

Mental health in Jordan: current situation, plan of improvement and recommendations

Introduction:

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the importance of mental health in the state of well-being in which the individuals fulfill their full potentials.

Globally, mental health is now included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals - a step towards acknowledging and addressing the effects of mental health disorders on wellbeing as well as other cross-cutting issues such as health, economic growth among others.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs within Jordan

Currently, Jordanians can access mental health services through the Ministry of Health at the National Center for Mental Health and its outpatient clinics spread over Jordan provinces, through the Royal Medical Services, Jordan University Hospital, King Abdulla Hospital, and through other NGOs and private sector providers. In a recent IMC-led 4Ws (Who is doing what where and when, 2021) study, most services were provided in the medical fashion (clinics and hospitals run by government institutions) with few psychosocial services provided by these mental health care providers such as community centers and youth centers 1.

The MoH utilizes mainly a pharmacotherapy approach, and partners closely with the NGO community in the provision of psychosocial mental health services.

No fixed budget is dedicated to mental health services due to the multiple sources of funding received by the MoH and create sustainability issues.

Challenges to Effective Mental Health Service Utilization

1. Need to improve coordination and governance

In its National Mental Health and Substance Use Action Plan 2022-2026, MOH aimed to draw a roadmap for advancing the mental health sector in Jordan based on past achievements and needed reforms over the upcoming four years. Meanwhile, an NGO coordination group co-chaired by IMC and WHO is in place to work alongside these efforts.

'Mental health and psychosocial working group, (2021), Who is doing What, Where and When in mental health and

psychosocial support in Jordan

Since there is a need for less specialized providers (lower levels of MHPSS services) to work together to identify and manage mental health issues, a more inclusive and multisectoral national strategy for Mental health and psychosocial support is needed.

2. Limited accessibility

Throughout the country, accessibility to mental health services is extremely limited, with the number of psychiatrists not exceeding 2 per 100,000 citizens in Jordan, and the number of nursing cadres at 0.04 per 100,000 citizens these figures are far below world average. Further to this, the lack of insurance coverage for mental illnesses in the private sector and the high cost of psychiatric treatment in this sector further exacerbates suffering of individuals with mental health issues.

3. Limited integration of mental health at the community level

An evaluation performed by WHO in collaboration with the MOH in 2021 revealed that expansion of secondary care has been slow to progress, with persistent administrative barriers to human resources allocation within the existing Community Mental Health Centers and inpatient units at general hospitals. Lack of integration of mental health and psychosocial support is not limited to health programs, but also there is clear gap in the integration with programs related to protection, domestic violence, GBV programs and programs for people with disabilities.

4. Insufficient capacity of service providers

Beyond shortages in human resources for mental health, there are also considerable weaknesses in the management of existing human resources in the absence of a coordinated national human resources strategy and related databases for the provision of specialized MHPSS services. More investment in local capacities of service providers is therefore recommended, especially for remotely provided interventions which require a higher degree of supervision and evidence-based practices. Involvement of local agencies in training, coordination and referrals processes is also highly recommended.

5. Stigma and community acceptance

Stigma is widely expressed through open utilization of terminology such as 'crazy' and 'mad' to describe persons with mental disorders or high levels of psychosocial distress.

6. Cultural and religious barriers

Social coping mechanisms appear to be more highly prioritized than coping strategies at the individual level. Thus culturally, gathering as a community and maintaining strong links with extended families and friends is an essential component of maintaining a healthy life balance and supporting positive coping mechanisms.

Recommendations:

Objective 1: To improve strategy includes direction and promotional activities related to mental health issues, service availability and risk factors at the governmental level.

It's crucial to create a body to investigate the coordination among different ministries to improve mental health integration, programs, and provide technical guidance. This entity can initiate a national and comprehensive strategy that includes directional changes and promotional activities related to mental health and psychosocial issues and service availability on the different levels.

Objective 2: To Strengthen the capacity of mental healthcare service providers

Support should be provided to the Jordanian government in developing critical skills related to mental health care amongst relevant health care service providers by rolling out a comprehensive package of trainings and capacity building activities.

Objective 3: To develop Mental health Act/ Legislations

To develop national mental health medical guidelines, legislation and protocols for the effective treatment and management of mental health cases, in line with international standards and best practices.

Objective 4: Increase attention for early MHPSS programs for children and youth.

Implementing programs, especially in schools and community centers, to integrate psychosocial support activities into the education sector to support the psychosocial wellbeing of students more effectively. Teachers have a crucial role in providing children with psychosocial support because they are interacting with school children daily, and informally act as part of a network of psychosocial support for children.

Objective 5: Increased awareness of mental health issues, service availability and

risk factors at the community and individual level.

Response should work closely with universities and other relevant stakeholders to develop a national program that increases public awareness on mental health issues, service availability and risk factors, and reduces levels of stigma related to mental health. It's suggested to introduce courses related to mental health in school and university curricula (as well as through engagement in volunteering work, videos and promotional materials) to raise awareness about these diseases, and remove the social stigma attached to them.