



New effort to promote mental health - more should be done in all countries

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recently announced a new global strategy to address the growing burden of mental illness throughout the world. More than 450 million people worldwide are reportedly affected by either a mental, neurological or behavioural problem. In many countries, those affected by mental illness are amongst the most vulnerable and disenfranchised. The WHO is concerned that human rights abuses of the mentally ill remain largely unrecognised and unaddressed. Alarmed by examples of severe marginalization and isolation of people with mental illness in some parts of the world, including being incarcerated, restrained, and sometimes confined to cages, the WHO is urging countries to respond.

The new WHO approach aims to support countries in implementing mental health legislation that protects the rights and fosters the health and well-being of people suffering from all forms of mental illness. A new publication, *WHO Resource Book on Mental Health, Human Rights and Legislation*, examines international human rights standards and gives a detailed account of how to implement mental health policy and laws. Furthermore, this strategy includes technical support from an international network of experts in the field who are primed to provide information and assistance to countries wanting to adopt these new practices. The WHO is hoping these new resources will help create the climate and support for improved conditions.

In Canada, at least one in five adults will experience a mental illness during a one-year period. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, an estimated 2.5 million Canadians over the age of 18 will experience a depressive disorder.

Among children and adolescents, the prevalence of depression and other emotional problems have also increased over the last decade. The 2002 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey (HBSC) measured emotional health in students from grades 6-10 and found girls were more likely to report symptoms of depression compared to boys and this increased with age. More than 36% of girls in grade 10 reported feeling depressed compared to only 25% of boys.

Depression is considered one of the leading causes of disability worldwide and by 2020 will be the second most costly global burden of illness, after heart disease. The social and direct financial costs of depression, while difficult to measure, are estimated to be approximately 14.4 billion dollars annually in Canada (including

medical billing costs, hospitalization costs, as well costs related to loss of productivity and income).

Despite the fact that mental health problems in Canada are a serious and growing concern, only a fraction of dollars are devoted, and far fewer programs and policies developed to address mental health issues compared to physical health problems.

The severe stigma associated with mental illness, the lack of awareness of effective treatment and care, and the continuous discrimination by policy makers, governments, and the public between physical and mental health problems continue to hamper efforts to respond to and develop valuable mental health policies, legislations, and programs.

Estimated One-Year Prevalence of Mental Illnesses among Canadian Adults

Mental Illness	Estimates ^{2,3} of One-Year Prevalence
Mood Disorders	
Major (Unipolar) depression	4.1 - 4.6%
Bipolar disorder	0.2 - 0.6%
Dysthymia	0.8 - 3.1%
Schizophrenia	0.3%
Anxiety Disorders	12.2%
Personality Disorders	—
Eating Disorders^a - Anorexia, Bulimia	Anorexia 0.7% women 0.2% men Bulimia 1.5% women 0.1% men
Deaths from Suicide (1998)	12.2 per 100,000 (1998) 2% of all deaths 24% of all deaths among those aged 15-24 years 16% of all deaths among those aged 25-44 years
<small>^a Estimated percentage of the population who have the disorder during any 1 year period</small>	