



**World Health
Organization**

Report on launch of new publication:

MENTAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Targeting persons with mental health conditions as a
vulnerable group**

**UN Headquarters, New York, 16 September 2010
Conference Room 5, TNLB, 13.00–14.45**

Organized by the World Health Organization (WHO)

Event description:

There is growing recognition within the international community that mental health is one of the most neglected yet essential issues in advancing human development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Not only is mental health a key indicator of development, but the social and economic impact of mental and psychosocial disabilities is diverse and far-reaching, leading to homelessness, poor educational and health outcomes and high unemployment rates culminating in high rates of poverty.

Persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities are one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society, yet they are consistently ignored on the health and development agendas. This is despite the fact that an explicit goal of development is to reach the most vulnerable: by investing in persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities, development outcomes for all can be improved.

For this reason, the World Health Organization (WHO) produced a report entitled "Mental Health and Development: Targeting people with mental health conditions as a vulnerable group". The report presents compelling evidence that persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities continue to be marginalized in terms of development aid and government attention. It calls for all development stakeholders to focus their attention on mental health.

The report was launched at an event in New York on 16 September 2010 at the United Nations, in the lead up to the MDG Summit.

Event proceedings:

Dr. Ala Alwan, Assistant Director-General, Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health, World Health Organization (WHO), opened the session. He thanked the both the Government of Spain and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (through the Mental Health and Poverty Project research programme) for their support in the development and production of the new WHO report: Mental Health and Development.

He provided a brief overview of the WHO report, emphasizing that it draws evidence from a range of sources in order to provide a comprehensive picture of how persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities are neglected in development efforts, and how this undermines the progress and effectiveness of development programmes. He went on to describe how the report suggests strategies to develop a global development agenda that invests in and empowers persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities and noted that WHO plans to work further on these issues. He then introduced the speakers for the event:

- Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
- Dr. Michelle Funk, Coordinator, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO
- Prof. Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, University, College London
- Mr. Sylvester Katontoka, Founder and President of Mental Health Users' Network of Zambia (MHUNZA)
- Ms. Akiko Ito, Chief, Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, DESA.

Ms. Rachel Mayanja congratulated WHO for the report and their recognition of the importance of mental health. She stated that there is an increasing recognition of the importance of mental health in the international community, but that there is an ongoing need for evidence and the documentation of the experiences of persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities. She outlined various initiatives to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, linking them to the mental health agenda. Finally she noted the links between mental health and the MDGs, highlighting that mental health is a key issue in advancing human development.

Dr. Michelle Funk presented an outline of the report. She began by describing the burden of disease attributed to mental health conditions in all countries and that the majority of persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities are living in poverty. She went on to explain that this group meet 9 core criteria for vulnerability, including experiencing high levels of stigma, barriers in accessing education and employment, and exclusion from a range of health and development social services. She also pointed out that a number of other vulnerable groups have high rates of mental health problems.

Dr. Funk put forward a number of evidence-based strategies for improving development outcomes. These include integration of mental health into primary care, broader health policies and programmes, into post emergency strategies, and into social services (including housing); supporting children with mental disabilities to access education; creating employment opportunities for persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities; developing policies and laws that address human rights; and including people with mental disabilities in decision-making processes. All development actors – including governments, civil society or professional organizations – have an important role to play in integrating mental health into the development agenda. Dr. Funk concluded by urging global development community to invest in persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities in order to improve development outcomes for all people.

In response to the presentation, **Prof. Michael Marmot** applauded the WHO for the report. He noted the value of interventions to improve the social conditions which lead to poor health. He concluded by recognizing the importance of ensuring that all people are equally able to enjoy healthy living conditions, and that targeting people with mental disabilities in health and development efforts is a matter of social justice.

Mr. Sylvester Katontoka gave his support for the report and highlighted the importance of using a human rights approach to mainstreaming mental health into development. He firmly stated that there is a need to promote and support the involvement of persons with mental health conditions in these efforts.

Ms. Akiko Ito thanked the WHO for this timely report. She affirmed that there is an urgent need to integrate the needs of persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities in all development efforts, including the MDGs. She outlined the role of DESA in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development and noted that the panel discussion and launch would prompt more action in the area of mental health, including within the UN system.

Dr. Alwan opened the floor for reactions to the report.

Comments included:

- Several audience members felt that the launch of the report was a landmark event, marking a growing recognition of the importance of mental health in development.
- The report will be a useful resource in the process of developing strategies to mainstream mental disability into development efforts, as well as inter-agency guidelines for supporting people with disabilities in emergency settings.
- There is an ongoing lack of funding for mental health and while there is still limited evidence from low and middle income countries, there is also little implementation of the evidence that exists. There is an urgent need to support consumers and family members to have a voice and advocate for themselves.
- It was proposed that the Secretariat of the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities assign a focal point on mental health to sustain efforts to keep mental health on the UN agenda.
- It was also noted that not only should mental health be integrated into development, but that mental health care should include development and anti-poverty components.

Dr. Alwan concluded the event by thanking all for their participation. He reiterated that there is a high level of marginalization of persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities in development programmes, but added that the report shows that there is opportunity to change this. He stated that WHO will continue to work on this issue

by strengthening partnerships, involving people with mental disabilities, and developing an action plan for this issue.

WHO gratefully acknowledges the support of the Government of Spain for the production of the WHO Report on Mental Health and Development. The report was also produced as part of a research programme consortium entitled the Mental Health and Poverty Project, funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development.
