

## ‘Global mental health matters’

*Valentina Lemmi, Research Officer at the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at the LSE, reports on discussions from a recent conference – on mental health in low- and middle-income countries.*

*The Royal Society of Medicine recently hosted the event ‘The world in denial? Global mental health matters’, which highlighted the importance of raising the profile of mental health funding in low- and middle-income countries. The global mental health community was represented by stakeholders such as the WHO and WHO-Europe, as well as NGOs such as BasicNeeds and others.*

According to the most recent figures, 15% of the global burden of disease is attributed to mental disorders, 30% of which is in high-income countries, 20% in middle-income countries and 10% in low-income countries. Yet, resources for mental health are still **scarce, inequitable and inefficient** especially in low- and middle-income countries. Only **2.14% in middle-income countries and 0.53% in low-income countries** of health budgets are allocated to mental health. People from low socioeconomic backgrounds have the highest need of mental health care but the poorest access. In addition, people suffering from mental health disorders are more likely to experience socioeconomic deprivation.

Actions have been taken by the global mental health community to tackle these issues. The profile of mental health has been raised worldwide over the last decade since the publication of a **World Health Report** on mental health in 2001, and the future presentation by the WHO of a **draft mental health action plan 2013-2020**.

At this particular event, media was identified as a new and important tool for tackling stigma, for example through **documentaries** or **videos** disseminating research results. Recently this was also used at the World Mental Health Day 2012: ‘**I had a black dog: his name was depression**’. To tackle inefficiencies, the WHO provided a guide to **evidence-based interventions** applicable in non-specialist mental health settings.

Otherwise, there have been notable key dates that raised the mental health agenda. In 2001, **World Health Report 2001** ‘Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope’ firstly brought mental health to the international attention. In 2005, **the WHO Mental Health Atlas 2005** made the first attempt to map mental health resources in the world. In 2007, the Lancet published a first **Series on Global Mental Health** highlighting the gap in mental health treatment worldwide. In 2008, the WHO launched the **Mental Health GAP Action Programme** to scale up services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders worldwide. A few years later, the WHO **Mental Health Atlas 2011** presented the latest estimates of mental health resources in the world, and the Lancet published the second **series on Global Mental Health**. In 2012, the WHO prepared a **draft of a mental health action plan 2013-2020** that will be discussed at the World Health Assembly which will take place in Geneva in May.

Mental disorders are an important contributor to the global burden of disease worldwide and further resources need to be directed towards it in a more efficient and equitable way. A recent **blog post** by LSE Health and Social Care showcasing their current research in the area, also emphasises the relationship between mental health and poverty.

The **Post 2015 United Nations Development Agenda** is now in the process of defining the new **Millennium Development Goals**, which shape the development agendas and distribution of budgets. There is scope for mental health to gain importance within the new development agenda and so to be allocated more funding in the future.

## Further information

For more information about LSE Health and Social Care’s work on mental health, including dementia, interventions for depression in community and primary care settings, and the mental health of children and young people, please visit: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/healthandsocialcare/2013/05/19/mental-health-awareness-week-2013-lsehsc-research-round-up/>

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