

## **DEPRESSION IN OLDER ADULTS**

Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems in the world, including Africa. Depression is extremely common among older adults in Africa; studies demonstrate a prevalence of 26 – 43%, depending upon whether diagnostic measures or a screening tool are used. In rural Ugandan villages, older adults have lack of access to health care in general, making it unlikely that they can access care for mental health problems. Lack of access to mental health care results in loss of function, reduced quality of life, and worsened medical outcomes.

Although depression is common in older adults, it may be difficult to recognize. Depressed older adults may complain of lack of energy, or other body symptoms, and they may think the symptoms are related to old age or diseases. Symptoms, which range in severity from mild to severe, include depressed mood or sadness, loss of interest in activities or a lack of pleasure, weight loss or gain, decreased or increased appetite, difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, decreased or increased motor activity, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, difficulty concentrating or overconcentrating, or thoughts of death or suicide.

Depression is highly treatable. It may respond to behavioral interventions, counseling, group support, and/or medications.