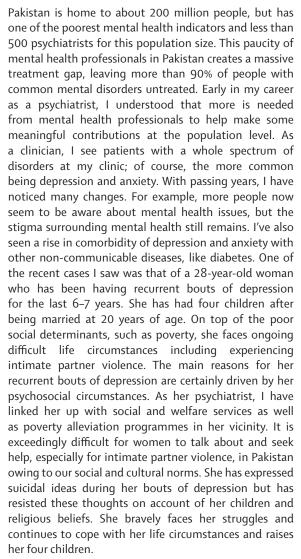
A letter from...

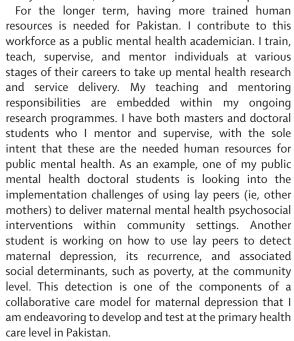
Pakistan



In my other role as a public mental health professional, I conduct research around maternal mental health and early childhood development. Being a public mental health professional, I interface with the Ministry of National Health Services and the policy making environment. Developing and testing task-shifted maternal psychosocial interventions delivered through existing health systems remains my main focus of work. This remains my focus for two main reasons: (1) women are a vulnerable and neglected group in Pakistan; and (2) there remains a huge treatment gap for women's mental health—ie, there are very few psychiatrists to treat a huge burden of mental health issues in Pakistan. Having



psychosocial interventions that can be delivered by non-specialists or peers ensures that this gap is reduced to some extent. And working to promote women's mental health also addresses the wellbeing of their children. Besides these reasons, psychosocial interventions are less costly to invest in, thus more likely to be scaled up.



With the recent pandemic of COVID-19, like other countries, Pakistan has been responding at all fronts, including the public health front. As one of the very few public mental health professionals in Pakistan, I serve as a member on a technical steering committee established to promote the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of students by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Through this committee, I am contributing to ensure mental health and psychosocial services for adolescents and young students are available at their colleges and universities. This committee is a rare example of having two sectors—ie, health and education—working together to address the mental health needs of Pakistan's youth in a very sustainable way.

Being a Pakistani psychiatrist turned public mental health professional puts many demands on me to contribute, as much as possible, for the wellbeing of populations and communities I work with.

Siham Sikander

