



AtidMUN 2023

# WHO Study Guide



# World Health Organization

**Topic A: Destigmatizing Mental  
Health in Schools and Workplaces**

**Topic B: Improving Responses and  
Coordination in Addressing Mental  
Health Cases**



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## CHAIR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to AtidMUN's World Health Organization! As your Chairs, we are thrilled to witness this gathering of brilliant people. Together, we have the unique opportunity to tackle and address pressing global issues and work collectively towards finding innovative solutions that could open possibilities to make a real difference in the world. Our wonderful committee will focus on two pressing issues in the field of health and wellbeing.

The first topic is *Destigmatizing Mental Health in Schools and Workplaces*. This subject will emphasize the importance of relieving the stress and misinformation about mental health caused by stigma. We will work on innovative ways to overcome mental health stigmas across different cultures and societies. As for the second topic, it is: *Improving Responses and Coordination In Addressing Mental Health Cases*. Our goal is to strengthen mental health systems and enhance support for needy individuals globally. Also, by raising awareness about mental health, we aim to better address mental health issues with understanding and empathy. We will devise strategies to promote mental well-being worldwide and foster international cooperation for practical solutions.

We hope to see every delegate with a smile and lots of energy. We highly encourage active participation as we engage in constructive discussions and learn from one another. Let's make this conference unforgettable and enjoyable for all of us! Embrace the diversity of perspectives and seize this opportunity to grow as diplomats and advocates for positive change. All of you are more than welcome to contact us anytime about any concerns and questions.

Good Luck!

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE:

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. The WHO's scope of work is vast, encompassing various health-related areas such as disease prevention, health promotion, health systems strengthening, emergency response, and health policy development. It provides technical expertise, research, and guidance on various health issues, from infectious diseases like malaria and tuberculosis to non-communicable diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

One of the WHO's essential functions is setting international health standards and norms and monitoring and assessing global health trends. It collaborates with governments, non-governmental organizations, and other international partners to develop strategies and initiatives to achieve universal health coverage and improve health equity.

Remember that WHO has no legislative power while still significantly influencing our world. While simulating this committee, delegates will take on the roles of the Heads of State of their assigned countries. They will try to balance national interests amongst themselves while also keeping the interests of the entire World Health Organization at heart.



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### TOPIC A: DESTIGMATIZING MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS AND WORKPLACES

#### *BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE*

#### CHALLENGES IN LIVING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESSES

Mental health illnesses are a phenomenon millions must live with constantly - and those people must face enormous and unimaginable challenges. Mentally ill people must confront the stigmas and stereotypes surrounding them and refute horrifying claims daily. These widespread and common claims have roots that date much before this century and before the last one. Mental health and awareness of it have always been treated with disdain or disregard - as it was often a sensitive and painful topic. Over the years, two different approaches were developed to deal with this subject:

1. A strategy of systematic desensitization towards the topic and slowly but surely building a stoic and staunch attitude of denial and sometimes even complete ignorance towards the issue. Societies and communities that chose and built this path often forcibly supported their philosophy - which, as expected, would regularly lead to a hazy cloud around the issue of mental health awareness.
2. A second strategy was built upon labeling mentally ill people as “crazy” and “insane.” In societies that adopted this doctrine, mentally ill people were often mistreated and sometimes even institutionalized (often mistreated within these so-called medical and restorative institutions).

Both approaches - now widely and extensively frowned upon by liberalistic societies- are based on stereotypes, stigmas, and generalizations that we can now classify as harmful and offensive



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with our 21st-century point of view. We will now specify and give more details about the stereotypes above.

### STEREOTYPES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In ancient and medieval times, beliefs about mental illnesses centered around the idea that the “victims” were possessed by evil spirits. Certain behaviors commonly found in “allegedly afflicted” people were prone to cause a person to be labeled as “cursed” or “sick.” These behaviors included but were not limited to eccentricity, belief in “outdated” folklore, mental and emotional instability and much more. The school and workplace environment, with its well-known tendency to be a stressful place often led to a worsening in these “symptoms” and later to a “diagnosis” of lunacy or cursedness.

