
YHO Section on Mental Health

Policy Statement on Mental Health Post-Pandemic

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND POSITION

“Without mental health there can be no true physical health,” famously stated Dr Brock Chisholm, the first Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). The true meaning of the statement was very much evident in the pandemic and post-pandemic era - a time where we talked immensely about how to stay healthy while our mental health was deteriorating.

The pandemic has critically impacted the mental health of children and adolescents as well. There is a high prevalence of anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, suicidal behavior, stress-related disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and other mental health problems. Also, factors associated with children and adolescents mental health such as age, gender, place of residence, educational attainment, household income, sedentary lifestyle, social media and internet use, comorbidities, family relationships, parents' psychosocial conditions, COVID-19 related experiences, closure of schools, online learning, and social support were reported across various studies (Hossain et., 2022).

Multilevel interventions are needed to address psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 in young people. Therefore, International Youth Health Organization as a network of youth-led and youth-focused organizations is strongly advocating for attention and action on youth mental health with a wide variety of stakeholders.

CALL TO ACTION

We call upon the following stakeholders to help improve the status of youth mental health and encourage intersectoral collaboration.

Government:

- We urge governments and respective Ministries to increase the number and availability of mental health professionals working with youth.
- We invite health insurance companies to consider having psychotherapy sessions covered (reimbursed) for young people.
- We remind local, regional, and national authorities to fulfill all the elements of the right to health - availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of mental health services for university students [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948].
- We demand governments adopt a national mental health strategy/action plan with concrete steps, measurable elements, evaluation periods, criteria and monitoring through a consultative process with all relevant stakeholders - the health professionals, education institutions and the school and faculty members and staff, NGO and civil society, student unions and councils, youth organizations, and all youth groups including youth representatives.
- Moreover funds necessary for the implementation of the strategy should be allocated by the government.

- In addition, we encourage governments to do the constant monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the strategy.

Education system:

- We call upon the decision-makers in the education sector to address mental health issues for students and academic staff.
- Since a lot of time of young people is spent in education institutions or performing tasks in relation to their education, we emphasize the need to start looking at the issue as a whole and conduct research among students and staff and create a concrete action plan based on the results with measurable elements, evaluation periods, criteria, and most importantly, monitoring.
- In this strategy, some of the key points should cover accessibility, availability, quality, and acceptability. Recognizing the accessibility point, we are deeply convinced that psychological counseling in the Education Institutions (EI) should be free and available to all who need it, especially after Covid-19 pandemic worsened the mental health of many young people (Hossain et al., 2022) .
- Furthermore, to increase the accessibility of mental help, we emphasize the need to expand the pool of experts who could provide these services. The current situation shows that the waiting times for consultations are disastrously long.
- We would also like to emphasize the need to educate the academic community about the availability of psychological counsel. The need for informational seminars and other activities to raise awareness and understanding of mental health issues is mandatory as the literacy on mental health is still biased and educators are people who spend the most time with youth and can be the first front to notice deteriorating mental health.
- We also encourage decision-makers to include topics on mental health, mental hardships and disorders, stigma and soft and self-care skills into the school curriculum, especially in highschools.
- Workload should be adequately adapted to make time for youth to take care of themselves, physically and psychologically. One of the biggest challenges for youth is preserving the balance between studies, life outside the classroom, and extracurricular activities. For this reason, it is crucial to reflect on the obligations and criteria that are put upon students and need to be met.
- Furthermore, open communication about mental health in classes and being open to offering academic support and flexibility when needed, as well as access to information about the service and support available for students, all contribute to creating a safe space and fighting stigma.
- When discussing the types and availability of services and support, one of the productive ones would be peer-to-peer counseling, which would allow students to find other young people of the same or similar age and experiences.

Healthcare professionals:

- Considering the expertise and role that healthcare professionals have, they can significantly impact healthcare prevention and empowerment within schools and universities.
- As mental health staff in educational institutions, they can make the first step toward the most vulnerable youth and young people meeting academic and other difficulties.
- Also, they can build, promote and facilitate mental health awareness and prevention programs among education staff, mental health professionals and caretakers.

- As experts in the area, healthcare professionals can assess their needs in achieving their goals in mental health and advocate, in collaboration with students' unions and other organizations, for assigning more financial support and human resources to tackle student mental health.
- Nonetheless, healthcare professionals can and should publicly speak up and share information about the importance of mental health through awareness campaigns, on the governmental and local level, and through government policies and to also educate the caretakers to recognize mental health issues and encourage their help-seeking behavior for mental health support.

