

Committee/Council:	Special Conference on the hazards of health
Issue:	The impact of the economic crises on mental health
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Introduction

Since 2007 the European Region as well as other countries have been suffering from the economic crisis which continues to pose major challenges for both people and economies. Due to this, countries have been facing significant declines in economic activity, unemployment rise, depressed housing markets, as well as a continuously increasing number of people living in poverty.

Public spending is obviously the primary domain on which the governments are forced to implement severe cuts. Undoubtedly, the world economy is facing significant risks, and an era of austerity is prevalent in health and welfare services throughout the world.

Good mental health is extremely important for all human beings since it is responsible for the healthy functioning of societies, families and communities. It is vital for our cognitive and emotional flexibility, which are the bases for the formation of our social skills and which helps us to cope with stress.

Resistance to stressors such as economic crises varies among individuals and societies. Without any doubt, economic shocks lead to destabilization of public service budgets and affect significantly education and health care systems.

According to data available, legislation aiming at the protection of social welfare can make communities more resilient to economic shocks, thus mitigating the mental health effects of economic crises and increased unemployment. Not only is people's mental health affected by the depressed economy but their mental health problems caused mainly by this may have serious economic effects. For instance, one such effect is the loss of productivity which is estimated to be at an average of 3 to 4% of the European Union countries' gross national product. Taking into consideration that various mental health problems may appear during adolescence and early adulthood we may well understand that this may mean long-lasting lost productivity. Mental disorders can last for a long period of time and in some cases they are very difficult to get over them. People who suffer from depression, anxiety and other forms of stress related disorders may appear long periods of absenteeism from the labor market, as well as withdrawal symptoms. Continuous changes in the work environment as well as work loss may pose a burden upon employees who are called to cope with new work environments, increased demands in the new work place and feelings of insecurity.

The increasing number of citizens who suffer from mental health problems has forced many countries to attribute about one third of new disability

benefits to mental health conditions, a sum which is shown to be continuously increasing.

Since we are living in the era of knowledge and communication we realize more than ever the importance of mental health in order to achieve the desired productivity level and prosperity. If the world economies wish to overcome economic depression and recover their economies they must take into serious consideration that the mental health of their citizens is a crucial factor that must be taken into account.

Definition of Key-Terms

Mental health

Mental Health refers to a broad array of activities directly or indirectly related to the mental well-being component as stated in the WHO's (World Health Organization) definition of health: "*A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease*". It is connected with the promotion of well-being, the prevention of mental disorders, and the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by mental disorders.

Depression

Depression is characterized by sustained sadness and loss of interest along with psychological, behavioral and physical symptoms. It is ranked as the leading cause of disability worldwide.

Suicide

Physician-assisted suicide is defined as ending the life of a person who is terminally ill in a way that is either painless or minimally painful for the purpose of ending suffering of the individual. It is also called euthanasia and mercy killing.

Financial Crisis

As stated in Investopedia: *A financial crisis can come as a result of institutions or assets being overvalued, and can be exacerbated by investor behavior. A rapid string of sell offs can further result in lower asset prices or more savings withdrawals. If left unchecked, the crisis can cause the economy to go into a recession or depression.*

Background Information

Mental health problems

The stressful everyday life that the majority of us experience may lead to mental health problems which at times may lead to long term conditions. It is extremely important to consult an expert as early as possible in order to face such stressful conditions since the earlier a person who suffers gets help the sooner he can overcome his problems.

Experts give several definitions and classifications to mental health problems so as to be able to offer appropriate treatment to patients according to their problem. Even though there are cases that the diagnoses may be controversial which often leads to inappropriate treatments and may have a negative impact on people's lives, the classification of the symptoms is essential in order to divide the symptoms into groups.

There are two main groups into which these symptoms are classified: the 'neurotic' or 'psychotic' symptoms. By using the term 'Neurotic' we mean those symptoms that nowadays are called "common mental health problems", such as depression, anxiety or panic that are very common mental problems from which one in ten people may be affected at some point of their lives. Both anxiety and depression may have a negative impact on people's life since these disorders deprive them from leading a normal pace of life and keep them away from their daily activities

However, when we refer to psychotic symptoms we mean all those symptoms that affect the way a person perceives reality. People who suffer from psychotic symptoms have hallucinations concerning reality and they experience things around them in a way that no one else does as they hear or feel things that do not exist. Between one and two in every 100 people experience either schizophrenia or bi-polar disorder which are both severe mental illnesses since people may have irrational and unreal beliefs and lose touch with reality.

Mental health problems should not be treated as a person's weakness since about a quarter of the population may suffer from some kind of mental problem at some point of their life. As they may affect our everyday life and our social interactions and relationships with others they should be diagnosed by a doctor and treated as early as possible so as to achieve the best results and help the patient return to his daily activities. In spite of the fact that certain disorders have common symptoms, the reality is that the sufferers do not behave in exactly the same way or do not experience exactly the same symptoms.

