



Research Report

General Assembly 3

The question of the undermining of
mental health issues in developing
nations

Student Officers:
Jim Pardon
Hilde Kokx

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2019

Introduction

Everyone understands that infectious diseases affect public health, but one might wonder if mental health issues have the same negative consequences. Mental disorders might not be contagious or visible from one's appearance, but nevertheless they are damaging to society. Mental illness obstructs people from participating in society. Some consequences for society which stem from a lack of treatment of mental health issues include a higher unemployment rate and a higher suicide rate. Mental illness negatively affects one's ability to perform a job correctly, which consequently affects the economic status of a nation and therefore prevents the nation from becoming developed, hereby keeping it a developing nation.

In general, mental health issues are an invisible problem in developing nations, since there is little awareness about them in the developing world. In developed nations, there is currently a trend whereby employers are starting to acknowledge the need to recognise mental health issues within a work environment. Employers are starting to take responsibility for not only ensuring their employees physical health, but their mental health as well. That, together with public awareness, creates a nation in which mental health is valued and mental disorders are treated. This contrasts with the situation in the developing world.

"Mental health disorders are a leading cause of suffering and disability everywhere, but the problem is especially acute in the developing world," said Dr. Peter A. Singer, CEO of Grand Challenges Canada. "There is very little funding for mental health innovations in low- and middle-income countries, where mental illness is the most neglected of many neglected diseases. It's a terrible denial of human potential." – *Dr. Peter A. Singer*

Charities struggle with finding sufficient funds to improve mental healthcare, because such issues do not appear in advertising or promotional material to the same extent as those relating to physical healthcare. Donations come flooding in when an advertisement shows poor children living in bad conditions, because the public feels empathy. Mental illness, on the other hand, is not as easy to empathise with, simply because mental illness does not usually show from the outside and it is hard to relate to. This, in combination with the stigma around mental disorders, hinders the formation of any significant social pressure to take action against this issue.

The Committee

This committee will focus on a number of different issues concerning current environmental, humanitarian and health issues that affect people all over the world. Because of the pressing issue of the environment, MUNA added environment to its "Third Committee", and gave it a slightly different name than the name used at the real UN for its Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural).

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Keywords

Some important keywords are listed below that apply to this issue, together with their definitions.

Mental health

= A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

Mental illness

= Refers to a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors.

Developing nation

= A nation that has low levels of industrialization and fares poorly on the Human Development Index (HDI).

Primary care

= The medical attention that a patient receives on initial contact with a health-care service

Marketability

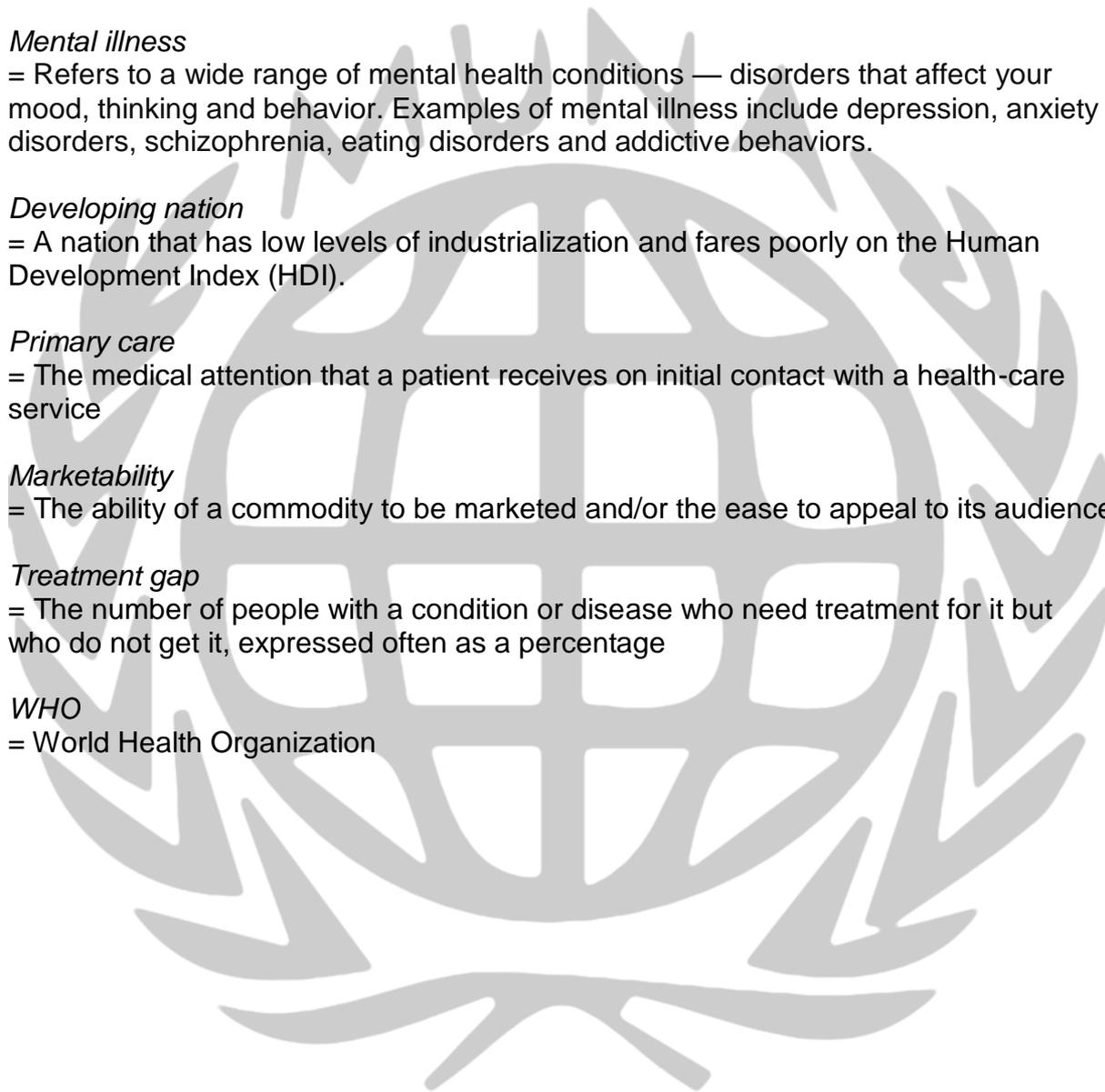
= The ability of a commodity to be marketed and/or the ease to appeal to its audience