These practices and beliefs had long-lasting effects - a “possessed ” child couldn’t go to school. A cursed adult naturally couldn’t work. Even after the “touched one” was “cured” (often by horrifying methods such as mental abuse and even electrolysis to “repair” the nervous system) it left a lasting impact on one’s life. Because of the stereotypes surrounding people with past “episodes” and because of the mind-wrecking methods used to “cure” them, it was challenging to rejoin society and the workforce. This led to them being marginalized and outcasted - which only led to a dramatic increase in the stigma surrounding them and others like them. The collective indifference to the problem, especially in educational facilities, led to cases of extreme negligence of these children, which led to insecure and unconfident adults with no chance of integrating into society.

### MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The enduring ramifications of mental health challenges encompass prospective outcomes, earning potential, overall well-being, and personal relationships. Mental health afflictions can cast a shadow over various facets of a student's existence, significantly diminishing their overall quality of life. Consequently, this has long-lasting effects on academic prowess, physical well-



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being, and the overall educational experience. Mental health issues significantly impact students' abilities, characterized by a depletion of vitality, concentration, dependability, cognitive awareness, and an optimistic outlook.

Moreover, improved mental health and well-being among students can contribute to better memory and performance - when students perceive themselves as supported and are triumphant within the educational milieu, their self-esteem and emotional welfare experience substantial growth. This directly relates to the connection between the stigma surrounding a mentally ill person and that person's self-perception and achievements. If a person lives within an unsupportive environment, surrounded by the stigma of his condition, they are likely to experience a drastic decline in their quality of life. Similarly, if a person has the unrequited support of those surrounding them, they are more than likely to overcome the difficulties of mental health illnesses.

Lastly, it is disconcerting to acknowledge that suicide prevails as the leading cause of mortality among young adults. Numerous high school students embark on their educational journeys with pre-existing mental health tribulations. Yet, they abstain from seeking assistance for their comprehensive well-being and academic success. This directly coincides with the fact that there are many stigmas surrounding the seeking of psychological and psychiatric help, and it is crucial to rid ourselves of them. The prevention of suicide assumes an indispensable endeavor, ensuring that students not only receive the necessary support but also exhibit awareness of the telltale indications and symptoms shown by those wrestling with mental distress.

### STIGMAS REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH AND INCREASING AWARENESS

One mental health stigma that was previously not addressed is the claim that depression or depressive disorders are just a state of mind that the person contending with them is having a



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hard time and made up an illness to gain credibility. This stigma is widespread and deadly and creates a barrier when seeking help – the mentally ill person is told daily that his alleged problem is just something he made up in his head and that he can “snap out of it.” This stigma is just one example of the many different aspects that led to forming a dark cloud surrounding mental health and impeding mental health awareness efforts. The need for education, awareness, and open conversations regarding mental health proves to be more essential by the minute; the question is, how?

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECT– AND SUBSEQUENTLY THE NEED FOR ACTION

We have already discussed the stigmas, but now, the appalling consequences will be examined to emphasize the need for a more active policy. The stigmas are terrible and demeaning, but as they ingrain deep into the collective human psyche, they create a concrete wall of shame and guilt when facing mental health illness. Not only do they make a subconscious negative approach towards mental health awareness - but they often cause vocal and physical opposition to it.

The way to deal with this issue, which has been utterly ignored for far too long, is by actively raising awareness and combating the stigma in our society. The historical wrongs of past civilizations led to a tangible worsening of the situation, and now we must remedy it. But as a global community, not enough has been done - therapy and treatments are still widely inaccessible, and even when they are available, they are often not good enough. Furthermore, these new methods of treating mental health illnesses often face scrutiny and an unsupportive public still rooted in the stigma of the past. In conclusion, in the past, mental health has been covered with a grey cloud due to a lack of understanding and a desire to better the situation. As a global society, we are now in an age when such barriers are no longer the primary concern – there is nearly a consensus as to the fact that something must be done. The only question is: what?