NGOs / Civil society / Youth Organizations:

- Youth organizations/NGOs/Civil Society could host panels where students with different diagnoses can speak about their personal experiences to break down any stigma associated with their respective diagnoses or difficulties.
- These organizations can also use their social media to give these individuals a bigger platform to speak about their experiences and give youth and their communities opportunities to engage with them in a structured and safe way.
- Organizations should also host periodical consultations with their stakeholders or members in order to monitor the progress of their work with supporting youth and students.
- Youth organizations could also lobby the Government for additional funding to promote themselves across the country, focusing on rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.
- Youth-led organizations should also take into account the mental health of their volunteers and youth workers, provide them with support, guidance, resources and space to appropriately take care of their health.

Youth:

- We encourage youth to think critically, promote human rights, raise awareness for mental health and engage in not only academic but also extracurricular activities that would improve their literacy about mental health problems in their community.
- Young people living with a mental health disorder can be involved as mental health ambassadors, promote the fight against stigma and the importance of students' mental health through their experience, and present the mental health issues as a normal phenomenon that shouldn't be stigmatized.
- Students, as the main group YHO is advocating for, should advocate for their own mental health and proactively reach out to students' councils, educators, government and other stakeholders to include their topic into their agendas and recognize the importance of youth mental health.

YHO Section on Environmental Health and Climate Change

Policy Statement on Climate Refugees

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As the greatest threat to global health in the twenty-first century, climate change has caused significant changes in the underlying social and environmental determinants of health at a worldwide level. The frequency, intensity, duration, and timing of weather events change as the climate changes.

The most direct link between climate change and migration is extreme weather events. In the short term, populations are forcibly displaced by storms, extreme precipitation events, and floods as a result of disasters because they lose their homes, cause economic disruption, and increase the frequency of waterborne diseases. Heatwave is one of the most crucial health-related exposure of climate change affecting populations living in rural and nonrural areas. More frequent droughts, wildfires and extreme temperatures are results of increasing heat due to climate change. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), since 2008 an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced by extreme weather events. In 2020, storms and floods were the major sources of displacement in Europe and Central Asia, resulting in over half of the recorded disaster displacements in the region; 120,000 displacements triggered by floods and 6,200 by 15 major storms. Around 33 million people, including approximately 16 million children, have been affected by this year's heavy monsoon rains in Pakistan. These numbers are expected to surge in coming decades with forecasts from international thinktank the IEP predicting that 1.2 billion people could be displaced globally by 2050 due to climate change and natural disasters.

The World Bank's Groundswell report projects that climate change could lead up to 216 million people across six world regions (Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America, East Asia and the Pacific, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia) to move within their countries by 2050 if no urgent action to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions is taken.

Inequalities between Climate Refugees:

The figure of new displacements of climate refugees from 2020 is a reminder that climate change enshrines a 'foundational' international inequality – both in terms of historical responsibilities and of differentiated adaptive capacities. 40.5 million people were displaced in total, out of those 30.7 million by disasters driven by climate change. It represents a tacit recognition of climate vulnerability as the result of structural 'wrongs'. On these bases, States and 'the international community' are pinned down to their responsibility (and legal duty) to protect/house/welcome/offer refuge to ecologically vulnerable populations displaced by climate change.

While the effects of climate change are global, and their projected impacts concern every area in the world, a wide scientific literature suggests that climate risks disproportionately affect the poorest countries and people, who are more exposed and more vulnerable to their impacts.

The likelihood of relying on natural resources for survival is highest among those with the lowest incomes. The poorest people frequently lack access to basic health care services and insurance programs, rendering them especially exposed to shocks that affect their assets and sources of income. Informal work, precarious land rights, and inherently risky subsistence agriculture, severely limit the ability of people to cope with crisis.

The representation of the climate refugee is taken from an antiquated globe map with a "simple" North-South line. But, the conversation around climate refugees emphasizes both concern for the effects of unchecked mass human movements and the fundamental right to protection that displaced individuals hold.

POSITION

An important ingredient of discourses on climate refugees is that they pose the question of responsibility, which entails a problematisation of climate change and its impacts on human mobility that considers the issue of climate justice. We want to emphasize the figure of climate refugees as the 'human face' of climate change. The responsibilities accompanying these human rights concerns are two-fold: ensuring that climate refugees are not created in the first place and introducing mechanisms to protect those people who are nevertheless displaced.. There is an urgent need to better understand how migrant health can be protected and promoted in the context of a changing climate in order to manage safe and orderly migration.

