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Ministry of Public Health

**NEWS
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NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

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The Applied Mental Health Research Group at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the United States in collaboration with IDRAAC, RESTART Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture and Violence and the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) at the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) organized an informational workshop in Beirut on February 3-4, 2015. The aim of this workshop was to share knowledge about evidence-based interventions with mental health and decision making organizations that are helping children and adults affected by trauma and wars in Lebanon.

The workshop was attended by experts from the Johns Hopkins University, the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, Restart and IDRAAC as well as 35 members from different local and international organizations including UN agencies who shared their experiences in providing mental health and psychosocial support programs and interventions for victims of trauma and refugees.

This workshop was of utmost importance in view of the recent influx of displaced Syrians in Lebanon. The meeting informed organizations working in the country, on current knowledge, effective, and feasible mental health and psychosocial interventions for victims of displacement and violence. The workshop also highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing, since many organizations are not always aware of the effectiveness, feasibility and acceptability of different interventions to their respective communities. Challenges to providing mental health and psychosocial support services in Lebanon were also discussed along with monitoring and evaluation practices.



A main priority for the NMHP at the MoPH is to actively engage academia as a strategic partner that would be able to advise and support the mental health reform process. It aims in particular to identify strategic directions and possible partnerships for mental health research and to link with the different entities working in mental health to avoid duplication and ensure the dissemination of evidence-based practices.

For this end, the MoPH, in collaboration with International Medical Corps, organized on March 19, 2015 a meeting to discuss possible ways of collaboration with universities. The meeting was attended by heads and representatives of schools/faculties of disciplines related to mental health: pharmacy, medicine, psychology, public health, nursing and social work from the following universities: American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut Arab University (BAU), Lebanese American University (LAU), Lebanese University (LU), Notre-Dame University (NDU), University of Balamand (UOB), Université Saint-Esprit Kaslik (USEK) and Université Saint-Joseph (USJ).

Discussion revolved around: (1) possible areas of collaboration between the NMHP and the universities (curricula, practicum, technical assistance, etc.); and (2) the creation of a national mental health research committee with defined Terms of Reference. The role of this committee will be to provide advice and support on mental health research and knowledge dissemination in line with the national mental health framework.



03 Better management of suicide

In April 2015, three 3-hour trainings for case managers from different non-governmental organizations in Zahle, Aakar and Zgharta were conducted by the NMHP to help them identify and manage the imminent risk of suicide. Around 20 case managers from various NGOs participated in the trainings, including child protection case workers, managers, lawyers, psychologists, nurses, among others.

04 Integration of mental health into primary health care



As part of its priority action plan, the MoPH is working towards integrating mental health into primary health care. With this aim and in continuation of the project led by the MoPH, funded by the European Union and implemented by WHO, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a series of advanced trainings was rolled out in May 2015 on the mental health Gap Action Program- Intervention Guide (mhGAP-IG) which is a technical guide developed by WHO to train non-specialized primary health care staff on identifying, managing, and referring mental health cases. Three two-day trainings were conducted in Beirut and were attended by a total of 57 medical doctors, nurses and social workers from 31 centres across Lebanon.



The training was interactive with case studies and discussions in addition to the lectures. Primary healthcare staff learned how to conduct proper assessment, management, referral and follow up for priority mental health conditions such as depression, psychosis, dementia, alcohol and drug use disorders, self-harm/suicide, and other. They were trained on how to offer psychosocial support. Medical doctors were trained on prescribing adequate medication and following up appropriately.





In collaboration with the Pompidou Group, the NMHP is preparing a National Substance Use Strategy for the years 2015-2020.

As part of the process of preparing this strategy, a substance use consultative meeting was held on April 18, 2015 and was a successful step towards involving all substance use actors in Lebanon to discuss main challenges and priorities to be tackled in the strategy.

A total of 45 representatives and focal persons from ministries - including the Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Social Affairs - universities, UN agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations and associations participated in this meeting.

The meeting included presentations as well as working group sessions in one of three domains: prevention and drug supply reduction, health sector response and monitoring and evaluation, and policies and international cooperation. Within each group, participants discussed the main challenges faced, in addition to the main priorities to be tackled to address these challenges. The meeting's findings will be used for the development of the first draft of the National Substance Use Strategy.



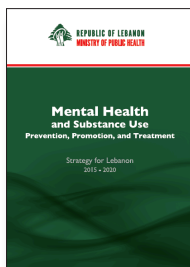
The Ministry of Public Health launches the Mental Health and Substance Use Prevention, Promotion and Treatment Strategy for Lebanon 2015-2020

The Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and International Medical Corps (IMC), launched on May 14, 2015 the Mental Health and Substance Use Prevention, Promotion, and Treatment Strategy for Lebanon 2015-2020. With the vision that all people living in Lebanon will have the opportunity to enjoy the best possible mental health and wellbeing, the mission driving the Strategy is to ensure the development of a sustainable mental health system that guarantees the provision and universal accessibility of high quality mental health curative and preventive services through a cost-effective, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach, with an emphasis on community involvement, continuum of care, human rights, and cultural relevance.

The launching was attended by governmental entities, ministries, local and international NGOs, UN agencies, syndicates, societies, and academia, among others. This event marked an important milestone for mental health reform, especially considering that mental and substance use disorders are prevalent in Lebanon and at the top of public health priorities.



