**Forum:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) **Issue:**

Addressing Child and Adolescent Mental Health

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## Introduction

Child and adolescent mental health is central to physical health, psychological health and development, and is impacted by a large range of factors including familiar, cultural, societal, economic and environmental factors. Mental health, especially that of children is also an indicator of risk behaviors such as self-harm, violence, tobacco, drug, and alcohol use. In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 25, "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being", it can be seen how mental health is of the utmost importance and needs to be addressed. Although significant progress has been made in the front of child and adolescent mental health over past decades, with an increase in resources and programs for child and adolescent mental health, as well as a greater understanding of the importance of mental health, many challenges remain. One of these challenges lie with helping those involved in conflict as armed conflicts are one of the leading causes of mental health problems. With approximately 250 million children living in nations affected by war and other conflict, and aproximatly 68 million people displaced by conflict, this is a huge issue. Moreover, with up to 50% of all mental health conditions starting before the age of 14 and suicide being in the top three causes of death among youth, it can be clearly seen how big of an issue the mental health and well-being of children and adolencets is. But mental health remains a somewhat neglected region of health, and although officially considered an important part of overall health, with the WHO's view of mental health meaning that it is technically just as relevant as physical health, in actuality mental health remains neglected. In fact, the poor political will and inadequate budget distribution to cope with and avert the pressure caused by mental health are juxtaposed with compelling evidence on the great burden and the importance of addressing mental health. The fact that mental health ranks so low on many health system's priorities is truly a major issue. International data is available on the notable scarcity of mental health facilities in countries with low and medium incomes, amid the growing pressure of accelerated economic and social change.

The effects of the recent COVID-19 pandemic can also not be ignored as it has exacerbated the preexisting issues around child and adolescent mental health. A study conducted in China on adolescents found that, "the prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms was 43.7% and 37.4%, respectively". COVID-19 has also decreased the youth's access to and willingness to accept to resources to help with mental health issues with on study finding that, "almost a quarter of respondents (23%) said that there was less mental health support in their school than before the pandemic, while only 9% agreed that there was more mental health support."

## Definition of Key Terms

**Mental Health**

Mental health is a combination of many things including one's psychological, emotional, and social well-being. One's mental health is affected by a host of factors and affects how people act, cope, interact with one another, and more. Mental health is very important in order for people to create and maintain all types of relationships, and contribute to both their community and to society as a whole. It also helps determine how one handles stress, makes choices, as well as overall productivity.

**Behavioral Health**

Behavioral health is essentially one's mental/emotional well-being and specifically actions that people make that affect these areas of health. When someone has issues involvinf their everyday actions/routines, it can lead to a multitude of problems including durg abuse, serious mental disorders, and, in some cases, suicide. Behavioral health is also a sort of "spectrum", which includes things like stress on the less extreme end and serious mental illness/self harm on the other.

**Mental disorder**

A mental disorder is basically a diagnosable mental problem. What is meant by this is that a certain problem that someone is having mentally, that has certain symptoms etc, can be diagnosed and had a specific name. This covers a wide range of things and can be used to describe essentially any mental problem. A mental disorder can also be considered a "serious emotional disorder". This is a mental health disorder that is so serious that it hampers one's ability to function in everyday life.

**Systems of Care**

Systems of care is a model that essentially is a web of connections that young people can make with people like close family, other people their age, and professionals. This web of connections is used in conjunction with other resources and services that can help to support young people as they move through their lives. This system has been proven to be very effective and is a holistic approach to helping

youth with mental health problems. It also relies on activities and involvement from the community at large as well as the individual.

**Mental health promotion**

Mental health promotion can include a multitude of different things, broadly it is actions that have the goal of improving mental health and success to resources surrounding it. It can be as simple as having a positive sense of worth. However, usually it is more complicated than that and is a strategy that is used to help support those going through mental health problems.

**Interventions**

An intervention is an action taken to cure a mental health disorder. An intervention takes many forms and can include a multitude of things such as formal therapy, changes in one's activities, and early intervention services for young children among other things. Any of these, whether it be separately or together, can seriously help youth going through mental health problems.

# Background Information

## Causes of Mental Health Issues

There are a vast number of potential causes of mental health issues, especially when relating to young people. For most people who have mental health issues, there is probably a complex combination of many things that caused them to develop. However, there are a few common causes. These include, child abuse, social isolation, discrimination, social disadvantages/poverty, bereavement, long-term stress, significant trauma, and physical casues such as a head injury.

