



Norad



This event is led by ADPC in partnership with MHPSS.net, Centre for Crisis Psychology of University of Bergen (CCP-UiB) Norway, Faculty of Public Health of Thammasat University (FPH-TU) Thailand, and Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHUBSPH) USA with funding support from Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad).

Mental Health in Emergencies: Greater Investment, Greater Access

“Making Mental Health and Psychosocial Care Services Available to Everyone”

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

A. Background

The Year 2020 has posed significant challenges to countries and people worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. People’s lives and the way we interact and conduct our daily business have changed drastically. Much is said about death reports, number of infections and recoveries seen during COVID-19. However, there are additional profound and compounded issues and problems brought about by this pandemic. Isolation, fear and worry of losing loved ones, complications with grieving processes, becoming sick due to weakening health systems, evolving changes in government policies and guidelines such as lockdowns and physical distancing measures are major challenges. Loss of jobs, quarantines, economic and social consequences can also increase anxiety, depression and mental health problems. The uncertainty of the disease makes it very challenging to manage with its impact at a huge scale. People with already existing mental health conditions and other forms of physical disabilities suffer even more. In this regard, there is so much uncertainty and anxiety surrounding COVID-19 as we determine the “New Normal”.

Myths and misconceptions about COVID-19 and the inability to obtain and share accurate and timely information adds to the mental health and psychological stress of everyone. The strong stigma and marginalization of those with prior mental issues coupled with the stigma associated with COVID -19 make things more complicated. The inability to access Mental Health and Psychosocial support (MHPSS) services during COVID-19 also complicates the coping abilities of affected individuals. Prolonged exposure to stress due to long duty hours have harmful effects to frontline workers, which can lead to burnout, anxiety and inability to think objectively for the people that they serve. In some cases, it may trigger onset of common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

There is an urgent need to strengthen advocacy mechanisms in addressing different sectors of society on the importance of mental health and psychosocial support during this pandemic. The need is increasingly important and will escalate substantially in the coming months. The recent “World Mental Health Day” celebration substantiates the World Health Organization (WHO) in calling on all governments to invest in mental health programs at all levels, and in making the mental health care services available to everyone.

With funding support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) was tasked to undertake projects on mental health and psychosocial support in response to emergencies and disasters in the region. The aim was to strengthen national capacity in Asia to cope with the psychosocial and mental health effects of disasters and emergencies. In coordination with the Center for Crisis Psychology Norway an *Open Forum on Psychosocial Response to Disasters with Focus on*

Children in Asia was held in Bangkok, Thailand in January 2010. The event provided an opportunity to debate on the usefulness of providing psychosocial support to children affected by disasters and emergencies in Asia. The training paved a way for learning psychological approaches for children affected by disasters in the region.

Since then, a series of regional conferences focusing on mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies in Asia were organized by ADPC. The second regional conference in February 2013 was on *Psychological Support and Recovery in Emergencies in Asia* aimed at promoting awareness on mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies and increasing the capacity of countries in the region to respond to the psychological needs of those affected by disasters. In 2016, a third regional conference on *“Bridging the Gaps in MHPSS in Emergencies in Asia”* was organized by ADPC in collaboration with the Center for Crisis Psychology Norway and the Faculty of Public Health of Thammasat University in Thailand. Raising awareness, addressing gaps and challenges, and exchange of lessons learned from different countries in Asia in building resilience through MHPSS were some of the objectives of the 2016 conference.

With the growing need for mental health and psychosocial support around COVID-19, ADPC will host the fourth cross learning event through the webinar *“Mental Health in Emergencies: Greater Investment, Greater Access”* with a theme on *Making Mental Health and Psychosocial Care Available for Everyone*. It is appropriate and important to understand MHPSS during pandemics which have unsparingly affected economic downturn and increased instances of violence, stigma and discrimination affecting all facets of society.

This year’s webinar coincides with the *“International Day for Persons with Disabilities”*, where mental illness and associated conditions are widely recognized as disabilities. Leaving no one behind is a task strongly included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and people with disabilities (PWDs) are at risk of exclusion. There is a huge spectrum of disabilities other than physical conditions which are common but often unrecognized. As such, learning about MHPSS challenges and good practices from disability organizations amidst COVID-19 will be a special topic in this webinar.

Objectives of the Webinar:

1. To share experiences and good practices on MHPSS in response to COVID-19.
2. To learn from other countries’ approaches used in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To obtain recommendations on evidence-based MHPSS approaches for greater investment and promoting access for everyone.

It is expected that through this webinar, people’s awareness of the importance of increasing investment in MHPSS will be raised and more attention will be focused towards making these services accessible and available to everyone. Participants are able to learn from each other on how other countries continue to manage mental health and psychosocial issues amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Register via Zoom: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_1kCR6rBJTmmQZHRiUvARYQ