

# Mental Health: Myths and Facts

## Commonly held myths about mental health

There are false beliefs commonly held by people around that world that encourage stigma and discrimination, and even form barriers to effective action. Here is a brief list of the more common and harmful of these beliefs:

- If someone has a mental health condition, other family members are more than likely to also become mentally ill.
- Mental health conditions mainly affect persons who are weak or have character flaws that have caused these problems.
- Persons with mental health conditions cannot be as productive as others, cannot hold jobs, cannot form normal relationships, or be good parents or partners.
- They tend to be more violent than the rest of the population.
- For most mental health conditions, treatment is difficult, not very effective, and requires expensive long-term professional care.
- Most people, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, do not consider mental health to be an important issue.
- Most people can access treatment if they really need it.

## Here instead are some important facts about mental health:

- More than 1 billion people globally live with a mental health condition. These conditions are the leading cause of global disability.
- Mental health conditions are the major health issue among young people in terms of prevalence and impact. Suicide is the 4th highest cause of adolescent deaths.
- Mental health conditions are the leading complication of pregnancy and childbirth. Poor mental health in both women and caregivers is directly linked to poor newborn, infant, and child health and developmental outcomes.
- Mental health conditions have been linked to increased risk and poor outcomes for infectious and non-infectious diseases, including HIV and TB, and non-infectious diseases including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
- Between 2011 and 2030, cumulative economic output loss from mental disorders is projected to be US\$16.3 trillion worldwide, comparable to cardiovascular diseases, and more than cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes.
- Every \$1 spent on effective improvement in mental health returns \$4-9 in increased productivity and reduced other costs.
- A global average of 2% of health budgets goes to mental health. In low- and middle-income Countries, two thirds of this goes to psychiatric hospitals that typically do little more than warehouse the mentally ill.
- Approximately 22% of adults in conflict settings have mental health conditions, and many more experience mental health distress that is undiagnosed or does not reach diagnostic levels but still contributes to suffering.

## What can we do?

We have cost-effective interventions that can be integrated into existing health and social services. These interventions can help prevent and can treat most mental health conditions at the community level when provided by trained and supported lay workers. Integrating these services into infectious disease treatment programs has already been proven to improve both mental and physical health outcomes and there is evidence supporting their impact on non-communicable diseases.