



Countering the Global Increase of Mental Disorders and Mental Health Instabilities
ECOSOC

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Introduction

“There is no health without mental health.” Mental disorders and mental health instabilities are incredibly prevalent in almost every country around the globe, with at least one in 4 individuals being affected by mental health problems in their life (WHO). At one time in their life (in Europe), about 11% of people suffer from anxiety and/or depression, 2.5% suffer from alcohol usage disorders, 1% suffer from dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, and the list goes on. Without anything more needing to be said, most people around the globe are touched by the effects that mental health disorders hold. It is important to understand that mental health disorders not only affect the ones that have them but also their loved ones.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only been a health crisis in the sense that the virus has affected hundreds of millions of people, but this pandemic has also brought many mental health problems with it caused by numerous different factors. The long lockdowns and regulations implemented by most nations often saw people spending a lot of their time in their homes with limited social interactions, which was the cause of mental health issues such as depression. Anxiety regarding the virus was also prevalent throughout the pandemic. Front line workers and health officials worked under great stress during the peak of the pandemic which reportedly also caused numerous mental health problems amongst healthcare workers.

Definition of Key Terms

Mental Health Disorder

Mental health disorders are health conditions that affect your mood, thinking, and behaviour. There is a wide range of mental health disorders. They range from depression to schizophrenia to eating disorders.

Depression

Depression is the most common mental health disorder. Around 264 million people suffer from depression today, with more women than men being affected. According to the WHO, depression is “characterised by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, tiredness, and poor concentration. People with depression may also have multiple physical complaints with no apparent physical cause. Depression can be long-lasting or recurrent, substantially impairing people's ability to function at work or school and to cope with daily life. At its most severe, depression can lead to suicide (WHO).”

More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs)

A More Economically Developed Country (MEDC) is a country with a high standard of living and a high GDP (BBC).

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

A Less Economically Developed Country (LEDC) is a country with a low standard of living and a low GDP (BBC) as defined by the UN list of least developed countries.

Treatment gap

The treatment gap within a country, for example, is the statistic that represents the number of individuals with a disorder who are in need of treatment but do not



receive it. Therefore, it is also the statistical comparison between the prevalence of a disorder and the percentage of with it that have been treated.

Psychoactive substance-related disorders

These are disorders linked to substance abuse or addiction and in reaction to a stimulant substance such as alcohol, cannabis, caffeine, etc. Several different treatment approaches are available for these disorders and can include self-directed change procedures, psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy.

General Overview

Mental health issues have always been prevalent throughout society, with treatment methods dating back to as far as 6500 BC. It is said that one in four individuals will suffer from some kind of mental health problem in their life. In the 20th century, there was a stigma about mental health problems, especially when it came to men and them dealing with such mental health issues. Although the stigma around mental health problems has cleared up a lot throughout the past 21 years, it could be argued that mental health is still currently stigmatised (although not as much as before).

Mental health disorders come in multiple different forms (e.g depression, eating disorders, etc.) as well as different severities. Outside factors are usually the main causes of mental health issues. These could be things such as stress, homelessness, incarceration, abuse, traumatic experiences/events, etc. Misuse of alcohol and drugs may also lead to mental health problems. Addiction is also recognized as a mental health disorder.

The treatment of mental health disorders and the services to be able to provide this treatment are of utmost importance to protect and heal those suffering. Nations, such as Denmark, have extensive resources consisting of psychologists, psychiatrists, and the necessary psychotropic drugs when it comes to dealing with mental health disorders. Although many MEDC (More Economically Developed Country) countries have similar resources when it comes to mental health services as Denmark, some MEDCs decide not to invest as much money in mental health services. This, in the long run, is detrimental to a nation's economy as bad mental health in a nation will result in more burnouts, sick leaves, etc. resulting in a worsened economy.

When it comes to LEDCs (Less Economically Developed Countries), the availability of mental health services is even scarcer, with governments choosing to invest the little money they have allocated to healthcare to more 'general' healthcare. The WHO as well as NGOs such as Fracarita International are dedicated to providing mental health services to LEDCs. These initiatives are of utmost importance as mental health disorders should be treated like other illnesses.



