

Summary report on the

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Planning meeting to set up a diploma in mental health, human rights and law at the International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Cairo, Egypt
24–26 September 2017



World Health
Organization

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

Efforts to address mental, neurological and substance use disorders are beginning to gain more traction in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, following the adoption by the 62nd Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean of the regional framework to scale up action on mental health, which implements the provisions of the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2013. One of the indicators of the regional framework requires countries to update mental health legislation in line with the provisions of international and regional human rights instruments such as the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Vulnerable sections of society, which include women and children, are most at risk from mental health and substance use disorders, and this problem is especially compounded during periods of transition and unrest. Moreover, people suffering from mental, neurological and substance use disorders are especially vulnerable to human rights abuses due to the widespread stigma and discrimination associated with these disorders.

In light of these issues, it is vital to ensure that the rights of persons with mental, neurological and substance use disorders are observed, and that quality in the provision of services based on the provisions of the UNCRPD is ensured. In order to achieve these objectives, one of the strategic activities identified in the regional framework is to set up an international diploma for mental health, human rights and law in a country. This would help build up a cohort of regional experts who can help countries review and develop mental health legislation consistent with both international covenants and the prevailing regional legal systems. This would also help to ensure the rights of one of the most vulnerable population groups are protected, and that community-based mental health services are developed. The target

audience could include mental health professionals, lawyers, members of civil society and family members of persons with mental health and substance use disorders.

Following discussions between the president of the International Islamic University, Islamabad, (IIUI), Pakistan and Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, it was agreed that WHO would support the establishment of such a diploma programme at IIUI, and that the diploma would be modelled on the International Diploma in Mental Health Law and Human Rights currently being offered at the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, Indian Law Society, Pune, India. A planning meeting was therefore held at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean from 24 to 26 September 2017, with the participation of the course coordinator from India, IIUI, WHO, and international experts on mental health and law from Egypt and South Africa.

In preparation for the face-to-face meeting a series of virtual consultations were organized between the collaborating institutions, and a thorough review of the curriculum of the diploma currently being offered at the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, Indian Law Society was conducted.

The meeting was opened by Dr Jaouad Mahjour, Director of Programme Management, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, who delivered a statement on behalf of Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. In his statement, Dr Fikri noted that the prevalence of mental health disorders, and particularly depression and anxiety disorders, was very high in the Eastern Mediterranean Region as a result of the complex emergency situations prevailing in many of the countries of the Region. He further noted that despite almost all countries having

ratified the UNCRPD, the implementation of corresponding legislation was very weak. This initiative was therefore both timely and very much in line with the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 and the regional framework to scale up action.

The objectives of the meeting were to review and contextualize the curriculum of the existing International Diploma in Mental Health Law and Human Rights; and to agree on the modalities of collaboration between IIUI, the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, Indian Law Society, and WHO, to support the establishment of the International Diploma in Mental Health Law and Human Rights at IIUI.

2. Summary of discussions

In light of the discussions during the meeting, the participants reached a number of conclusions.

The proposed diploma programme at IIUI should provide more focus on Islamic legal tradition and its interaction with human rights and provisions of international human rights law including UNCRPD, in order to develop a distinct identity and niche.

In light of the complex humanitarian emergencies affecting more than half of the countries of the Region, the diploma at IIUI could also include a stronger focus on the rights of persons with mental disabilities in the context of humanitarian emergencies.

More time should be set aside to prepare the technical materials for the proposed diploma programme at IIUI in close collaboration with the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, Indian Law Society, and that the IIUI diploma should target the fall semester of 2018 for the first intake of students.

WHO should explore the possibility of setting up similar programmes in countries of the Region whose legal systems are influenced by the Napoleonic Code.

3. Next steps

Following detailed discussions focusing on the review and contextualization of the individual modules of the curriculum of the existing International Diploma in Mental Health Law and Human Rights, the modalities of collaboration between IIUI, the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, Indian Law Society and WHO, as well as logistic and administrative aspects of setting up a diploma in mental health, human rights and law at IIUI, a work plan was agreed upon.



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