CALL TO ACTION

We ask for the international powers to recognise the definition of 'climate refugees'. As for the criteria defining a climate refugee, the following things should be taken into account:

Inclusion clauses in regards to the applicant:

1. It is assumed that, unless they seek adventure or just want to see the world, no person would abandon his home and country without a compelling reason. While other types of refugees exist, in this case, only one reason has been singled out to denote a climate refugee – displacement due to climate crisis.
2. An evaluation of the *subjective element* is inseparable from the assessment of the personality of the applicant, as psychological reactions of different individuals might not be the same in identical conditions.
3. An assessment of the credibility is indispensable when the case is not sufficiently clear from facts on record. It will be necessary to take into account the personal and family background of the applicant, their particular race, religion or social class, their own interpretation of his situation and his person experiences - all of which can indicate that the predominant motive for this application is fear.
4. As regards to the objective element, it is necessary to evaluate the statements made by the applicant. The competent authorities that are called upon to determine refugee status must take the applicant's statement in the relevant background context situation. A knowledge of the conditions in the applicant's country of origin is an important element in assessing the applicant's credibility.
5. In general, the applicant's fear should be considered well-founded if they can establish, to a reasonable degree, that their continued stay in their country of origin has become intolerable to them for the reasons stated in the definition, or would for the same reasons be intolerable if they returned there.

Inclusion clauses in regards to the origin's country situation:

1. In general, climate refugees are people who leave their homes because of climate stressors, as these stressors make their homes uninhabitable.
2. Examples of climate disasters caused by the climate stressors that should be considered in the applicant's background:
 - Sea level rise
 - Earthquakes
 - Landslides
 - Floods
 - Major storms
 - Wildfires
 - Other climate crises

Cessation clauses:

1. They have voluntarily re-established themselves in the country which they left.
2. They are no longer in fear because of the circumstances in connection with which they have been recognised as a refugee have ceased to exist.

We call for:

WHO, UNHCR, IOM and IDMC:

- To endorse the development of effective climate justice policies, as well as ensure their implementation by member states.
- To acknowledge the climate driven displaced population as refugees and implement their recognition in the International Law Framework
- To recognize and support the pivotal role of youth organizations in climate action and include youth in the development and implementation of climate justice policies.

National and Local Governments:

- To provide resources to incentivate the inclusion of climate change's consequences in the curriculum throughout all levels of education.
- To ensure Climate Refugees's access to knowledge throughout all levels of education
- To develop the necessary political and social structure to adapt Climate Refugees to the community and prevent social exclusion.
- To promote initiatives that stimulate the inclusion of Climate Refugees in the labor market.
- To guarantee Climate Refugees's access to safe drinking water, food and housing through the development of specific policies.

Educational Institutions and Universities:

- To support climate change research and create an international and multidisciplinary network to promote the recognition of the Climate Refugees status.
- To include climate change and its consequences in the curriculum throughout all levels of education.

Hospitals and Health Institutes:

- To provide high-quality healthcare coverage to all Climate Refugees regardless of their origins, beliefs or economical situation.
- Establish a specific plan of sustainability to target the current healthcare services's carbon footprint.

YHO Section on Nutrition and Physical Activity

Policy Statement on Sustainable Food Systems

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND POSITION

Global burden of non-communicable diseases is at an all-time high and they are now the leading cause of death worldwide. Unhealthy diets are responsible for more premature deaths and more total deaths than any other risk factor globally. In the past, undernutrition was the leading cause of death amongst diet-related NCDs, but today overweight/obesity has surpassed this. Prevalence of global obesity nearly tripled between 1975 and 2016, with no signs of slowing down. Obesity today is fastest rising in LMICs, with groups of higher socioeconomic status presenting higher rates of obesity.

Food systems are one of the major factors of this rapid increase in global obesity prevalence and have been significantly altered in recent decades by globalisation and industrialisation. At the same time, the food is not distributed equally across the world – we currently produce enough food for 10 billion people, however, more than a quarter of the world's population is affected by food insecurity. Unsustainability of food systems shows at multiple stages within the »from farm to fork« concept, and multiple levels when it comes to the quality of food, access to it and supply chains. Additionally, the impact of unsustainable food systems on environmental health cannot be neglected with the loss of biodiversity, deforestation and overfishing being some of the major contributors.