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### *CURRENT SITUATION*

#### CURRENT OVERVIEW OF THE MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA IN THE WORLD

Mental health stigma - as discussed in the last chapter - is an issue that the collective human population has been dealing with for centuries, and with the little bit of action being taken now - it looks like it's here to stay. In the last chapter, we discussed at length the stigmas of the past, the horrific claims of proposed insanity and cursedness, but now we shall discuss the ones that are perhaps more relevant to the era we live in the current stigmas. Even though, as a global community, we have evolved and taken considerable strides in supporting people facing mental health illnesses, there are still many challenges present - one of which is the presence of stigmas. The horrific stigmas previously mentioned are outdated and seem extreme and unrealistic - but the sad truth is that even though we have advanced somewhat, we still have a long way to go. And as surprising as it is - we are still facing the stigmas one could have expected to have been abandoned in the dark past. Such stigmas are prevalent in the school environment and the workforce - where all these claims tend to become more extreme with cases of bullying, casting, and feelings of shame and loneliness.

However, even if the term “stigma” and all affiliated with it are still present, the stigmas have changed - not entirely, but at least to some extent. Less common now are the claims of demonic possession and lunacy, but rather, stigmas of a different sort are now more prevalent - the treatment-centered ones. A mentally ill person seeking help right now will have many obstacles thrown at him - from jabbing remarks tossed his way to actual intervention between him and a caretaker. Plus, without validation regarding their feelings, it is straightforward to feel crazy and dramatic, causing shame and self-hatred.



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Additionally, students who have spoken out often face hatred from peers and sometimes even teachers; workers will face angst from colleagues and bosses and struggle to find their next job. And why does all that happen? For years, stigmas against mentally ill people getting treatment have been ingrained deep into the collective human psyche. Because ever since the people throwing remarks were children, they were surrounded by comments of “Oh, your friend is just making it up; there’s nothing wrong with him” and “Why are they taking him to a doctor - it’s not like a *doctor* can cure laziness in a child - who’s going to hire him when he’s older?” and so on. And it’s not just the people who will throw remarks later that hear these statements - it’s also (and most importantly) the people who will later contend with mental illness. The widespread stigmas and ideas that most mental health issues are “made-up” or “silly” cause deep-rooted societal beliefs that cause millions of lives to be ruined or even lost. We will now examine mental health culture and stigmas in other countries and how these points of view differ worldwide.

### MENTAL HEALTH IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

In different cultures, treatment for mental health illnesses has evolved differently, with specific communities taking a supportive stance when dealing with mental health and others taking perspectives that make the path to treatment harder. For example, in the USA in 2022, 23% of adults said they had visited a therapist, psychiatrist, or other mental health professional within the past year, according to Gallup polling. That vast number shows several things:

1. There are lots of mental illnesses in the USA.
2. But most importantly, a margin of people feel comfortable, safe, and unashamed when it comes to seeking help!

(Regarding speaking of the USA, we must be careful because a 2020 OnePoll survey showed that 47% percent of all Americans believe that seeking psychological help is a sign of weakness - so the USA is very divided about this).



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On the other hand, countries like China still have a long way to go, with only 20 people per million in China even having access to mental health services. Even when the mentally ill person reaches the so-called caretaker and healer, they are sometimes faced with the consequences of stigma even inside the medical facility. Even doctors, nurses, and other medical staff, people who trained for years to help patients, have been known to treat mental health patients with disrespect and indifference - as if their illness is not “real” or at least not “as real” as the ones the other patients have.

