

AMERICAN MOCK WORLD
HEALTH ORGANIZATION AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

AMRO REGIONAL GUIDE

REGIONAL
CONFERENCE
2019

GLOBAL
MENTAL HEALTH:
FROM SILENCE TO
SOLUTIONS



SUMMARY OF THE AMERICAN REGIONS

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization. The Region of the Americas (AMRO) consists of 52 member countries.

In their efforts to improve health, PAHO targets the most vulnerable groups including mothers and children, workers, the poor, the elderly, and refugees and displaced persons. Focusing on issues related to equity, PAHO encourages countries to work together on common issues and build lasting capacities for those who lack access to health.

“In terms of burden and prevalence, depression continues to be the leading mental disorder, and is twice as frequent in women as in men. Disorders due to the use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances, such as illegal drugs and medically prescribed psychotropics, are a growing epidemiological problem with great social impact. Mental and neurological disorders in the elderly, such as Alzheimer’s disease, other dementias, and depression, contribute significantly to the burden of noncommunicable diseases. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in the group aged 20 to 24 years, and fourth in the groups aged 10 to 19 and 25 to 44. Violence against women, which affects one out of every three women, gives rise to multiple health consequences, ranging from depression to death, including suicide. “

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SUMMARY OF THE AMERICAN REGIONS

The Region is experiencing a demographic transition, which is posing a challenge that mental health services must address. Resources are still insufficient to meet the growing burden of mental illness and are unevenly distributed. Furthermore, the existing services need to be transformed in order to increase coverage and improve access to mental health care, and to ensure that mental health is an integral part of national policies for universal health coverage. However, a potentially positive finding in the Region is that resources and services are gradually being shifted from psychiatric hospitals to community services. This indicates that the countries are moving towards developing community-based mental health programs, a key recommendation of the Pan American Health Organization.



IMPORTANT TOPICS

Maternal & Child Mental Health

Violence against women is a human rights violation with important mental health ramifications. Evidence shows violence in the household produces long lasting effects on health and is a significant cause of morbidity. In Mexico City, for example, rape and other intimate partner violence was estimated to be the third most prevalent cause of morbidity and mortality in women. As a result of growing global evidence, the international community has begun to give violence against women a greater priority in the public health agenda and to recognize the magnitude and consequences of such violence for women's health and well-being. Violence against women also poses an intergenerational threat. Children suffer when witnessing violence in the household. Growing evidence suggests that these children have an increased risk of behavioral and mental health problems in the future.

Responding to violence against women requires a coordinated effort that spans multiple disciplines, including the health sector, law enforcement, the judiciary, and social protection services, among others. The health sector's role includes improving primary prevention of violence as well as the ability of health services to identify survivors of abuse early and provide women with compassionate and appropriate care. The health sector must also contribute to improving the evidence base regarding the nature of violence against women, including the magnitude, consequences, and risk and protective factors.



IMPORTANT TOPICS

Adolescent & Young Adult Mental Health

While the dialogue around mental disorders continues to become more accepting and knowledgeable, especially for developed countries, there is still a significant treatment gap for mental health care among all demographics. Particularly among the youth population in the Americas, the majority with mental and/or substance abuse disorders are not getting the care they require. Canada, for example, has one of the highest rates of teen suicide among countries in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Marginalized communities such as ethnic minorities and LGBT+ individuals are especially at high risk for mental health disparities.

Developing countries usually allocate an insufficient amount of public health funds toward mental health care, thereby limiting the quality and accessibility to proper services. Adolescents in these economically underdeveloped regions often experience extreme poverty, violence, incarceration, and dwindling educational and work opportunities. These Adverse Childhood Experiences contribute to the urgent need for effective mental health care. Promotion of mental health education and improvements in early detection and prevention could have considerable effects on improving the overall burden of mental illness among the young adult population in the AMRO region.



IMPORTANT TOPICS

Mid-Life & Elderly Mental Health

Alcohol, illicit drugs and other psychoactive substances alter the brain's function and structure, affecting mood, perception and consciousness. Psychoactive substance use can lead to psychological and psychosocial problems, employment loss, legal issues and difficulty in participating in education. Substance use disorders include dependence syndrome and harmful use of psychoactive substances.

In the United States, the current opioid epidemic greatly affects the adult population. The greatest use in prescription opioid mortality disproportionately affects adults aged 25-54. Older adults are more likely to suffer from chronic pain and physical illnesses, making them more susceptible to the addictive properties of prescription opioids. Worldwide, overdose deaths contribute roughly one half of all drug-related deaths, and opioids are attributable to most cases. Collaboration is essential for success in preventing opioid overdose deaths. Medical personnel, emergency departments, first responders, public safety officials, mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, community-based organizations, public health, and members of the community must all bring awareness, resources, and expertise to address this complex and fast-moving epidemic.



IMPORTANT TOPICS

Mental Health in Emergencies

For decades, the AMRO region has been dealing with an immigration crisis. A multitude of people from Central and South America are being forced to leave their home countries due to civil unrest, widespread poverty, and rising crime rates. Venezuela is experiencing one of the largest refugee crises in the world since the nation has been going through an unprecedented economic crisis resulting in massive numbers of homelessness, starvation, and violence. The Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) has also seen a significant number of residents seeking refuge on account of the increasing rates of homicide and gang violence. Mexican immigrants living in the US, specifically those that are undocumented, are at high risk for untreated mental disorders.

The exodus of millions of people means that there's a growing need for efficient and accessible mental health care for these vulnerable populations. Immigrant and refugee communities have to deal with discrimination, a lack of safety, overcrowding, and separation from families. These factors contribute to the susceptibility of mental health and substance abuse issues. The trauma of being a refugee can lead to PTSD, anxiety, and depression all of which contribute substantially to the burden of health for these communities.

