

SPECIAL SESSION 3

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in the context of COVID 19: Implications for the Arab Region

Monday 29 March 2021, 15:45-17:15 (90 minutes) Beirut time (Online)

Background and objective

Mental health is one of the most neglected areas of public health in the Arab region. Over the last decade, most countries in the region experienced rapid social and political changes which put not only the socio-economic systems under immense strain but also exposed the populations to protracted stress and adversity which are well established risk factors for mental and substance use disorders. COVID-19 exacerbated an already fraught mental health situation, making provision of mental health and psychosocial support services an urgent priority for all populations, especially vulnerable groups, including women, children, adolescents, migrants, and refugees.

The objectives of this Special Session are to:

- Discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of the population, especially on vulnerable populations and what has been revealed about MHPSS in terms of understanding both well-being and service delivery in the Arab region in order to “build back better.”
- Discuss the importance of, and share lessons learned from-, countries on how to build MHPSS into community structures, e.g., the role of front-line workers and schools and the need to bolster MHPSS within primary health care, maternal health, and other health services.
- Discuss how governments, and development and humanitarian communities, as well as CSOs can support the humanitarian-development nexus to “build back better” national mental health and psychosocial support systems and promote community resilience and well-being especially in schools.

Questions to be addressed

1. Why does MHPSS need to be gender-sensitive and mainstreamed in preparedness, response plans and policies across sectors?
2. What alternative solutions developed during the confinement – targeting women and child survivors of domestic violence - can be scaled up after the pandemic?
3. How does the integration of MHPSS components into Universal Health Care benefit packages create a more resilient and fit-for-purpose health system, advance progress towards SDG 3, and build the resilience of communities?
4. Why is it important to equip teachers and front-line workers with the essential skills of providing basic psychological first aid?
5. Why is an integrated multidisciplinary approach targeting pregnant women necessary to address perinatal maternal mental health issues?

Facilitator(s)

- **Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari**, Regional director, WHO Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region
- **Mr Ted Chaiban**, Regional Director, UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

Panelists

- **Dr Najat Maalla M’jid**, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children
- **Dr Shekhar Saxena**, Professor of the Practice of Global Mental Health, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA
- **Dr Rabih El Chammy**, Head of Programme, National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon
- **Community member** user of MHPSS services

The session will be organized over Zoom. To join, please register via [this link](#).

Languages: Arabic and English