Mental Health of Youth in the Kyrgyz Republic: Issues and Solutions

Despite mental health being an essential aspect of overall well-being and quality of life, according to the WHO report (2017), one in four people on the planet requires psychological assistance at some point in their lives. This is particularly relevant for youth, whose mental health is developing during a period of active physical, emotional, and social growth. Youth in the Kyrgyz Republic is a vulnerable group concerning mental health. All of this has an impact on the mental health of young individuals, leading to increased disorders, neurological illnesses, heightened anxiety, panic, and more. Improving the mental health of youth is crucial for public health and requires the attention of all stakeholders, including the youth themselves.

The regulation of mental health protection for the population covers general issues, including the role of the state and healthcare institutions in ensuring the mental well-being of citizens. It involves organizing comprehensive integrated healthcare services for individuals throughout their life cycle, and introduces a multisectoral approach to mental health care for the population. There is a fragmentation of approaches to mental health issues in the healthcare and social protection system, which limits access for young people to primary assistance, both in terms of medical and psychological services. Only 6% of young individuals seek professional psychological assistance when needed. The following factors and problems affecting the mental health of youth were identified during the research and subsequent analysis:

1. High unemployment, low living standards, and limited access to quality education have a negative impact on the mental health of youth.

2. There is also a certain stigma associated with individuals with mental disorders in society, which acts as a barrier to young people seeking help.

3. There is a lack of awareness regarding how to maintain and support mental health, as well as how to prevent psychological disorders.

Recommendations at the State Policy Level:

1. Interagency Working Group: Establish an interagency working group with experts and civil society organizations to develop changes to the Kyrgyz Republic Government Program on Mental Health Protection for 2018-2030 and its implementation plan.

2. "Youth" Law: Promote an updated version of the "Youth" Law that sets a minimum level of social assistance and services for youth based on age and gender, along with a clear definition of a "difficult life situation."

3. Expansion of Guaranteed Social Services: Include young people in difficult life situations in the list of guaranteed social services recipients, which should encompass medical, psychological, and social services. Also, allow local authorities and self-governance bodies to create their own lists of social services.

4. Minimum Guarantees for Psychological and Psychoterapeutic Assistance: Enshrine minimum guarantees for the provision of medical-psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance in legislative acts. Also, expand the practice of helplines to ensure the availability and quality of services for youth.

Recommendations at the Governmental Level:

1. Situational Analysis: Conduct a situational analysis within the responsibilities of each ministry concerning the implementation of the Kyrgyz Republic Government Program on Mental Health Protection for 2018-2030.

2. Interagency Collaboration: Strengthen interagency cooperation by developing a roadmap for implementing the government program on mental health protection.

3. Access to Psychosocial Support: Develop mechanisms for youth to access psychosocial support at the local level, assess youth's psychological support needs, and initiate a public discourse through digital technologies, such as forums and social media.

4. Best Practices: Develop algorithms based on the best practices for handling emergencies and incorporate them into everyday practice. Also, expand the implementation of effective approaches targeting youth as the focal group.

5. Partnerships: Foster partnerships with all stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive approach to youth and mental health problems.

6. Annual Gender-specific Assessments: Conduct annual assessments in a gender-specific context regarding psychosocial indicators for different reference groups of youth to have comparative data and evaluate the impact of measures taken.

Recommendations at the Education Level:

1. Teacher and Social Pedagogue Training: Develop and approve a program to enhance the capabilities of teachers and social pedagogues in psychodiagnostics, prevention, and providing initial psychosocial assistance to children and teenagers.

2. Psychological Education Programs: Create and implement programs on psychological education and awareness for youth, as well as for teachers and parents.

3. Enhancing Psychologist Training: Improve educational standards and the quality of training for psychologists in various fields, such as family psychology, adult psychology, and cognitive-behavioral psychology. Raise the status of psychologists at the state level.

Recommendations for Practical Services:

1. Psychologists' Association: Initiate the establishment of a Psychologists' Association that monitors ethical aspects of private practitioners' work and the quality of services they provide.

2. Access to Qualified Psychologists and Psychotherapists: Provide access to qualified psychologists and psychotherapists at the local level through the opening and support of psychological assistance centers, placing psychologists in schools, colleges, universities, youth centers, and other institutions where young people can access professional support.

Recommendations at the Society Level:

1. Youth Awareness: Increase youth awareness of mental health prevention, building relationships within families and society, stress management, and communication development.

2. Community Discussions: Organize community discussions on mental health, stigma, and major stereotypes in the field, utilizing digital technologies, forums, and social media.