



PROMOTING RIGHTS

AND COMMUNITY LIVING FOR CHILDREN

WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL DISABILITIES



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This publication is part of a series of thematic papers, coproduced by the World Health Organization and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Global Mental Health Platform. The series consists of four publications covering the following topics.

- Innovation in deinstitutionalization: a WHO expert survey
- Integrating the response to mental disorders and other chronic diseases in health-care systems
- Social determinants of mental health
- Promoting rights and community living for children with psychosocial disabilities.

Examples from different countries are used throughout this report to illustrate some of the key issues, problems and solutions in relation to children with psychosocial disabilities. The information and data contained in the report are drawn from published sources which cannot be verified independently. The use of examples does not imply that these issues, problems and solutions are unique to a specific country.

These examples should not be viewed as an assessment of countries' overall performance in relation to children with psychosocial disabilities. Many countries highlighted in this report have taken corrective measures to improve the situations in which children living in institutions find themselves. Nor should the examples be taken to suggest that any country is more or less advanced than others in protecting the rights of children with psychosocial disabilities. The examples highlighted in this report are used for illustrative purposes only; they apply to many countries around the world.

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FOREWORD

Those of us who are parents typically want our children to have the best start in life. And of course, we typically believe that we can provide it. We know, and the experts in childhood development also tell us, that the best start for a child is to grow up in a family group with parents or other caregivers providing security and love.

Some children are born with disabilities, and others develop disabilities in their early years. These children need security, care and love, best provided by keeping them with their parents or caregivers in their own community.

The World Health Organization published its first *World report on disability* in 2011. It emphasized the need for more attention to rehabilitative measures, medicines and therapies and the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including psychosocial disabilities, in the worlds of education, work and community living.

This present report looks specifically at the options for children with psychosocial disabilities. Many such children end up not with their families and communities but in institutions – and the decision to put them there is often taken by members of the health services and government authorities rather than parents. However, growing evidence shows that this is harmful for children. Many institutions struggle to provide the individual care that children with psychosocial disabilities need, and become places where children are subjected to demeaning treatment and forgotten by society, excluded from education, work and normal social activities.

Apart from all the scientific research that has made this report possible, extracts are included from reports by inspectors and staff of institutions. Their statements are distressing.

Evidence shows that, for children with psychosocial disabilities, community services lead to significantly better developmental, health and human rights outcomes than institutional care. Of course, it puts more responsibility on parents, and that is why this report outlines the types of community services and support, including financial assistance, that are needed – for children and for their families.

We hope that this thematic paper will not only inform but also stimulate action by all stakeholders, including governmental agencies and civil society organizations. The issue here is not just to save money; it is to meet the needs of children with disabilities more appropriately, to ensure their education and integration into society and to respect their human rights. Simply put, it is to give them the best start in life that we can.

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