### *QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER*

1. How does your country define mental health stigma, and what is the general attitude towards mental health within the society?
2. What significant challenges does your country face in combating mental health stigma in schools and the workplace?
3. What cultural factors contribute to mental health stigma in your country, and how can they be addressed?
4. What role does media play in perpetuating or challenging mental health stigmas, and how can it be influenced positively?
5. How can the education system be improved to promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma among students and co-workers?
6. What specific measures has your country recently taken to address mental health stigma?



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7. What steps can be taken to train teachers, employers, and healthcare professionals to recognize and combat mental health stigma?
8. How does your country support mental health initiatives and programs that work towards abolishing stigma and increasing awareness?

### *SUGGESTED READING*

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/mental-health-lessons-learned-2020-2021-and-forward>

<https://therapybrands.com/blog/the-role-of-culture-in-mental-health/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/mental-health-stigma-examples#:~:text=Mental%20health%20is%20often%20stigmatized,who%20have%20mental%20health%20conditions.>

<https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/3975996-why-more-americans-are-going-to-therapy/#:~:text=In%202004%2C%20just%2013%20percent,was%20up%20to%2023%20percent.>

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### TOPIC B: IMPROVING RESPONSES AND COORDINATION IN DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CASES

#### *BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE*

Mental health issues have gained significant attention in recent years due to their increasing prevalence and impact on individuals, families, and communities. The complexity and diversity of mental health cases necessitate comprehensive and coordinated efforts to address them effectively. Many factors have significantly affected how the entire mental health situation is handled and viewed worldwide.

**The Global Mental Health Crisis** The global mental health crisis is characterized by a growing burden of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicidal tendencies, Etc. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately one in four people worldwide will experience a mental health disorder at some point. 14.3% of deaths worldwide can be attributed to mental disorders. The destructive effects of mental health issues on individuals, families, and communities necessitate urgent action to improve responses and coordination.

**Stigma and Barriers to Care:** Stigma remains a significant barrier to accessing mental health services; stigma is an essential issue for everyone affected by mental health disorders. Negative societal attitudes and misconceptions surrounding mental health often prevent individuals from seeking help and obstruct effective responses. However, stigma related to mental health disorders can be exaggerated in specific populations. Associations between stigmas and help-seeking behavior may disproportionately affect certain cultures due to perceived shame, desire to protect the family reputation and personal dignity. Gender disparities also exist, with men more likely to report feelings of personal stigma associated with their mental health disorder.



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**Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Addressing mental health cases effectively requires multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination. Professionals from diverse fields, such as psychiatry, psychology, social work, counseling, and peer support, must work together to provide holistic care. Collaboration extends beyond healthcare professionals to involve community organizations, schools, workplaces, and policymakers. By fostering partnerships and sharing resources, stakeholders can pool their expertise and enhance the effectiveness of mental health interventions.

**Integration of Mental Health Services:** Improving responses and coordination involves integrating mental health services into primary healthcare systems. This approach recognizes that mental health is integral to overall well-being and should be addressed alongside physical health. By incorporating mental health care into primary care settings, individuals can receive comprehensive and timely support, reducing the burden on specialized mental health services and improving overall access to care.

**Technology and Innovation:** Advancements in technology have opened up new possibilities for improving responses and coordination in mental health care. Telehealth services, mobile applications, and online platforms have expanded access to mental health support, particularly in underserved areas. Additionally, data analytics and artificial intelligence can be utilized to identify at-risk populations, track treatment outcomes, and guide resource allocation. Leveraging technology and innovation can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of mental health interventions.

### DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE ISSUE

How others see people with mental health problems can affect their ability to form relationships, find work, and build the self-confidence and self-esteem they need. It is also an essential factor in their recovery process.



