Integrating a public health and human rights approach into mental health services for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip

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Abstract

Background In the context of violations of human rights and insecurity, the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) provides mental health services and psychosocial interventions that match local cultural and social norms. The GCMHP uses a community mental health approach to promote the psychological wellbeing of the people living in the Gaza Strip and advocate on mental health issues.

Methods The GCMHP provides preventive and therapeutic care to a broad public health spectrum of Gazan society. Services are provided in terms of preventative public health at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Data reported here are from 2014–16.

Findings For primary prevention, our services include advocacy, public awareness, and media campaigns aimed at raising awareness about and preventing common mental disorders and behavioural difficulties in children. 35 878 people are estimated to have benefited from these programmes. The GCMHP also provides psychological first aid and crisis intervention to vulnerable persons and a free telephone counselling service. About 12 943 persons have received individual sessions, and 2590 persons have received telephone counselling. The GCMHP also provides training to enhance the skills of professionals of local organisations working in mental health and psychosocial services. 3557 people have attended these programmes. As secondary prevention, the GCMHP offers individual and group psychotherapy, and routine home visits are provided for torture survivors and individuals and families exposed to cumulative trauma. 11 713 individuals have received such services. As tertiary prevention, rehabilitation services including physiotherapy and occupational therapy are provided to help patients regain their role as active members of the community. 398 people have received these services.

Interpretation A public health-oriented approach to mental health services fits the socioecological model that locates individuals and families within the context of their community, religious-cultural context, and social, economic, and political systems. With social responsibility embedded as a core value, the GCMHP seeks to restore psychological wellbeing in citizens of the Gaza Strip.

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Contributors

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