**Assignment one**

**Certificate in Mental Health**

Kindly respond to the following questions citing relevant examples to render your explanations practical

1. Mental health is becoming a central issue for public Health complex emergencies explain this statement citing relevant examples other than the one of Afghanistan that is provided here.

The importance of mental health in public health is already evident in the definition of health as provided by the WHO. The WHO defines health as ‘*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*.’ One of the priorities in emergencies is to protect and improve people’s mental health and psychosocial well-being. A good example of the relevance for mental health is the recent outbreak of Ebola in D.R. Congo. Ebola epidemics are unlike anything seen before: The virus spreads rapidly, the disease is infectious and has a high mortality rate, local health care systems are ill equipped to handle large scale outbreak. Finally, there are widespread rumors, misconceptions and misinformation about the disease and how to prevent it are widespread. Psychosocial support is identified as a key priority. Psychosocial support is vital to ensure the well-being of the affected population, and also to counter-act the threats to public health and safety that fear, stigmatization and misconception poses[[1]](#footnote-1).

Another example of mental health being a central issue is seen in the Middle East. Due to the conflict many people fled and infrastructure was destroyed. Existing communities were torn apart, hospitals and social centres destroyed leaving the population without any medical and social support but the levels of traumatic stress are high. [International Medical Corps (IMC) undertook a n analysis](http://www.mei.edu/content/article/addressing-mental-health-needs-among-syrian-refugees) at IMC supported health centers serving Syrian refugees and IDPs in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. The findings underlined the very limited access to mental health services while noting that 54 percent of the displaced had severe emotional disorders and 26.6 percent of children faced intellectual and developmental challenges[[2]](#footnote-2). [The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes](http://www.unhcr.org/55f6b90f9.pdf) that “the most prevalent and most significant clinical problems among Syrians are emotional disorders, such as: depression, prolonged grief disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and various forms of anxiety disorders.” Lack of appropriate treatment and continuing high levels of stress worsen their situation. Medical care for those with mental disorders remains out of reach for most[[3]](#footnote-3).

2. Many complex emergencies are exacerbated by cultural and ethnic issues in developing countries, Rwanda genocide of 1994. Do the issues have an impact on mental health status of the victims, and how can the same be taken care of. Explain your answer with relevant examples.

Yes, cultural and ethnic issues do impact the mental health status of the ***survivors.*** An example is the situation in Somalia. For several decades, the people of Somalia have been confronted with severe levels of armed conflict and forced displacement. As a result, 1.1 million Somalis have become refugees, fleeing primarily to neighbouring countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti), with yet another 1.1 million Somalis living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Somalian borders. Additionally, sizable populations may be found in countries scattered along the route to Europe, North America and South Africa. Health professionals frequently find it challenging to provide assistance to displaced Somalis with mental disorders or psychosocial problems due to distinct cultural and religious conceptualizations of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. This is compounded by lack of understanding of the specific sociopolitical organization of Somali society and the complicated migration history of the population.[[4]](#footnote-4) In order to provide good mental health care it is important to understand the culture and context of the country you work in. Cultural and religious values and understandings play an important role in the perception and explanation of mental and social problems, and the methods of treatment. It is important for all health practitioners involved in mental health and psychosocial support programmes to understand and explore how distress within a culture or community is expressed and how do people explain and make sense of their symptoms or illness as this will influence their treatment expectations and coping strategies.

3. What are the needs for cross-cultural communication?

People from different culture may find it is difficult to communicate due to language barriers and cultural differences. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking—ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures. The needs for cross-cultural communication are:

* Language - you need to speak the same language or use a translator. For example: agree to both speak English
* Non-verbal communication - you need to be aware that some gestures which may mean one thing in your own culture, may mean something else in another culture. You also need to know what is appropriate in certain countries. For example: in some countries a woman is not supposed to look directly at a man.
* Culture – you need to understand the culture and context. Is it normal to shake hands when greeting or is that not okay. What are the customs in greeting, how much time do you need to chit chat before getting to the point, etc.

4. Explain the concepts of communication and culture in terms of dealing with issues of Mental Health in Emergency situations.

As described in the above answer, for good communication we need to understand the language and cultural meaning. In terms of language it is very important to understand how mental health conditions are described. For instance, I, as a westerner, may speak about psychosis, but that concept may not be known to other countries and it may be viewed as ‘being possessed’. Mental illness may also be viewed as the ‘will of God’ or as the result of voodoo or witchcraft. So it is important to understand what wording is used to describe mental health issues but also what people think causes mental illness. As this will have an effect on how people understand, view and treat the mentally ill in their community. Do they acknowledge that people can be mentally ill or is the concept stigmatized and are people with mental disorders kept away from the public eye? If cultural beliefs and understanding do not permit people to speak about their own or others mental illness, then it will also be a challenge to address it and provide the help needed. In that case it may be needed to start with awareness raising and communicate about mental health (what it means, that is a normal part of health, nothing to be ashamed of, etc.) to help create understanding. In order to bring the message across it is also important to understand how the community communicates. Do you communicate through drama, songs, pictures or words? So in order to provide proper mental health care you need to understand the culture and how to communicate what in which manner.