Major Parties Involved

WHO (World Health Organisation)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a major party in this issue as mental health issues and problems are real problems that affect a large percentile of the world's population. The WHO's mission is to promote health and keep the world safe, thus it is largely involved in dealing with mental health issues. The WHO also argues that the financial resources allocated to tackling the issue of Mental health disorders are insufficient as well as arguing that this is linked to a social stigma and therefore discrimination against people suffering from these disorders.

Fracarita International

Fracarita International is an NGO, which is dedicated to providing mental health care in LEDCs (less economically developed countries). They have support from the UN. Fracarita International aims to ameliorate the lives of the vulnerable through charitable work in the fields of mental health care. With a lot of their work targeted on African and Asian countries (such as Brazil, Burundi, China, Ethiopia, and more), Fracarita international has placed a large focus on coaching, exchange of knowledge and international fund-raising.

United Kingdom

In a study led by Conor Stewart, it was concluded that in 2020, the United Kingdom had the highest prevalence of mental disorders across Europe. According to another study, 1 in 8 individuals suffering from mental health problems in the United Kingdom receive treatment. The most common mental health disorder in the United Kingdom is linked to mixed anxiety and depression, with approximately 8 in 100 people suffering from this.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is an LEDC that has suffered from civil war as well as being heavily impacted by the Ebola outbreak. A damning report from Amnesty International shows the total lack of mental health services available to the many suffering in Sierra Leone. This is also directly a reflection of the situation that many citizens of LEDCs find themselves in when it comes to Mental Health Services.

Germany

Considered by many as the leader in terms of providing the best mental health care system in the world, followed closely by countries such as Luxembourg, Germany's main method includes public good health insurance which covers mental health issues. This public health insurance is chosen by 86% of people in Germany. The two main treatments offered for patients in Germany include psychosomatic clinics, which treat depression, anxieties, eating disorders, etc and psychiatric hospitals.

Timeline of Key Events

6500 BC	Prehistoric skulls and cave art show skull drillings, which were used to release demons within someone. This indicates possible mental health problems, showing that mental health disorders have been around for a very long time.
1946	President Truman of the United States of America signed the National Mental Health Act which was a major step in recognizing and researching mental health disorders.
Nov. 2011	Major Cuts in the budget allocated towards mental health in the USA. A total cut of 1.6 billion dollars.
July 1st 2016	The Human Rights Council (HRC) of the United Nations (UN) created and adopted a new resolution on Mental Health and Human Rights. This was a major step forward as it showed the United Nations' will in working with the WHO and NGOs such as Fracarita International.
2020/2021	Due to the coronavirus outbreak there has been a large influx in people suffering from mental health disorders, especially depression and anxiety. This can clearly be seen in young people (especially teenagers) as well.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

The World Health Organisation has been striving to provide Mental Health Services to all those who need them.

Fracarita International has made real progress in delivering mental health services to LEDCs (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) and Asia. This has worked to an extent however it needs more financial backing.

According to Keith Humphreys, a professor of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences at Stanford, the most influential and promising legislative and federal measures that have been taken include the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010. These acts aim to place mental health in the same category of significance as physical health. However, many argue that although these acts have proven to be successful, over the last decade, multiple sources have been undermining the implications of these acts. For example, insurers, as even having been proven in court, have been restricting treatment and care people are entitled to.



Possible Solutions

The development and implementation of viable, feasible and effective plans to promote mental health and mental wellbeing as well as promoting activities that benefit mental health, especially to marginalized and vulnerable people (e.g. refugees, migrants, people who are unemployed, prisoners/ex-prisoners, people with disabilities, queer people etc.) This would raise awareness of these issues to the general public and reduce the social stigma around mental health, thereby reducing the currently over 70% treatment gap in many countries.

Providing mental health services and making them accessible to the general public. This could also include ensuring proper funding for psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotropic drugs, in order for them to be accessible to those that need them.

Attempting to introduce measures to close the treatment gap that people suffering from mental health problems suffer with. In LEDCs a very small percentile of the population have access to treatment for mental health disorders whilst in MEDCs, the percentage lies between 44 and 77 (depending on the country) (WHO). This would give people suffering from mental health disorders in lower-income countries better access to treatment which could also concur with possible treatments for psychoactive substance-related disorders.

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