

Box 4 Case study: integration of mental health in maternal and child health services in Pakistan

Mental health has been integrated into maternal and child health services in Pakistan using the Five-Pillars (5-PA) Approach to Maternal Psychosocial Well-Being. The approach is derived from the Thinking Healthy Programme: a cognitive-behaviour therapy-based psychosocial intervention for mothers with depression and their infants. The Thinking Healthy Programme is a targeted intervention for women suffering from perinatal depression and their infants. It was evaluated in a community-based setting in rural Rawalpindi by female community health workers, known in Pakistan as “lady health workers”. There is good evidence for its effectiveness and it is aligned with the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) intervention guidelines.

5-PA is an adaptation of the Thinking Healthy Programme in order to integrate it into a child nutrition and development programme. Thus, it is an example of delivery of mental health care to mothers and infants through a maternal and child health platform. The adaptation targets not only depressed women but also all mothers during pregnancy and in the 2 years after giving birth. The key feature of the approach is that it is integrated into and facilitates the delivery of a community-health-worker-delivered intervention for early child nutrition and development. Thus, whenever the community health worker delivers a session for child nutrition or development, she uses 5-PA to strengthen the key message and to provide the psychosocial intervention.

A pilot study has been successfully completed in one rural area and 120 community health workers have been trained. Evaluation of its impact is being tested through a cluster randomized controlled trial. Pilot results show that community health workers were able to apply the 5-PA effectively to their work, and the approach was found to be useful by them, their supervisors, the mothers and the families.