Treatment gap

= The number of people with a condition or disease who need treatment for it but who do not get it, expressed often as a percentage

WHO

= World Health Organization



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Overview

Some actions have been taken in an attempt to solve this issue.

In 2008, the WHO launched the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) to advocate giving mental health more attention in global health policies.

In 2012, the Grand Challenges Canada organization, which the Canadian government funds, announced their intention to support 15 innovative projects designed to improve mental health diagnosis and care in developing nations, using \$19.4 million for these projects. These projects include for instance the Pakistan 'Family Network for Kids' project, which focuses on encouraging the community (relatives, neighbours, etc.) to pay attention and to care for the troubled youth, and not to leave the job to health workers only. Another project funded by Canada is the Zimbabwe 'Friendship Bench', which aims to reduce the mental health treatment gap by using a cognitive behavioural therapy based approach at primary care level to address 'kufungisisa', or 'thinking too much'.

The major parties involved in this issue are all developing nations, since this is where the issue occurs. However, developed nations are of importance, too, because this is where the funds for improvement might come from.

Developing nations in GA3 (according to the UN):

- Afghanistan
- Argentina
- Brazil
- China
- Egypt
- Gambia
- Ghana
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Niger
- Nigeria
- North Korea
- Pakistan
- Russian Federation (in transition)
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- Syria
- Thailand
- Turkey

Developed nations in GA3 (according to the UN):

- Australia
- Canada
- France
- Germany

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- Hungary
- Italy
- Spain
- The Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- United States of America

Arguments

Below are some arguments in favour and against the issue. While this might be helpful, we encourage the delegates of GA3 to think creatively and come up with more arguments of their own.

Note: in favour means that mental health issues should not be undermined, while against means leaving the issue as it is.

In favour:

- Providing mental healthcare can have a positive impact on the economy of a nation
- Providing mental healthcare can lower the suicide rate in a country, meaning the people will be happier

Against

- Leaving the issue as it is creates room to campaign for and receive funds for other issues
- Mental illness is not a problem in developing countries and by addressing it people will start to think it is (make sure, if you use this argument, to be smart in using statistics to prove your point and come across as credible)

Timeline of Events

Below is a chronological list of some major events in the history of mental health.

- 1992: World Mental Health Day first introduced by the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH), since then an annual happening
- 2001: World Health Report by WHO focused on mental health
- 2001: World Health Day, themed 'Mental Health: Stop Exclusion – Dare to Care', to raise awareness for mental health
- 2004: 'Prevention of mental disorders' report by WHO
- 2008: Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) by WHO
- 2012: Grand Challenges Canada NGO gives \$19.4 million to certain projects (see 'Overview' for more information)
- 2017: World Health Day, themed 'Depression: Let's Talk' to raise awareness for depression

Resolution

Keep in mind that your resolution should reflect your stance on the issue. Furthermore, it should offer possible solutions. Remember to stick to your country's opinion. There is a sample resolution on www.munalfrink.nl under Conference > Downloads > Sample Resolution.

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Links and sources

Below is a list of the (very useful) sources used to write this report.

- http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_current/2014wesp_country_classification.pdf
- <http://doc.rero.ch/record/304727/files/S0033291700043993.pdf>
- http://www.who.int/whr/2001/en/whr01_en.pdf (Box 4.2; Figure 4.2; Figure 4.3)
- http://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/country/en/
- <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-a-developing-country.html>
- https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2012-10/srcf-hta100212.php
- https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2016-01/tca-pia012116.php
- <https://www.scidev.net/global/health/opinion/mental-health-in-the-developing-world-time-for-inn.html>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/may/10/mental-illness-developing-world>
- <https://www.uniteforsight.org/mental-health/module1>
- <https://www.friendshipbenchzimbabwe.org>