Governments have endorsed nine voluntary global targets with the overarching aim to reduce premature death from the four major NCDs by 25% by 2025. The deadlines of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals are fast approaching but the progress is simply not there with the goals still being far from fulfillment.

Understanding the link between food, nutrition, diet and NCDs is essential for solving the problems of food sustainability and with the world's population projected to grow further, we are likely looking at a much increased negative factors affecting the health of humans, animals and the environment.

We need comprehensive and holistic action to rebuild food systems to be stronger and more sustainable. The efforts require a multisectoral approach and engagement of many stakeholders at all levels. The three pandemics of obesity, undernutrition and climate change represent the Global Syndemic, and affect most people in every country and region worldwide.

According to a definition by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) from 2018, food systems are comprised of “All the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions) and the activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food, as well as the output of these activities, including socioeconomic and environmental outcomes.”

CALL TO ACTION

We call upon the following stakeholders to contribute to improving the food systems sustainability.

Government:

- To ensuring supply of high-quality nutritious food in all communities and facilities, preferably locally sourced and seasonal.
- To dedicate funding and resources toward research focusing on food, nutrition, health and sustainability, then use and apply the findings to relevant national Public Health policies. Also to expand research on the implications of climate change on food production as well as on adaptation and mitigation strategies to reduce the effects of climate change on crop quality and yield.
- To adopt policies to protect food sustainability, the natural environment (including addressing biodiversity loss from conversion for agricultural purposes) and nutritional status of population.
- To implement changes in school settings with the nutrition-related topics being addressed in the school curriculum, offering high-quality nutritious food through school cafeterias or other vendors to ensure food insecurity is not a barrier to access education.
- To use neurological marketing techniques to advance the implementation of policies and ensure larger availability and consumption of healthy foods.
- To explore the options of implementing sugar-sweetened beverage tax, green tax on sustainability processes and similar.
- To promote good nutrition and healthy lifestyles amongst the population.

United Nations:

- To develop programs to address the six pathways for food systems transformation as recommended by the UN FAO and utilize resources by WHO to make improvements towards healthier food consumption trends.
- To encourage increased action towards the SDGs, especially ones related to nutrition, food security and sustainability.
- To provide technical support and programs to countries to tackle the problems of unsustainable food systems, malnutrition, food insecurity, obesity and more.
- To provide a regular review of national and global progress and using the reporting to inform subsequent action plans.
- To commit to increasing funding and resources to improve the progress of the 2016-2025 »Decade of Action on Nutrition«.

Food Regulatory and Enforcement Agencies:

- To set standards and comprehensible certification systems for sustainable food and supply chain, as well as indicators on the nutritional benefit of food products and health warnings.
- To adopt and ensure the implementation of policies that regulate marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages.
- To evaluate and report on practices, required improvements and existing gaps in order to inform future policy.

Food industry:

- To commit to using recommended sustainable practices for food production, processing, distribution and marketing of food products.
- To take action when it comes to internal regulations regarding food quality and food waste reduction.

Educational institutions, including universities:

- To adopt food sustainability and nutrition-related modules in the curricula accessible to all children and youth. To equip all students with relevant knowledge and skills to raise awareness on healthy lifestyles, counsel them on making healthy and sustainable food choices, educate them about the causes of food insecurity and the measures needed to reduce it.
- To integrate healthy nutrition into their priorities and provide a variety of nutritious, sustainable and affordable food choices. Additionally, by utilizing the »green universities« approach, these institutions should strive to improve on different levels of sustainability.

NGOs / Civil society / Youth Organizations:

- To advocate to their respective governments to increase national efforts to address nutrition, and to call for evidence-based policies on sustainable food systems transformation and strategies to address malnutrition, obesity and NCDs.
- To educate youth on the burden of disease connected to poor nutrition and food systems, as well as the importance of the concept of food security and food sovereignty.
- To utilize relevant approaches in their own work, for example providing sustainable food option during their activities, reducing food waste, supporting local products, providing healthy food and beverage options.
- To conduct activities and projects on raising awareness on the topic amongst the general population and use their social media presence to spotlight the issues in their communities.

