Addressing mental health in Bangladesh
Addressing mental health in Bangladesh

Prepared for the Ministerial Roundtable of the 75th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia

6th September 2022
165 million (2022)
Population

73 (2020)
Life-expectancy in years

2620 (2021)
Gross national income per capita, Atlas method (current US$)

51.00 (2019)
UHC coverage index

75% (2020)
Literacy (15+)

37 (2018)
Per-capita annual expenditure on health (US$)

0.5%
Expenditure on mental health of the total government spending on health

The burden of mental health problems

The prevalence of select mental health conditions and suicide among adults was as follows:

- 6.7% Depressive disorders
- 4.7% Anxiety disorders
- 2.3% Somatic symptoms and related disorders
- 1.0% Schizophrenia spectrum disorders
- 0.5% Bipolar disorder
- 0.5% Substance related and addictive disorders

Source: National Mental Health Survey 2019

The National Mental Health Survey was completed in 2019, which provided detailed information on the prevalence of mental disorders and treatment gaps.

Bangladesh has a high treatment gap (91%) for mental disorders. Depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, somatic symptoms and related disorders, schizophrenia spectrum disorders were the main contributors to this gap.
The suicide rate was 14.7 per 100,000

4.7% of the adolescent and youth population had suicidal thoughts and 1.5% had suicidal plans and attempted suicide at least once.
Source: Ahmed H. U. Epidemiology of suicide and suicidal behavior among youth and adolescent in Bangladesh (2021), National Institute of Mental Health, Bangladesh.

The prevalence of epilepsy was 8.4 per 1,000

- The new Mental Health Act was approved by Parliament in 2018. In 2022, both the National Mental Health Policy and the National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030 were approved by the government. The Neurodevelopmental Disability Protection Trust Act was also enacted in 2013
- A new Narcotics Control Act was enacted in 2018. It includes provisions for the treatment of substance use disorders and rehabilitation.
- Alcohol Control Rules 2022 was recently issued by the Home Ministry under the Narcotics Control Act of 2018 which details aspects related to sale, production, import and export of alcohol.
- The 7th Five Year Plan and Vision 2021 recognizes that health also includes mental health and social wellbeing. The National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030 includes adolescent mental health as one of four major thematic areas. Bangladesh has also enacted the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Council Act, 2018 and developed a National Strategic Plan for Neurodevelopmental Disorders 2016-2021.
As per the newly approved National Mental Health Strategy, a National Multisectoral Mental Health Coordination Committee for implementation and monitoring of the National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030 and a separate mental health governance system (Directorate) will be set up. Mental health review and monitoring committees (MHRMCs) will be established in all districts. These will be a part of the multisectoral noncommunicable disease control committees.

An Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders Cell has been established in the Health Service Division led by a Director-General who is an Additional Secretary. It coordinates overall activities related to autism and neurodevelopmental disorders as well as programmes on disability and mental health.

The Mental Health Act approved in 2018.

The National Mental Health Policy was approved in 2022.

The National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020–2030 was approved in 2022.

Neurodevelopmental Disability Protection Trust Act was enacted in 2013.

The new Narcotics Control Act was enacted in 2018.

The 7th Five Year Plan recognizes mental health as an integral component of health.

The Bangladesh Rehabilitation Council Act, 2018 was enacted in 2018.

The National Strategic Plan for Neurodevelopmental Disorders 2016–2021 is being implemented.

Adolescent mental health is a major thematic area of the National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017–2030.
### Human resources per 100,000 population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatrists</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health nurses</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologists</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mental health atlas 2020

### Prevention and promotion activities: organization and coverage

There are prevention and promotion programmes on mental health being carried out by the National Institute of Mental Health, Ministry of Social Services and national level NGOs. Specific information related to these programmes need to be collected through consultations.
Mental health services: organization and coverage

- There are two specialized mental hospitals in Bangladesh. These are the 500-bed Pabna Mental Hospital and the 400 bed National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). There are 62 psychiatric inpatient units with a total of 195 beds in general hospitals, medical colleges and medical universities. There are 15 beds in forensic inpatient units and thousands beds in residential facilities such as homes for the destitute, inpatient detoxification centres and homes for people living with chronic mental health conditions and neurological disabilities. There are outpatient mental health facilities in the country according to the Mental health atlas 2020, and the National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030.

- Mental health services through the primary care system need to be strengthened.