The launching event included a panel discussion during which the director-general of the MoPH Dr. Walid Ammar stressed that the strategy is not that of the MoPH but rather a national strategy and that its successful implementation will require the continued implication and collaboration of all actors on the ground. The program's partners, WHO, IMC and UNICEF, also reiterated their public commitment to support the implementation of the strategy and the achievement of its goals and objectives.



The strategy document was the result of a participatory process involving all actors in the field of mental health and substance use in Lebanon as well as international experts. The strategy underwent many stages of consultations to ensure that it addresses all national priorities identified by the main actors in the field.

06

The Ministry of Public Health launches the Mental Health and Substance Use Prevention, Promotion and Treatment Strategy for Lebanon 2015-2020 (cont'd)

These stages included a consultation meeting to inform the “Vulnerable Groups” Section of the Strategy that joined all concerned actors on the ground from ministries to UN agencies and non-governmental organizations for the identification of priorities and strategic objectives in relation to the all the vulnerable groups targeted in the strategy.



The strategy development process was concluded with a national consensus-building meeting in April 2015 to gain the approval of all stakeholders on the final draft of the Strategy.

The goals and domains of action of the strategy are in line with the WHO Global Action Plan for Mental Health (2013-2020). The strategy covers five domains: strengthening effective leadership and governance for mental health (domain 1); providing comprehensive, integrated and responsive mental health and social care services in community-based settings for all populations (domain 2) especially the needs of specific vulnerable groups (domain 5). Another domain also deals with implementing key promotion and prevention activities for mental health and substance use disorders (domain 3) and obtaining evidence-based knowledge to inform mental health policy and service development through an operational Health Information System and coordinated national research practice (domain 4).

07

Update on the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Task Force

The MHPSS Task Force is a coordination body chaired by the NMHP at the MoPH and co-chaired by WHO and UNICEF. This task force includes around 40 organizations working on the Syrian Crisis response in Lebanon with the aim of harmonizing and mainstreaming MHPSS in all sectors and improving access to care.

A log-frame for the task force's activities for 2015 was set in January 2015 and will be updated in July 2015. Similar coordination mechanisms, the MHPSS Regional Task Forces, will be established in the North and in the South in July 2015, in addition to the previously established one in the Bekaa. Each of these regional task forces will have an assigned focal person who liaises centrally with the MoPH.

08 Trainings on Psychological First Aid

In line with the MHPSS Task Force action plan, the NMHP conducted a one-day training of primary health care centres staff on Psychological First Aid (PFA) in March 2015, funded by the European Union and implemented by the World Health Organization in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, under the Instrument for Stability project.



Fifty nine nurses and social workers from around 36 centres located in Beirut, the North and the Bekaa participated in this training, which is designed to orient helpers to offer PFA to people following a serious crisis event. PFA involves humane, supportive and practical assistance for people who are distressed, in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities.



09 Who's doing What, Where and Until When in mental health and psychosocial support interventions

The “4Ws” in Lebanon: Who's doing What, Where and Until When in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support interventions mapping exercise was conducted by the National Mental Health Programme for the year 2014. The “4Ws” mapping tool is an essential component for locating, assessing, coordinating and planning MHPSS services.

The overall aims of this exercise were to:

- ▶ review and update the existing data on MHPSS provided for displaced Syrians in Lebanon;
- ▶ map the “4Ws” of NGOs providing MHPSS services in the four governorates: Bekaa, Beirut and Mt. Lebanon, South Lebanon and North Lebanon;

- ▶ foster collaboration and coordination between actors from the MHPSS Task Force and the NMHP; and
- ▶ analyse existing data trends, highlight gaps, reflect on the particular context of displaced Syrians in Lebanon and provide practical recommendations to the MoPH, UNHCR and other relevant partners.

The report of this exercise compares the 2014 results to those of the previous and first mapping exercise of the 4Ws in Lebanon published in the December 2013 UNHCR commissioned report, Assessment of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon to display the changes in service delivery.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations in relation to five main domains: training, service provision, research, coordination and the future “4Ws” mappings. As such, the information gathered from this report will be used to better prioritize the issues to be addressed by the MHPSS Task Force and to feed into the development of a referral system. The report is available online on the website of the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon.

The National Mental Health Programme participated in the following events:

- ▶ A high level panel discussion on health and wellbeing in emergencies organized by WHO and held as a side event of the sixty-eighth session of the World Health Assembly in Geneva on May 20, 2015. This side event focused, among other aspects, on mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian emergencies.
- ▶ A symposium - entitled “Growing up in conflict: the impact on children’s mental health and psychosocial well-being” - around psychosocial support for children in complex emergencies, organized by UNICEF with the government of the Netherlands in The Hague on May 26-28, 2015. The NMHP was part of a poster presentation session during which Lebanon was presented as a case study for “Linking humanitarian to development programming in MHPSS”.
- ▶ A panel discussion, organized by the Middle East Institute in collaboration with International Medical Corps in Washington DC on June 25, 2015, that revolved around the conditions of Middle Eastern populations most vulnerable to neglect or abuse – children, women, the poor, and persons with mental illness or developmental handicaps. This panel discussion was one of three panels organized as part of a full-day conference joining 200 policy-makers and practitioners to examine the health care crisis in the region and identify ways to address the needs and challenges.

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