Background: Mental Health during COVID-19

- 25% increase in the prevalence of major depressive and anxiety disorders in 2020
- 93% of the countries reported disruption in their mental health services
- 89% reported that MHPSS was part of their national COVID-19 response plans
- 17% ensured that full additional funding is available for MHPSS activities

Methods

A web-based survey was sent to Ministries of Health (MoH) and WHO Regional and Country Offices in the African Union member states (55 countries)

Results

- 68% of the countries implemented less than 50% of the recommended MHPSS activities
- 57% establishing MHPSS coordination group
- 45% developing an MHPSS strategy

Challenges

- The lack of political commitment and low prioritisation of mental health
- The lack of financial and human resources
- Failure to apply lessons learned from previous emergencies
- Competing priorities in emergency situations

Opportunities

- Capitalising on the increased attention to mental health during COVID-19 to integrate it into emergency response plans and strengthen mental health systems in the longer term
- Sustaining multi-stakeholder coordination of MHPSS activities beyond emergencies
- Building regional networks to facilitate sharing experiences and learning between countries in the region
- Drawing from lessons learned in previous crises to inform the preparedness and response to future emergencies

Recommendations

- Establish an MHPSS pillar as part of future responses to emergencies
- Sensitize national leaders to the importance of MHPSS in emergency preparedness and response
- Undertake an in-depth review of MHPSS components of the national response to COVID-19 and identify lessons learnt
- Improve data and information systems in routine national mental health systems to improve this function during emergencies

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