Even nowadays people who experience a mental health problem feel embarrassed about their condition and they hesitate not only to share it with others but very often to admit it themselves since they cannot cope with people's reactions and the discrimination they may be faced with. We should also take into consideration those people who are not diagnosed with a mental disorder and they try to continue their daily activities feeling troubled and stressed about themselves to cope with daily life.

Who will be more affected by the economic crisis?

The economic crisis faced globally nowadays has increased the level of poverty and has mainly hit low-income or poor people. As a result, it has led to a great number of households which are in red and many people who live in poverty and face social exclusion. The current economic crisis has affected almost all of us however those who suffer the most are young people, single-parent families, unemployed people, ethnic minorities, migrants and older people. As parents hit by the economic crisis are stressed and unable to cope with the daily demands of their families, they lack patience and strength which affects their behavior towards their spouses and children. Poverty on children may have detrimental effects since it influences their emotional, physical and cognitive development and these results may be life-long. According to studies a lot of mental disorders make their appearance during early adolescence.

It is a fact that during periods of severe economic crises the percentages of suicides are higher. Suicides are most common between the ages of 15 and 44 in low and middle-income countries. Undoubtedly, mental disorders are one of the reasons in connection to economic crisis that may lead to suicide.

Major Organizations Involved

World Health Organization (WHO)

“WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.” (WHO’s official website)

World Bank

The World Bank is a major *“intergovernmental agency related to the UN”*. The World Bank loans money to poor countries on advantageous terms not available in commercial markets. The amount of money loaned to developing countries for human resources development, i.e. health and education, has increased steadily over the past 10 years, from 5% of total loans in the early 1980s to 15% in the past two years, with a projected 50% increase in human resource development loans over the next three years.

The American Public Health Association

“The American Public Health Association is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world and has been working to improve public health since 1872. The Association aims to protect all Americans, their families and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and strives to assure community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States.” (ALPHA’s official website)

International Monetary Fund

“IMF is an organization of 188 countries, working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world. In fact it helps financially the countries so as to achieve their goals in order to overcome the economic crisis and secure the well-being of their citizens.” (IMF’s official website)

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

UN Resolution

The Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA65.4 on the global burden of mental disorders and the need for a comprehensive, coordinated response from health and social sectors at the country level. http://www.who.int/mental_health/WHA65.4_resolution.pdf

WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)

The WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) aims at scaling up services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders for countries especially with low and middle income. http://www.who.int/mental_health/mhgap/en/

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

During the last years a lot of efforts have been made by governments of numerous countries in order to overcome the economic crisis. As it is proposed by a number of experts, the main way to succeed in this effort is by implementing development strategies. Only by investing, creating new employment positions and enforcing economic security policies in national development strategies can we move ahead of the current global financial and economic crisis. A lot of countries have received financial support from organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) but this does not mean neither that they have achieved a better economic position nor that they have managed to implement those goals.

Possible Solutions

In order to write an effective resolution it is crucial for all delegates to separately consider each point below:

- Employment can prove beneficial for a person's mental health.
- Employees' mental health is positively affected by factors such as job security, sense of control of work and social support at work.
- Stable employment, income security and social capital can promote good mental health.
- Social capital is the quality of social relationships within societies or communities, community networks, civil engagement, sense of belonging and norms of cooperation and trust.
- Conversely, a large number of mental health problems and disorders are due to socioeconomic factors such as poverty, financial problems and social deprivation.
- The population's mental health in many countries is negatively connected with the consumption of alcohol that is one of the major factors that may play a considerable role in increasing suicide attempts, mainly among male population.
- People living in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation and who experience social fragmentation and unemployment are more prone to attempt suicide than those who live in more affluent areas.
- Poor education standards, deprivation of material goods, as well as unemployment are among the factors that may contribute to the appearance of common mental disorders.
- The currently increasing suicide rates have been associated to increasing income inequality.
- Undoubtedly the more disadvantaged a person is the more vulnerable he is to suffer from mental health problems since they experience insecurity, hopelessness, social isolation and poor housing.

- The foundations of good mental health are laid during pregnancy, infancy and childhood.
- The determinants of mental health do not only lay on the health system but it is the responsibility of a number of government sectors since the factors that influence a person's mental health are numerous and it is obvious that financial stability plays an important role.

Conclusion

Dear delegates,

As you should have already realized the issue you have to deal with is of great importance. Human beings and their mental health are directly connected with the economy and the crisis we are facing nowadays. There is an immediate need to find a solution so as to protect the well-being of the citizens and ensure the future of the countries. Do not forget that there are also other factors that can cause mental health problems but in this case we have to consider only the patients who have developed a mental disorder due to the impacts of the economic crisis. Additionally, keep in mind that our main goal has to be to boost the economies and to support these people. It is not enough to suggest ways to overcome the crisis, it is also very important to find ways to help these people and to avoid suicide, a phenomenon that is very common the last years and can cause disastrous effects to the families and friends of the person who commits suicide. Furthermore, I want to remind you that the study guide is not enough so as to write your resolutions. You need to do your own research and of course to be aware of your countries' policy. I hope that we will have a fruitful debate and that you will promote productive solutions. If you have any further queries concerning the topic, do not hesitate to mail me at any time (my email is danaipassakou@msn.com).

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