
INVESTING IN MENTAL HEALTH:

EVIDENCE FOR ACTION



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SUMMARY

Mental health and well-being are fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life. They directly underpin the core human and social values of independence of thought and action, happiness, friendship and solidarity. On this basis, the promotion, protection and restoration of mental health can be regarded as a vital concern of individuals, communities and societies throughout the world.

However, current reality presents a very different picture. The formation of individual and collective mental capital – especially in the earlier stages of life – is being held back by a range of avoidable risks to mental health, while individuals with mental health problems are shunned, discriminated against and denied basic rights, including access to essential care. Accentuated by low levels of service availability, the current and projected burdens of mental disorders are of significant concern not only for public health but also for economic development and social welfare.

In this report, potential reasons for this apparent contradiction between cherished human values and observed social actions are explored with a view to better formulating concrete steps that governments and other stakeholders can take to reshape social attitudes and public policy.

The report shows that a strong case can be made for investing in mental health – whether to enhance individual and population health and well-being, protect human rights, improve economic efficiency, or move towards universal health coverage. The report also identifies a number of barriers that continue to influence collective values and decision-making – including negative cultural attitudes towards mental illness and a predominant emphasis on the creation or retention of wealth (rather than the promotion of societal well-being).

In partnership with all relevant stakeholders, governments have a lead role to play in reshaping the debate about mental health, addressing current barriers and shortcomings, and responding to the escalating burden of mental disorders. Key actions that would mark a renewed commitment to promote, protect and restore mental health include: better information, awareness and education about mental health and illness; improved health and social services for persons with mental disorders; and enhanced legal, social and financial protection for persons, families or communities adversely affected by mental disorders.

1. INTRODUCTION

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