YHO Section on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Substances

Policy Statement on Alcohol Control and Availability

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND POSITION

Alcohol as a psychoactive substance with dependence-producing properties - has been widely used in many cultures for centuries. Alcohol usage is a major contributor to the global burden of disease and injury - the harmful use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions.

Worldwide, 3 million deaths every year result from harmful use of alcohol which represents 5.3% of all deaths. Overall, 5.1% of the global burden of disease and injury is attributable to alcohol, as measured in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).

Beyond health consequences, the harmful use of alcohol brings significant social and economic losses to individuals and society at large. Alcohol consumption causes death and disability relatively early in life. In people aged 20–39 years, approximately 13.5% of total deaths are attributable to alcohol. There is a causal relationship between harmful use of alcohol and a range of mental and behavioural disorders, other noncommunicable conditions, diseases such as liver cirrhosis, cancers, cardiovascular diseases and injuries, including those due to road traffic crashes, violence, and suicide. Fatal alcohol-related injuries tend to occur in relatively younger age groups.

One of the biggest issues is the availability of alcoholic beverages in connection to the lack of regulations or implementation of existing legislation, leading to alcohol consumption by youth. Addressing the problem requires an interdisciplinary approach and utilizing the »SAFER« best buys, a set of 5 most cost effective recommendations provided by the WHO that reduce alcohol related harm. »S« stands for strengthening restrictions on alcohol availability through addressing public health strategies that seek to regulate the commercial or public availability of alcohol through laws, policies and programme.

Availability of alcohol can have a reciprocal influence on the social availability of alcohol and can contribute to changing social and cultural norms that promote the harmful use of alcohol, usually known as »wet culture«.

Since progress towards alcohol consumption-related SDG targets is lagging behind, we believe alcohol availability is a crucial topic that needs to be addressed urgently in order to bring about progress in other areas as well.

CALL TO ACTION

We call for comprehensive policy change and strengthening the implementation of existing legislation when it comes to alcohol availability through the following actions of key stakeholders.

Governments:

- To increase the minimum age limit for accessing alcohol to 20 years of age.

- To ensure the same age limit is implemented at all levels, including pubs, stores and restaurants, and for all alcoholic beverage categories without exceptions such as lower age limit for beer that currently exists in certain countries around the world.
- To abide by international obligations and follow recommendations set forward by WHO.
- To adopt policy on the following measures that restrict alcohol availability:
 - Introducing separate stores for all alcoholic drinks and preventing alcohol to be sold in regular stores.
 - Exploring licensing procedures for selling, handling and serving alcohol in stores, pubs and restaurants with strict annual renewal procedures and regular inspection checks.
 - Preventing online sales and associated delivery systems of alcoholic beverages.
 - Reducing drinking in public spaces and decreasing viable hours for serving and selling alcohol.
 - Complementing regulation of industrial alcohol with actions on illicit or informally produced alcohol, including raising awareness on the dangers of home production.
- To ensure government-level regulation for retail sale of alcohol and density of alcohol outlets. It is further recommended to use available data on socioeconomic burden of populations and information on when certain communities experience increased alcohol-related harm to adjust availability policy.
- To implement higher taxes on alcohol adjusted for inflation. Additionally, to better categorize alcoholic beverages to avoid having the industry exploit the gaps in the system. This requires all types of alcohol to be treated the same without exceptions, and for a distinction to be made between other food and beverage products in comparison to ones containing alcohol.
- To enforce existing legislation and evaluate the effectiveness of measures.

Educational institutions and healthcare professionals:

- To advance their role in promotion of healthy lifestyles and decreasing alcohol consumption by raising awareness and educating their patients.
- To ensure the topic of negative impacts of alcohol use on health, environment and society is addressed regularly within formal curricula and in informal settings.
- To increase knowledge and build health literacy skills of children and youth for them to be able to understand why healthy lifestyles are important and how their decisions impact their health status in short- and long-term.

NGOs / Civil society / Youth Organizations:

- To conduct »mystery shoppers« activities and ensure that establishments enforce the minimum age for purchase in accordance with national legislation.
- To use their communication channels to conduct alcohol awareness campaigns and contribute to behavioural change amongst communities to shift from »wet« to drier cultures.
- To advocate against secondary supply of alcohol for youth, usually by parents or friends, to safeguard youth wellbeing and ensure the purpose of laws on minimal age of purchasing remains intact.

- To promote the concept of sober lifestyle amongst children and youth, as well as work towards busting the myths and fighting strategies of alcohol industry.