- Shishu Bikash Kendras (SBKs) have been established in 34 medical college hospitals and one district hospital. These focus on providing comprehensive care for autism and neurodevelopmental disorders, including facilities for the diagnosis and management of epilepsy as envisaged in the National Strategic Plan for Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

- Different services related to mental health are also provided by the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

- National level and local level non-government organizations work on a range of health and social issues. Organizations such as Shuchona Foundation work on autism, mental health and disability issues. Other organizations work on issues such as violence against women. These organizations have networks that work closely with communities.
Mental health information system and research

- A web-based health data collection system has been established, but mental health related data are not readily available as specific indicators and training on classifying mental illnesses according to accepted criteria have not been built into the system.

- The research capacity of the health sector is high. There should be reorientation of research towards community-based mental health and interventional research on addressing the determinants of mental health.

Analysis

Aspects that need to be maintained and supported

- There is strong political commitment for improving mental health services in Bangladesh. The new Mental Health Act 2018 has replaced the old Lunacy Act 1912. The National Mental Health Policy was endorsed in 2022. The National Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2030 was also approved by the government in 2022. A National Mental Health Survey was completed in 2019.

- The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and its experts work closely with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on different aspects of mental health programme implementation.

- Plans to support and improve services at the district level and primary care level are being implemented by the Ministry of Health with the support of the WHO Special Initiative on Mental Health. These activities commenced in 2022. Training of doctors on mental health has been sustained over a period, which needs to be further supported. The Bangladesh
Investments are needed for establishing primary and secondary care services for mental health to address the significant treatment gaps for many mental health conditions; improving the technical and managerial capacity of human resources (HR) at the district level to improve services; improving community mental health and mental health literacy.

Requirements and challenges

- Currently, there is no Directorate of Mental Health in the Ministry of Health. The subject falls within the Directorate of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD). Therefore, mental health related programmes need to be incorporated into the NCD operations plan at present.
- The technical capacity for mental health should be further developed within the Ministry of Health to complement the excellent technical support provided by the NIMH for mental health programmes at present.
- Non-institution-based services for mental health should be established, especially within the primary care system. Currently, mental health services through the primary care system are not widespread. Most mental health services are concentrated around urban areas. The recent National Mental Health Survey showed that the treatment gaps for most mental health conditions are significant.
- National level preventive and promotive programmes addressing stigma and prevention of suicide need to be implemented urgently.
- Among the areas requiring further investments, investments for strengthening services through primary and secondary care systems should be given the highest priority.
- This requires improving the capacity for mental health services in the districts - strengthening the technical and clinical capacity of health workers, capacity for supervision and management of such services, referral pathways and information systems.
- To ensure the acceptability of such services, community engagement and mental health literacy programmes need to be established at district and upazila levels.

An active and committed nongovernment sector works at national and community levels on different health and social issues, including mental health, which can be partnered with to improve community mental health.

World Health Organization

version of the mental health Global Action Programme (mhGAP) Intervention Guide for mental, neurological and substance use disorders in non-specialized health settings has been published.

- An active and committed nongovernment sector works at national and community levels on different health and social issues, including mental health, which can be partnered with to improve community mental health.
There is significant donor interest for strengthening mental health services in Bangladesh. The ongoing implementation of the WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health will strengthen district level mental health services. The National Survey on Suicide Among youth and adolescents has been concluded.

Adolescent mental health is a major thematic area of the National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030. The National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030 is in place. The National Survey on Suicide among adolescents and youth has been concluded.

The Mental Health Act was approved in 2018. The National Mental Health Policy was approved in 2022. A new Narcotics Control Act was enacted in 2018. Neurodevelopmental Disability Protection Trust Act was enacted on 2013. There is very high political commitment.

The 7th Five-Year Plan recognizes mental health as an integral component of health. National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030 is in place. The Bangladesh Rehabilitation Council Act was enacted in 2018. The National Survey on Suicide among adolescents and youth has been concluded.

Mental health data are available from the National Mental Health Survey. Technical support for programmes is provided by the highly competent and committed National Institute of Mental Health.

There is a committed social sector and national-level NGOs with grass-roots access.

The Investment case for mental health in Bangladesh is being finalized.

The National Survey on Suicide Among youth and adolescents has been concluded.
Weaknesses

There is a need for strengthening primary care services, including the systems, protocols and technically and clinically competent human resources.

Technical capacity should be strengthened, including planning, financing and programme implementation at the Ministry to implement the National Mental Health Strategic Plan.

There are significant treatment gaps for all mental health conditions.

Current services are mostly concentrated in urban areas.

Threats

Stigma is widespread

There is a paucity of mental health professionals, and conditions for mental health professionals in the government sector are not attractive.
Notes