

6 April 2017 – On World Health Day, 7 April, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on individuals and communities to speak out about depression and to fight the stigma surrounding it. The slogan for this year's Day is "Depression: let's talk". Talking about depression helps break down stigma and encourages more people to seek help.

To commemorate World Health Day this year, WHO and the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon are holding a regional celebration under the patronage of the President of the Council of Ministers H.E. Mr Saad Hariri at the Serail in Beirut, Lebanon.

Currently, more than 300 million people around the world are living with depression, an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015. Depression is an illness in which people feel overwhelming sadness, lose interest in activities they enjoy and find it difficult to carry out daily tasks. It can affect anyone, anywhere, especially populations experiencing humanitarian crises. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 1 in 5 people are affected by depression and anxiety as a result of armed conflict, insecurity and displacement.

Dr Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, says, "Despite common misperceptions, depression is not a sign of weakness but stigma and discrimination are preventing people from seeking the care they need. Effective treatment is available through talking therapies and antidepressant medications, or a combination of both.

Mr Ghassan Hasbani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health of Lebanon, says, "In Lebanon, we have a clear vision of how to continue to scale up mental health care and services to ensure that everyone enjoys good mental health and well-being. We are working to this end, so that every person needing mental health services can access them in a timely manner without the fear of being stigmatized and will receive the best care possible in the most respectful way. For too long, mental health has been neglected but this is no longer the case. A new era for mental health has started in Lebanon – one in which it is perceived as a need and a right."

In Lebanon, the Ministry is working on the integration of mental health into primary care, with the staff of more than 75 primary health care centres trained. From 2018, expansion of evidence-based mental health interventions for the most vulnerable within universal health coverage will be supported although inpatient care in psychiatric and general hospitals and

psychotropic medications have always been provided for those without the financial means to pay for them.

Depression is treatable, failure to act is costly

In many countries of the world, there is little or no support available for people with mental health disorders. Even in high-income countries, nearly 50% of people with depression do not get treatment. Investment in mental health makes financial and social sense, and failure to act is costly. If untreated, depression can be debilitating and even lead to suicide, which is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year olds.

“Governments can improve mental health services, families and communities can provide social support, civil society groups can raise awareness and individuals can seek help and treatment and talk to others about how they feel,” urges Dr Fikri.

Mental health services are also being provided in some countries by non-specialist general practitioners under the supervision of national specialists, trained through the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme, introduced in more than 90 low- and middle-income countries around the world. This scaling up of mental health services and care is crucial, especially for the most vulnerable populations experiencing humanitarian crises, conflict and displacement.

[World Health Day 2017](#)

Note to the editor

Depression has many causes. A combination of physical, psychological or social factors can cause depression. Some of these factors include:

- a family history of depression
- loss of a parent, child or other close relative or friend
- chronic physical illnesses
- alcohol or drug use
- extreme stressors like war, conflict or natural disasters
- experiencing adversity and abuse in childhood
- rapid changes in life situations like marriage, childbirth or loss of a job
- financial problems
- belonging to a minority group, and

- marital difficulties.

However, having strong social support can help ease some of the effects of these factors.

Low levels of recognition and access to care for depression and another common mental disorder, such as anxiety, result in a global economic loss of more than US\$ 1 trillion every year. The losses are incurred by households, employers and governments: for households, with absence from work affecting household income; for employers, with lower productivity of employees when at work and absence from work; and for governments, with higher health and welfare expenditures. Yet, every US\$ 1 invested in scaling up treatment for depression and anxiety leads to a return of US\$ 4 in improved health and ability to work.

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