5. Explain the universal set of values based on law that are followed when helping victims of complex emergencies so as to have their mental states stable.

“Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death.” Access to health care (including mental health) is one of those rights. In many countries people do not have access to basic mental health care and treatment they require. In other countries people may only have access to psychiatric institutions because community based mental health care is absent. Many people with mental illness are excluded from community life and denied basic rights such as shelter, food and clothing, and are discriminated against. Many are denied the right to vote, marry and have children. As a consequence, many people with mental disabilities are living in extreme poverty which in turn, affects their ability to gain access to appropriate care, integrate into society and recover from their illness.

Protection is frequently a major concern in all humanitarian crises— situations of conflict and violence, as well as natural disasters. An effective humanitarian response to such situations must be informed by an analysis of the threats and risks that people face. Appropriate steps should be taken to minimize those threats and risks, and ensure full respect of the rights of all people affected by disaster or armed conflict. Humanitarian actors must ensure that their activities do not lead to or perpetuate discrimination, abuse, neglect and violence[[5]](#footnote-5). The way relief is delivered is also important. For example, food distribution points must not be set up in areas where women are vulnerable to attack.

Part of the response to affected populations can include specialized services, such as legal aid, reuniting families and facilitate refugee registration. Several things can be done to protect the rights of people with mental health issues.

The WHO lists the following actions[[6]](#footnote-6):

**Raise awareness and advocate for change**

Violations often occur behind closed doors and go unreported - unless people know that they are going on, action cannot be taken to stop them. WHO works to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of people with mental disabilities and collaborates with international organizations to disseminate international human rights standards.

**Develop mental health policies and laws that promote human rights**

Mental health policies and laws are absent or inadequate in most countries of the world and yet they are critical to improving conditions for people with mental disabilities.

**Create mechanisms to assess and improve human rights conditions**

Many people with mental disabilities are assumed to have no capacity to make decisions for themselves and are therefore being detained and treated in psychiatric institutions unjustifiably and against their will, where they are being treated appallingly and inhumanely.

**Train key stakeholders on the rights of people with mental disabilities**

All people and professionals who have an impact on the lives of people with mental disabilities should receive training on human rights issues. Training needs to be provided to:

* people with mental disabilities themselves as well as their families - so that they can claim their rights;
* health and mental health professionals - so that they understand the rights of their patients and apply these in practice;
* the police force who are in daily contact with people with mental disabilities;
* Lawyers, magistrates and judges who make important decisions concerning the lives of people with mental disabilities.

6. Why is it important to comply with international Bodies, covenants and Declarations in emergency procedures?

The international bodies, covenants and declarations provide conditions under which justice and respect for the rights of human beings can be maintained. By complying to them you can ensure that the rights of the individuals are protected. Protecting Human Rights is essential for maintaining safety and security. When rights of people are being violated, unrest and even conflict may be the result.

So the international laws and regulations are a protective measure for individuals as much as for the security and safety (peace) in societies. That is why it is important that all actors (government, humanitarian aid organizations, companies and individual people themselves) respect and adhere to human rights.

7. Dealing with people with disabilities and special groups sometimes is a challenge in emergency situations. Enumerate some of the guiding principles that should be adhered to when handling them and why it is important.

Care should be given according to the IASC guidelines[[7]](#footnote-7) and Sphere standards[[8]](#footnote-8).

The Sphere Humanitarian Charter clearly establishes that both protection and assistance are ‘critical pillars’ of humanitarian action. This is summarized in:

* the right to life with dignity
* the right to receive humanitarian assistance
* the right to protection and security

The Sphere identifies four principles that underpin humanitarian action and contain the core elements of protection in humanitarian response. These principles are[[9]](#footnote-9):

1. ‘Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions’
2. ‘Ensure people’s access to impartial assistance – in proportion to need and without discrimination’
3. ‘Protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion’
4. ‘Assist people to claim their rights, access available remedies and recover from the effects of abuse’

It is important to adhere to these principles to protect the human rights of the people in need, to enhance their well-being and to do no further harm.

8. What are the causes of disputes and conflicts?

* Misunderstandings or misconceptions. Two parties may not see eye to eye on a certain matter and end up in a conflict.
* One party might want to have something that belongs to the other party (this can be at individual level but also on international level. For instance, one country wants the natural minerals (e.g. oil, gold, etc.) which are available in another country)
* Violations of (basic) Human Rights.

1. Psychosocial support during an outbreak of Ebola virus disease, [www.pscentre.org](http://www.pscentre.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Addressing mental health needs among Syrian refugees, IMC, September 22, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Culture, context and the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of Syrians, a review for MHPSS staff working with Syrians affected by armed conflict, UNHCR, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Culture, context and mental health of Somali refugees, UNHCR, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. OCHA on message: Protection [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/legislation/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. IASC, MHPSS in Emergencies - What Should Protection Managers Know?, 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Minimum Inter-Agency Standards for protection mainstreaming, published by World Vision 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)