### *Why mental health and treatment matters*

Mental health is perhaps the most important and also most neglected parts of most people's health. Mental health and the disorders associated with it have a reputation of being "fake" or not "real problems" for most people. Many people question the necessity and effectiveness of mental health practices. This is very dangerous as your mental health is just as important as physical health as it can lead to life threatening issues and is a major cause of productive years of life lost. Problems associated with mental health can also affect anyone, the causes mentioned above are just things that increase the probability that you will develop a mental illness. In reality, just about anyone can and does develop, at least at some level, some mental health issues. In most situations, people can find healthy coping mechanisms, but occasionally, they can not get past it. Angry or depressed, many people turn to food, alcohol,

drugs, gambling, and even suicide, when what is really needed is treatment.

*Caption #1: The United Nations Logo*

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United States

The United States is the third most depressed country according to the World Health Organization. Additionally, one sixth of US youth (6-17) reported experiencing a mental health disorder each year. With half of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24 and the fact that depression alone costs the nation about $210.5 billion annually, it can be seen how big of a problem mental health is in the US. The US also has a lackluster mental health care system with only 41 percent of those affected by mental health related issues receiving mental health care or services in the past year. Due to high costs many people chose to not get treated and instead deal with it on their own.

### China

China is the most depressed country according to the World Health Organization and as such is the most affected by mental health issues. Due mainly to a culture of suppressing feelings and the immense pressure placed on especially adolescents particularly in relation to the taking of the gaokao, many long term mental health issues develop. This combined with a lack of qualified staff with China only having 17,000 certified psychiatrists, (aproximatly 10 percent of that of other developed countries per capita) exacerbates the issues.

### Germany

Mental health issues are very prevalent in Germany with 31% of the population having some sort of mental disorder. However, Germany leads Europe in the treatment of mental illness. The public health care system in Germany provides financial support for patients, access to healthcare services, help finding work, outreach programs, and awareness campaigns. This leads to Germany being ranked first in

the world in relation to its mental health system. Additionally, Germany has a high ratio of psychiatrists to people with an average of about 13.20 per 100,000 population.

### Global Coalition on Youth Mental Health

The Global Coalition on Youth Mental Health is an organization very involved in both improving the systems for treating youth with mental disorders and preventing these disorders from forming in the first place. The organization is also working with many other organizations that work primarily with mental health, communities, nations, and individuals to try to bring awareness to the issue and find solutions. They have joined with many multinational organizations and corporations in order to create policies and programs to help address youth mental health.

### Miracle Foundation India

The Miracle Foundation India is an organisation that mainly focuses on working with underprivileged youth and children in India to bring about social-emotional development, build life skills, and develop coping strategies. However, in recent years they have also been expanding their reach to other countries and have been working with the Indian government to try to pass bills and create programs to help young people dealing with mental health problems.

### World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH)

The World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) is an organization whose goals include; "the prevention of mental and emotional disorders; the proper treatment and care of those with such disorders; and the promotion of mental health". It achieves these goals through being able to connect and have influence across the globe with it having contacts in 94 countries. It is the only worldwide advocacy and public education organization in the mental health field and deals with a multitude of things relating to mental health including both international crisis, advocacy at a national/international level, and help at an individual level.

## Timeline of Events

You must include short sentences to explain the timeline. Follow the format presented below:

**Date Description of event**

1948 World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) founded. The WFMH, as described above, is a NGO focusing solely on mental heal and prevention.

1952 American Psychiatric Association's publices the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) to officially standardize the diagnosis of mental disorders. These

legitimizing mental health problems and lead to a larger focus on them.

2011

Mental health was recognized as a key health and development issue for adolescents and included in several high-level documents including three consecutive State of the World's Children Reports

September 2015

Mental health and substance abuse included in the Sustainable Development Agenda, which was adopted at the United Nations General Assembly

standards went a long way to

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- Mental health and human rights - Resolution of Human Rights Council and associated Report, 31 January 2017**(A/HRC/RES/32/18)**
- The global burden of mental disorders and the need for a comprehensive, coordinated response from health and social sectors at the country level, 25 May 2012, **(WHA65.4)**
- Comprehensive mental health action, 27 May 2013, **(WHA66.8)**

## Possible Solutions

**Long-term programs and departments that focus on mental health under the larger department of health within a country could go a long way to improving the mental health of youth.** Mental health is an area of wellness that has long been discriminated against, and affirmative action would greatly improve the effectiveness of programs. There is a huge amount of lobbying activity going on in many nations. The concern is that it is often ad hoc and only really happens on days or weeks for mental health occasions. This sort of activism is not as effective as long term solutions that help over a long period of time. As such, nation-level activism and anti-stigma programs must be organized in a results-based context. In line with this, it must also be understood that, within certain country's departments of health, mental health systems are not strong enough and are completely absent in others. It is important for these nations to set up, improve and provide budgets for them. There is a great deal of re-work and a

subsequent loss of time and resources in nations where mental health and drug abuse systems are housed in separate departments. Time and resources will be saved with the integration of mental health and drug abuse services under one larger health framework. The problem with this is mainly that there is no standard way that nations can go about creating a "mental health budget", that is to say a budget specifically for mental health. Most nations spend less than three percent of their health budgets on mental health. A way to fix this problem could be to allocate certain funds of the health programs to specifically mental health. In short, in the mainstream health sector, mental health

programs need to be implemented. Additionally, although these services need to work together and in multiple health fields, actions that help to strengthen these specific organizations are often necessary to stop sidelining mental health and to allow it its proper prominence.

