

State of mental health in Pakistan — service, education and research

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WHO's *World health report 2001* and *Atlas of mental health resources in the world* (known as the Project Atlas) have highlighted the unsatisfactory state of mental health in many countries. A literature search for published material on mental health resources and services reveals that very little is available from developing countries, although it is they who need it most.

The book by Gadit & Khalid fills part of this gap for one large country, providing a brief overview of the mental health situation in Pakistan. It starts with an account of key concepts and general facts related to mental health, taken mainly from WHO material, followed by a demographic profile of the country. It then focuses on the mental health situation with regard to policies, legislation, psychiatric education, mental health services, financing and research. This background is very useful, though more detail would have been welcome, as well as a reference to their sources.

The section on psychiatric education provides some valuable information on undergraduate and postgraduate training in psychiatry, but there is nothing on training for other mental health professionals such as psychiatric nurses, psychologists and social workers. However, information available from the Project Atlas indicates that there are mental health training facilities for physicians, nurses and psychologists, though not for social workers. Training for primary care physicians and professionals is undertaken as a part of the mental health programme that was started in 1986. Similarly, the section on mental health services provides some statistics such as the numbers of psychiatric beds in hospitals, but hardly any on mental health personnel except for the city

of Karachi. According to WHO information gathered in 2001 from official sources there are approximately 1800 psychiatric beds in the country, 250 psychiatrists, 125 psychiatric nurses, 480 mental health care psychologists, and 600 mental health care social workers. The authors highlight the involvement of nongovernmental organizations, which are especially active in the areas of preventing mental disorders, promoting mental health, and providing rehabilitative services. Some of them are also involved in work with emotionally handicapped children.

The year 2000–01 showed a 9.9% increase in the budget allotment for health and this is expected to increase further in subsequent years. WHO figures show that in the period between 1995 and 2000 the health budget has fluctuated at around 4% of the gross domestic product. The expenditure on mental health accounts for only 0.4% of the health budget according to the Project Atlas. Out-of-pocket expenditure by the users of services is the commonest method of financing mental health care.

The authors provide a brief but informative account of current and recent research on mental health in Pakistan. They point out that there is a felt need for more mental health research, but the Pakistan Medical and Research Council has been unable to “sustain a culture of research”. The research output is also burdened by lack of trained personnel, and inadequate infrastructure and funds for research. The list of research articles in two of Pakistan's prominent journals should be useful to the reader.

The final section summarizes the recommendations of the *World Health Report 2001* and provides suggestions about the direction in which mental health in Pakistan should move in future. These include improving the training of professionals, developing community-based services with increased allocation of resources for mental health, increasing the research output by facilitating better dissemination of information, and creating national bodies for coordinating research.

Notwithstanding its weakness in some areas, this publication is an

important baseline information source for the mental health situation in Pakistan, especially in view of the very small amount of information that had been available previously. It will be useful for researchers and academics with an interest in Pakistan's mental health situation, and also for country-level initiatives in policy planning and service development. For general readers too, it provides at least a fascinating glimpse of the mental health situation in one large developing country. ■

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