

World Mental Health Day celebrations at WHO Punjab office. WHO/A.S.Khan

On World Mental Health Day observed every year on 10 October, World Health Organization (WHO) Pakistan marked the day with the support of psychosocial volunteers from United Nations Critical Incident Stress Management Unit (CISMU).

The aim of the event organized by WHO Provincial Office in Lahore was to raise awareness about mental health issues in the work place. The staff discussed the issues related to improving mental health of staff working in the field and signed a pledge to improve their well-being. According to a recent study, The Burden of Mental Disorders in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 1990-2013, Pakistan and Afghanistan – are witnessing higher number of chronic disorders, including mental illness.

'Working in an emergency program can be very stressful, our deadlines are short and work is demanding', commented Dr. Amir Ehsan who is the Provincial Polio Eradication Officer for WHO Punjab. He added that 'in polio program, we have to travel a lot and at times it affects our family life, however, we are happy because we are working for a greater cause, it is for the good of our country'.

Zainab Farooq, WHO-CISMU Psychosocial Volunteer for Punjab emphasized the importance of mental health at the work place: 'A major part of an employee's time is spent at work, and we have to understand that psychological health of a person is as important as physical health. Identifying employees' mental-wellbeing does not only help the individual but it also increases their productivity and motivation at work.'

In Pakistan, mental disorders account for more than 4% of the total disease burden, with the mental health burden higher among women. It is estimated that 24 million people in Pakistan

are in need of psychiatric assistance. However, allocated resources for the screening and treatment of mental health disorders are not enough to meet the increasing needs. According to WHO data, Pakistan has only 0.19 psychiatrists per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the lowest numbers in WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, and in the whole world.

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