

The Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders in Lebanon: 25% of the Population is at Risk



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Introduction

Mental health, an integral component of overall well-being, is an issue of global concern. In Lebanon, a country with a rich history and a complex socio-political landscape, the prevalence of mental health disorders has emerged as a significant public health challenge. This report aims to shed light on the current status of mental health in Lebanon, exploring the factors contributing to the prevalence of mental health disorders and the existing initiatives to address this growing concern.

1. Epidemiological Overview:

According to the Institute for the Development, Advocacy and Applied Care (IDRAAC), 25% of the Lebanese population will suffer from a mental disorder during their lifetime. This number is based on the only national study conducted in Lebanon measuring the prevalence of mental health disorders among the Lebanese population. **The most common mental health disorder is anxiety where 18% of the population experienced that and the second most common is depression where 13% of the population experienced that.**

Recently, Lebanon has faced numerous challenges, including civil conflict, political instability, economic crises, and, most recently, the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. These stressors have taken a toll

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on the mental health of the population. Preliminary results from new studies conducted by IDRAAC show a direct impact of these stressors on mental health where the rates are much higher compared to previous studies.

2. Contributing Factors:

Several interconnected factors contribute to the high prevalence of mental health disorders in Lebanon. The enduring impact of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) has left a legacy of trauma and psychological scars. Ongoing political instability, economic challenges, and the burden of hosting a large number of refugees have compounded these stressors. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing mental health concerns, leading to heightened levels of anxiety and uncertainty. But overall, it seems that the economic challenge has played the biggest role among those challenges.

3. Stigma and lack of awareness barriers to treatment:

Despite the increasing recognition of mental health as a critical public health issue, stigma and lack of awareness remain a significant barrier to seeking and receiving treatment in Lebanon. Societal attitudes toward mental health issues often contribute to individuals concealing their struggles due to fear of judgment or discrimination. Moreover, limited awareness and understanding of mental health contribute to delayed or insufficient treatment seeking. IDRAAC's numbers show that around 90% of those needing care do not receive it.

4. Impact on Vulnerable Populations:

Vulnerable populations in Lebanon, including refugees, displaced individuals, and marginalized communities, face heightened mental health risks. Displacement,

loss of livelihoods, and exposure to trauma amplify the challenges these populations encounter. **In one study, IDRAAC showed that 80% of elderly refugees living in Beirut suffer from depression.** Addressing mental health disparities among vulnerable groups is essential for building a more inclusive and equitable mental health support system.

5. Initiatives and Interventions:

Despite the challenges, Lebanon has witnessed the emergence of initiatives and interventions aimed at addressing mental health needs. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and mental health professionals are working to increase awareness, reduce stigma, and provide accessible mental health services. Telehealth services have become more prevalent, offering remote support during times when in-person interactions may be limited.

6. Need for Mental Health Policy and Legislation:

One of the critical gaps in addressing mental health in Lebanon is the absence of comprehensive mental health policies and legislation. IDRAAC developed a national mental health law however this law is awaiting its passing at the parliament. Also, the national mental health program at the ministry of health has been actively working on strategies that can provide a framework for integrating mental health into the broader healthcare system. Such policies should focus on destigmatization, prevention, early intervention, and improving access to mental health services.

7. Role of Education and Awareness:

Education and awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in destigmatizing mental health issues and promoting early intervention. Integrating mental health education into school curricula and conducting community outreach programs can contribute to building a more informed and supportive society. Engaging religious and community leaders in these initiatives can help leverage existing networks and reduce stigma.

8. International Collaboration:

Given the multifaceted nature of mental health challenges in Lebanon, international collaboration is essential.

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Collaborative efforts can involve sharing best practices, resources, and expertise to strengthen mental health services. International organizations, NGOs, and foreign aid can provide valuable support in building a robust mental health infrastructure.

Conclusion

The prevalence of mental health disorders in Lebanon is a complex issue influenced by historical, socio-political, and economic factors. While the challenges are substantial, there is a growing recognition of the need to prioritize mental health and implement comprehensive strategies for prevention, intervention, and support. Addressing stigma, promoting awareness, and fostering international collaboration are crucial steps toward building a resilient mental health system in Lebanon. By investing in mental health, Lebanon can empower its population to overcome the challenges they face and contribute to the overall well-being of the nation.