Children and Mental Health: Time to Act

As the world’s health ministers gather for the World Health Assembly in Geneva, United for Global Mental Health is highlighting the importance of addressing mental health in childhood and adolescence – and how the mental health of parents and carers can impact children’s mental health for life.

Today there is growing evidence of how early mental health disorders develop and importance of early action and intervention. Moreover, there is increasing need as more children and their families are caught up in conflict and crises across the world.

This year the world has historic opportunities to improve the mental health of children: the Wellcome Trust has announced a significant new investment in child and adolescent mental health; the World Economic Forum is partnering with Orygen of Australia to develop a future model for delivery of mental health services for children; the Women Deliver conference in Canada will include discussion on maternal mental health; the Global Fund replenishment provides a key moment to advocate for greater funding for mental health (including for children and their families affected by HIV/AIDS and TB); and the Dutch government is hosting the ministerial meeting on mental health later this year, with a focus on conflict and humanitarian settings. In order to leverage these opportunities this briefing provides some key facts to inform decision makers.

Did you know?

- Worldwide **10-20%** of children and adolescents experience mental health disorders.
- **Half** of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by mid-20s.
- Neuropsychiatric conditions (mental disorders attributable to diseases of the nervous system) are the **leading cause** of disability in young people is all regions.

... and yet ...

- **Less than half** of countries have a plan or strategy for child and adolescent mental health.
- Globally, **9%** of government mental health workers provide child and adolescent mental health services.
- Less than **1 per 100 000** population child and adolescent mental health beds.

... furthermore ...

- Maternal depression is a **leading cause** of disability in mothers living in difficult low- and middle-income country contexts.
- Parental mental health **directly impacts** early childhood development.
- It is estimated that globally between **15-23%** of children live with a parent with mental illness and parental ill-health predisposes these children to mental illness.
To illustrate these facts and the importance of mental health from childhood through to old ages see the diagram below.

**Biological and social determinants of neurodevelopment across life span.**

![Diagram showing biological and social determinants of neurodevelopment across life span.](image)

Source: Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development 2018

**So, what can be done?**

- **Deliver Universal Health Coverage**: invest in parental and child mental and physical health.

- **Increase development assistance** for mental health: support the most vulnerable and marginalised parents and children especially those living in crisis settings and those affected by diseases such as HIV/AIDS and TB.

- **Support innovative programming** especially in the areas of maternal mental health programmes to improve child development.

- **Integrate** early childhood development within child and maternal mental health services.

- **Generate knowledge** by more research, specifically implementation effectiveness.

To learn more about this work and forthcoming reports on this topic contact: James@unitedgmh.org