

Mental Health

Several investigations in recent years have found that up to 4 people out of 10 are suffering from some form of mental ill-health. The situation analyses revealed concern amongst members of communities around the country about problems of mental health - drugs/alcohol abuse, violence in communities and within families, gangsterism, and widespread signs of depression, stress, and chronic anxiety. There was also worrying information that health care personnel, too, are feeling overloaded, and demoralised.

Amongst the causes of this alarming amount of mental health problems are:

- unemployment and poverty - with constant worries about feeding children, finding or paying for shelter, affording education and health care, the endless boredom, sense of worthlessness and of being an expendable failure;
- family and marital breakdown - partly due to economic maldevelopment resulting in migratory labour, and partly due to the effects of alcohol/drug abuse, lawlessness and family violence. Many families have for these reasons lost their capacity to plan and work together for a better future;
- apartheid legacy - resulting in a build up of frustration and anger. This mental ill-health is also in part the effect of oppression, imprisonment, exile, organised violence and the fostering of conflict within communities; and
- among health workers - reasons given by survey respondents were dissatisfaction about pay and conditions, unexplained promotions, not being kept informed or consulted, and feeling unappreciated.

We therefore call on the government to recognise that:

- everybody has the right to mental health;
- its policies have seriously harmed many people;
- mental health care must be an integral part of primary health care; and
- it must accept responsibility to fund and support community-based mental health care projects and facilities.

Within six months

- to mount an offensive campaign about the elements of mental health, which makes clear that drugs/alcohol and violence are signs of stress and unhappiness; and
- to effectively address the grievances of health workers.

Within one year

- to have completed basic training and reorientation of health workers so that they will assist people in their desire to restore themselves to mental health. This should become the highest priority task in regard to mental health; and
- adopt a policy of multidisciplinary teamwork that would include traditional healers and workers from churches.

Within three years

- To move psychiatric care to facilities within communities such as local hospitals.

We call on health workers**Now**

- to incorporate mental health promotion into their everyday work within communities and to be sensitive to people's needs and feelings.

Within one year

- to become familiar with the elements of mental health and to focus their approach on the promotion of mental health. We particularly recommend linking with or developing income generating projects in their areas as places where effective mental health intervention can take place.