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In light of this, many countries differ in their attitudes and perspectives on this global issue. While some countries are more open and proactive in providing their citizens with the treatment and care they need to meet this challenge, others are less accommodating and less inclined to address these issues. Many countries, such as the United States, Chile, Australia, and England, advocate for mental health and recovery, whether through mental health advocacy movements or by working to make their countries more friendly to their citizens who struggle with poor mental health in addition, they have made changes to their health care systems to provide reasonable mental health care to their residents,

Mental health promotion is essential to individual, community, and societal well-being. It improves public health, reduces economic burden, promotes human rights, and strengthens social cohesion and resilience. On the contrary, some countries such as Africa, China, India, and Brazil do not necessarily or sufficiently act in this area. Furthermore, developing countries usually do not have the resources to treat such issues. As such, they require assistance and help from other nations willing and motivated to further this issue.

### CHALLENGES FOR MENTAL HEALTH ACTIVISTS THROUGH TIME

Mental health activism has faced numerous challenges throughout history. Here are some key challenges that mental health activists have encountered over time:

1. Stigma and Discrimination
2. Lack of Awareness and Education
3. Access to Quality Mental Health Care
4. Policy and Legal Barriers
5. Intersectionality and Inclusivity
6. Resource Constraints
7. Changing Societal Attitudes



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### MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES AND UP TO THE 20TH CENTURY

Though some scientific progress was made as physicians tried to understand the causes of mental illness, during the Middle Ages, theories of demonic possession and witchcraft resurfaced as Christianity spread through Europe. The Christian church became a predominant force in medicine, attitudes toward mental illness were syncretized with Hippocrates' theory, and the 20th century witnessed significant advancements in technology that contributed to raising awareness and transforming the mental health field.

Generally, technological advances in the 20th century, combined with scientific advances, therapeutic innovations, and societal changes, have contributed significantly to increased mental health awareness and understanding. However, it is essential to note that despite these positive developments, challenges such as stigma, access to care, and disparities in mental health support persist and require continued efforts to address them.

One example of technological advances is antipsychotic medications, which treat mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression by balancing neurotransmitters in the brain. They affect dopamine and serotonin, which regulate mood, thinking, and cognition. They are divided into two categories: typical and atypical medications. The choice depends on the disease, the symptoms, and the patient's preferences.

It is also essential to know that many dominant and vital figures are in these mental health battles, such as Clifford W. Beers (1876-1943), an American mental health advocate and writer. He is best known for his influential book, "A Mind That Found Itself," published in 1908. In this autobiographical work, Beers shared his experiences with mental illness and subsequent treatment in psychiatric institutions. The book shed light on the harsh conditions and mistreatment of individuals with mental health conditions during that time. Beers founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (now known as Mental Health America) in 1909, an organization committed to promoting mental health and supporting those affected by mental illness.



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### *CURRENT SITUATION*

#### CURRENT BREAKTHROUGHS AND STRUGGLES

Breakthroughs play an essential part in any issue and how it's resolved, although with any breakthrough come struggles of all kinds. One of the most critical factors of breakthroughs is Research development, in which ongoing studies have given humanity a better understanding of mental health issues, which has improved diagnostic equipment and allowed for more specialized treatment options.

Thus, awareness of mental health has increased over the years, and there has been a significant increase in mental health awareness. People have finally found the confidence to open up more about their mental health issues, lowering stigma and getting assistance. Technology has played a massive factor in breakthroughs due to the increasing number of digital health solutions that have increased access to mental health care. Thanks to mobile apps, online therapy platforms, and virtual mental health resources, people can connect with professionals and access self-help resources more efficiently.

Workplaces have taken a toll on employees' mental health in all aspects. Still, in recent years, Employers are putting efforts in place to promote well-being in the workplace as they begin to recognize the significance of employee mental health. In controlled settings, the use of Specific psychedelic drugs, such as MDMA and psilocybin, to treat conditions like PTSD and treatment-resistant depression has regained popularity. Studies are still being conducted to determine their safety and potential benefits.

As for the difficulties, despite advancements, many regions of the world continue to face significant barriers to accessing mental health services. Cost, stigma, and a lack of mental health professionals, particularly in rural or underserved areas, are obstacles. Also, due to prejudice, trauma, and a lack of culturally competent care, some vulnerable populations, such



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as refugees, LGBTQ+ people, and racial/ethnic minorities, frequently experience mental health difficulties.

