episodes listened to	Percent (number)
1	22% (4)
2-3	50% (9)
4-5	17% (3)
6-7	11% (2)
Total	18

Acceptability & relevance:

- Media content was seen as highly acceptable across all respondent groups, with adolescents, parents, radio staff, influencers, and other stakeholders all providing very positive feedback
 - On the feedback form, 94% of adolescents (17/18) responded 'strongly agree' to the statement "I liked the media content I engaged with."
- Radio drama episodes especially received positive feedback across all groups:
 - Accessible without data/airtime, can reach rural audiences
 - Presents relatable scenarios faced by young people
 - Storylines flow well and build on each episode
 - *'One of my roles was to track audience interaction via Whatsapp, and it was clear that people are hungry for this kind of content and conversation.'* - Radio staff, Bulawayo
 - *'As an individual I benefited because I learned lessons [from the radio drama] that I might not receive at home, such as respect, and I liked the fact that it spoke about what happens on a day to day basis as young people.'* - Focus group participant feedback form response
- The post-drama discussions with GRS Coaches additionally received glowing feedback across all groups.
 - Radio staff and presenters especially valued the work of GRS Coaches in these discussions, highlighting that they were well-prepared, knowledgeable, and very effective in simplifying complex material

- *“Coaches brought in their expertise and made the content very relatable to listeners.” - Radio Host, Bulawayo*
- Parents highlighted that the media content helped encourage communication about mental health topics within the family, and many described how their children opened up to them more following engagement with the media activities.
 - *“My grandson struggled a lot with confiding in his mother, but after listening to the radio drama sessions, he has gained the skills to openly express his feelings and emotions.” - Guardian of adolescent participant, Bulawayo*

Appropriateness:

- Across all stakeholder groups, the media activities were unanimously seen as appropriate for young people, while being accessible and useful for all age groups
- Adolescents highlighted numerous learnings and practical skills that they took away from the content:
 - Importance of positive self-talk
 - Practical ways to resist peer pressure
 - Dispelling myths about mental health
 - Using the 3Ts for managing strong emotions
 - Breaking down mental health stigma - people with mental health challenges deserve love and respect
 - It's OK not to be OK
 - *“The media content helped a lot, now we know that everyone can have stress. Even parents can now understand that mental health [challenges] occurs in everyone, where before the media content they would disagree that a teenager can have stress, and say that stress is for adults.” - Focus group participant feedback form response*

Recommendations from respondents:

- Include more young people in all parts of the content development process, across all platforms - they have stories to share and want to be more involved!
 - *“If you involve us, we will spread the word!” - FGD participant, Bulawayo*
- Air drama episodes multiple times in different time slots to increase reach, and extend the run of the drama to cover more months
 - *“Repetition is key to creating impact. When a drama is broadcast live on radio, it only reaches the audience tuning in at that specific moment, leaving others to miss out. To reinforce messages effectively, it would be beneficial to schedule the drama for multiple broadcasts at different time slots, ensuring a broader reach and increased engagement.” - Radio staff, Bulawayo*
- Increase the length of drama episodes & incorporate well-known content creators into the drama
- Explore ways of making content more interactive - live shows, more interaction with commenters and listeners
- Expand distribution and sharing of all content across different platforms, including TikTok, whatsapp groups/channels, and in-person presentation of dramas
- Partner with schools and community groups for awareness building events and live presentation of dramas

Effects on mental health knowledge and attitudes of young people:

Pre-post results from full matched sample:

- Pre-survey was administered to 261 participants who joined the station whatsapp groups
- Only 204 completed the post-survey: 75 male (37%), 129 female (63%), age range 10-63 years
- Overall, pre/post results show relatively high baseline values, and lower percent change than we would expect from in-person SKILLZ programs

		Pre	Post	% Change
1	Mental health is about how we think, feel, and act.	91%	96%	5%
2	I can name the feelings I have when I'm happy, sad, or angry.	88%	90%	2%
3	I know how to share my feelings with other people in healthy ways.	85%	85%	0%
4	Stress is a normal part of life, but too much stress can hurt your mental health.	97%	99%	2%
5	I can tell when stress is making me feel upset.	88%	87%	-1%
6	I know two ways to calm myself down when I feel stressed.	87%	86%	-1%
7	Taking care of my mental health can help me achieve my goals.	94%	95%	1%
8	I can identify my strengths or things I am good at.	91%	92%	1%
9	I can name three people I can talk to if I need help.	89%	90%	1%
10	I can say 'No' to peer pressure, like being asked to drink alcohol.	92%	95%	3%
11	People with mental illness are dangerous.	44%	47%	7%
12	A mental illness is a sign of personal weakness.	75%	76%	1%
13	I have talked to someone about mental health in the last month (outside of MindSKILLZ).	32%	60%	88%
	Overall	81%	84%	4%

Pre-post results from respondents aged 25 and younger:

- 157 completed both pre- and post- surveys; 106 female (68%); age range 10-25
- Overall results are very similar to those of the full sample
 - For both the overall sample and the younger group, the greatest observed change was in **communication about mental health** (88% and 76% change, respectively)

		Pre	Post	% Change
1	Mental health is about how we think, feel, and act.	90%	95%	6%
2	I can name the feelings I have when I'm happy, sad, or angry.	87%	92%	6%
3	I know how to share my feelings with other people in healthy ways.	85%	85%	0%
4	Stress is a normal part of life, but too much stress can hurt your mental health.	97%	99%	2%
5	I can tell when stress is making me feel upset.	89%	87%	-2%
6	I know two ways to calm myself down when I feel stressed.	91%	87%	-4%
7	Taking care of my mental health can help me achieve my goals.	92%	94%	2%
8	I can identify my strengths or things I am good at.	91%	90%	-1%
9	I can name three people I can talk to if I need help.	89%	88%	-1%
10	I can say 'No' to peer pressure, like being asked to drink alcohol.	92%	94%	2%
11	People with mental illness are dangerous.	41%	48%	17%
12	A mental illness is a sign of personal weakness.	74%	75%	1%
13	I have talked to someone about mental health in the last month (outside of MindSKILLZ).	33%	58%	76%
	Overall	81%	84%	4%

Participant Feedback Form responses - acceptability

	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total valid responses
I liked the radio episodes	11	69%	4	25%	0	0%	1	6%	16
The information in the radio episodes was useful to me	13	81%	3	19%	0	0%	0	0%	16
I liked the podcast episodes	13	81%	2	13%	1	6%	0	0%	16
The topics in the podcasts were relevant to me and other young people	13	87%	2	13%	0	0%	0	0%	15
I liked the influencer skits	9	69%	3	23%	1	8%	0	0%	13
The information in the skits was relevant to me and other young people	10	83%	2	17%	0	0%	0	0%	12
Overall, I liked the media content I viewed/engaged with	17	94%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%	18
The information in the content was easy to understand	10	56%	6	33%	2	11%	0	0%	18
The content was engaging	14	78%	4	22%	0	0%	0	0%	18
The content is appropriate for young people in Zimbabwe	17	94%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%	18
I would recommend the media content to a friend	15	83%	3	17%	0	0%	0	0%	18

Participant feedback form - media engagement

	0	1	2-3	4-5	6 or more	Don't know	Total valid responses
Radio episodes listened to	0	4	9	3	2	0	18
Podcast episodes listened to	1	5	9	2	1	0	18
Influencer skits viewed	0	8	6	0	0	3	17