



NOTE FOR THE MEDIA – MENTAL HEALTH IN SOMALIA

2 February, 2011 | Nairobi - Prolonged conflict and instability have largely impacted on the mental and psychological well-being of its people. One in three Somali's has been affected by some kind of mental illness, a prevalence which is higher than in other low-income and war-torn countries. Many Somali's have experienced beating, torture, rape or have been injured for life. Others witnessed horrific violence against family or friends.

Many Somalis with mental illness are socially isolated and vulnerable. The pain of this isolation is felt intensely because Somali culture is traditionally communal and family oriented. The mentally ill are generally chained or imprisoned. The country knows only 5 health centres (Hargeisa, Berbera, Bosaso, Garowe and Mogadishu) that provide mental health care services.

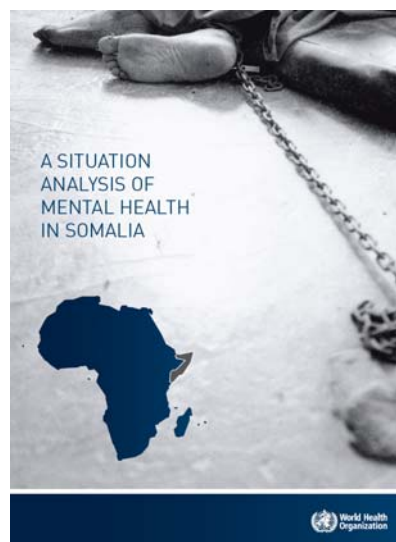


Dr Aden Haji Ibrahim, TFG Minister of Health Somalia, releases the chains of a mentally ill person in Habeeb Hospital, Mogadishu.

To have a better understanding of the mental health services within the country, WHO Somalia produced a mental health situation analysis. The document groups all crucial information on mental health in Somalia and is the result of a participatory process, which has engaged stakeholders through desk review work, group discussions, data collection, and consultative meetings both done in Somalia and at Nairobi level.

“After two decades of conflict and fighting, this mental health situation analysis comes at the right time”, says Mr Mark Bowden, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia. “The human rights of the persons with mental disorders and of their families cannot be neglected. We need to empower them to change the stigmatized image of mental illness, which is contaminated with images of violence, sin and laziness.”

“Taking care of mental health patients shows the communities that mental illnesses can be treated effectively, without stigmatizing the patients” says Dr Marthe Everard, WHO Representative for Somalia. “Mental health is still seen as an isolated sector but should be integrated into primary health care. Interventions are not too difficult or costly, but the area is rather lacking resources and infrastructure.”



The Somali health authorities are committed to the cause. Last Monday, Dr. Aden Haji Ibrahim, Minister of Health for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), visited Habeeb Mental Health hospital in Mogadishu. Habeeb Hospital is one of the health facilities that implements WHO Somalia's Chain Free Initiative, which advocates for chain-free hospitals, community and environment across the country. The initiative, currently being implemented by three mental health facilities will expand this year to the remaining two others.

RELATED LINKS:

A situation analysis of mental health in Somalia:

http://www.emro.who.int/somalia/pdf/Situation_Analysis_Mental_Health_print.pdf

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