**Creation of cheaper, user-friendly methodologies and resources to identify and help find treatment for mental health issues.** As technology improves, so do ways of identifying and finding help for those in need. One of the main problems that need to be addressed in relation to climate change is getting rid of the negative stigma of getting help and finding those who actually need it and getting them help. Due to mental health usually being neglected as a part of a person's health, many people do not get help when they need it or do not know they need it. This could be addressed by using a multitude of things, however, broadly, a cheap, widespread, and easy to use method of getting finding those in need needs to be developed. This could come in the form of an app, through education, advertisements, news, or a multitude of other things. There is also increasing evidence for the integration of mental health into primary health care, and there is evidence that supports the cost-effectiveness of mental health services when combined with primary care compared to hospital services. Fully qualified general physicians have been found to be capable of diagnosing and treating the most common psychiatric illnesses. There is some data from developed nations that by including multipurpose health professionals with minimal schooling, mental health can be improved at the national level as the first point of finding more advanced help for those who need it. However, it must be understood thatIntegration is out of the question in the absence of powerful health services. Only after a primary health care program is in place should these solutions be implemented. Before solid primary care programs are in place, it is important to recognize community-based approaches as potential alternatives.

**Addressing people's attitudes towards mental health and protecting the rights of patients.** In the world today, most people have an attitude toward mental health that is not healthy, namely, that it is not important and to just "push through it". This leads many people to not seek medical attention when they desperately need it. This can lead to fatal consequences and is a major problem that needs to be solved to address mental health. There are many solutions for this problem, and more research needs to be done to find the best and most cost effective ways. But, for now, it is known that patients need to have their rights protected and their dignity kept in check as this is a major reason why people shy away from

treatment. In many places around the globe, mental health problems are responded to with chains and asylums, or on the less extreme side, and what is more common with youth, social ostracism and shaming due to seeking help. The WHO stresses that, "mental health legislation is necessary for protecting the rights of persons with mental disorders in institutional settings and in the community". It is not believed that it would be necessary to establish and officially enact a piece of legislation in order to enhance the interests of people with mental disorders in all circumstances. However, legislation in some areas could greatly improve mental health treatment and while numerous hurdles to implementing regulations have been identified by the WHO if these could be overcome, real progress could be made.

Legislation and policy formulation can be seen as a top-down strategy which, in the presence of strong public infrastructures and a coordinated, advanced and conscious civil society, seems to work better. However, in many states that don't have these resources/programs, a bottom-up approach to improving care quality and promoting patients' privacy and rights appears to be more encouraging. An example of this is seen in the "chain-free" initiative started by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO), which was started as a pilot program in Somalia and Afghanistan in 2006, is a bottom-up approach that begins with specific hospital measures (taking away chains from people with mental health problems and enhancing medical treatment), and stretches down to homes and ends with community-level activism attempting to deal with the "invisible" chains that affect patients' human rights in general. If something similar to this could be implemented on a wider scale, it could go a long way to addressing child and adolescent mental health.

**The use of prevention and other non traditional methods as treatment for mental health issues.** Traditionally, the bulk of countries' public health officials have been experts in communicable diseases with the major focus being on these diseases. In a large number of nations, including several developing countries, with the emergence of non-communicable diseases as a major concern, public health officials have come to understand the importance of prevention and promotion. But within this framework, mental wellbeing is still not at all well placed. For starters, the modern solution to noncommunicable diseases is to focus on reducing the burden of risk factors. Integrating mental health services into the mainstream of general health, notably non-communicable diseases, has been one of the best steps to minimize the stigmatization of mental disorders. However, in terms of addressing the various causes of mental health problems and providing effective medical treatments, the distinctions between psychiatric illnesses and other noncommunicable conditions should not be identical due to the complex nature of mental disorders. Therefore, the key concern now emerges as to whether prevention can be specifically limited to primary prevention and risk factor monitoring as opposed to early warning systems and treatment. Primary prevention using things like risk factors tends to be better where practicable because it avoids incidence and is more successful than early case detection. However, there are some problems with this. First of all, there is no uniform definition of risk factors leading to no uniform way of detecting them. Second, many risk factors that have been identified such as obesity or

hypertension are really intermediate risk factors for other non-communicable diseases. If a more holistic approach was to be taken in regards to health these could then also be addressed.

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