It's important to mention that mental health problems have become more prevalent, especially among young people. Higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation have been associated with factors like social media use, Covid-19, academic pressure, and economic stress. Moreover, many people with mental health conditions also have substance use disorders, making treatment more difficult and necessitating integrated care strategies.

As for mental health funding, compared to other healthcare areas, mental health services frequently receive insufficient funding, which impacts the standard and quantity of care. It's critical to understand that the mental health field is constantly changing. Since my previous update, there may have been new developments and initiatives to address these issues and enhance mental health outcomes. Always consult reputable and up-to-date sources for the most recent details on products and challenges in the mental health field.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF COORDINATING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH**

For numerous reasons, it is crucial to coordinate international standards for treating mental illness. The worldwide mental health issue impacts people of various ages, nationalities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Countries might collaborate to handle mental health issues more effectively and ensure that their citizens receive the proper care and support by creating and upholding shared international standards.

For instance, common terminology and understanding of mental health conditions, diagnostic standards, and therapeutic modalities are made possible by the coordination of international standards. This encourages improved communication between specialists in the field of mental



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health worldwide. No matter where they are located, patients can benefit from exchanging knowledge and best practices made possible by an agreed-upon vocabulary.

Moreover, in certain societies, there may be stigma associated with mental health problems, resulting in discrimination against those with them. International cooperation can make it easier to pass on information to combat stigmatization and advance understanding and acceptance of mental illness globally.

In addition, the infrastructure and resources for healthcare vary across nations. An equitable distribution of funding for mental health care is made possible by harmonizing international standards. Governments can more effectively allocate their resources if they share information about the prevalence of mental health issues and the efficacy of various interventions.

Sharing of data, research results, and creative approaches to treatment and prevention are encouraged by collaboration on mental health standards. The development of evidence-based interventions and understanding of mental health disorders are all accelerated by this group effort.

As for cross-border support, In recent decades, cross-border mobility has significantly increased. Those with mental health illnesses who move to other nations can benefit from a pattern of care thanks to international standards. It is less complex for patients to receive the assistance they need, no matter where they are, when treatment techniques and medical records are compatible.

The value of mental health support increases in the aftermath of catastrophes, wars, or other crises. International standards collaboration enables a more persuasive response to these circumstances, enabling rapid and effective mental health treatment for impacted populations.



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Policy development is a considerable aspect of this issue and significantly affects it. Governments may utilize common international standards to create laws and policies for mental health reinforced by facts. Coordination of efforts can improve the integration of mental health services within larger healthcare systems, addressing the treatment gap and enhancing public mental health.

For many countries, coordination allows access to training and educational resources for mental health professionals. This encourages professional growth and guarantees practitioners are knowledgeable about the most recent developments in mental health treatment.

Global collaboration, knowledge exchange, and shared responsibility in addressing mental health challenges are all assisted by coordinating international standards for dealing with mental health. By cooperating, nations can improve the standard of mental health services, lessen inequalities, and encourage better mental health for everyone.

### *QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER*

1. How does your country currently respond to mental health cases, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system?
2. What are the barriers to early and timely responses for individuals facing mental health challenges in your country, and how can these be overcome?
3. How can international cooperation enhance mental health responses between countries?
4. What measures can be implemented to ensure confidentiality and privacy for individuals seeking mental health assistance?
5. How does your country address mental health while considering factors like gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status?



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6. What strategies can be employed to involve local communities in promoting mental health awareness?
7. What are the best practices from other countries in handling mental health cases, and how can your country learn from these experiences?
8. How can mental health awareness campaigns be effectively designed and implemented to reach diverse populations and demographics?

### ***FURTHER READING:***

<https://bmcpsychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-018-1711-1>

[https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/EB130/B130\\_9-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB130/B130_9-en.pdf)

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