

OPEN MINDS



Promoting mental health and well-being in the community



Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders

Mental health is an integral part of health; in reality, there is no health without mental health

*WHO, *Mental health: strengthening our response*, March 2018

Context

Greece has suffered a severe economic crisis since late 2009, due to nearly a decade of chronic overspending and structural rigidities. The severe impact of the current financial crisis in Greece that has led to extreme austerity measures and cuts in the public expenditure for mental health system while at the same time there is an enormous increase of demand for services. This, in conjunction with the mass influx of refugees and migrants in Greece over the past two years has contributed to further discrimination of the most vulnerable groups, such as destitute Greeks, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Roma, and LGBTQI communities.

Key facts & figures*

15% of households say their income is insufficient to meet even their basic needs

47,8% canceled or postponed medical treatment

1 in 5 is working below the minimum wage of 490 euros

20,8 % is the official unemployed rate

3 in 4 of them are long-term unemployed

Only 7,3 % of unemployed people get benefits

* IME GSEVEE, December 2017

Greek mental health system

Greek Mental Health reforms started in the late 1980s aiming at the deinstitutionalization of thousands of patients and the development of community mental health services.

Since then several projects funded by European Programmes have been implemented in order to develop a community-based mental health system.

The “National Action Plan Psychargos 2000 – 2010” (from 2001 to 2010) achieved the closure of long stay psychiatric hospitals, the deinstitutionalisation of the majority of the patients, the establishment of psychiatric services in general hospitals and the geographical and administrative sectorisation of mental health services.

Challenges

- A community-based mental health system has not been fully implemented up to now
- Inter-sectoral coordination and provision of specialised services
- Overburden public psychiatric clinics with poor results in terms of patients therapy
- Lack of funding and staff shortages
- Lack of Intercultural approach and capacity

Mental health services

19 available psychiatric ward places per 100.000 citizens while the average in OECD countries is 73/100.000

The last revision of Psychargos is scheduled to cover the period from 2011 to 2020. However, this reform is still incomplete, given that the sectorisation, adequate primary care policies, inter-sectoral coordination and specialised services – such as those for children and adolescents, and for people with autism, intellectual disabilities and geriatric and forensic services are under developed.



Mental health situation

Groups who were already facing numerous vulnerability factors before the crisis, have seen a reduction in or a termination of social safety nets and networks which provide them with basic help.

Families unravel under the weight of a crisis that is as much human as it is financial. Single parent families, large rural families and the families of economic migrants and unskilled workers are the most affected. Families without children face lower extreme poverty rates than families with children, but families with three children seem to be in a better position than those with one or two.

Stress, insecurity and disappointment among the issues most commonly cited, by people when asked about their mental health situation.

Unmet basic needs such as physical health, housing, food, education and occupation tend to lead to a range of depressive feelings, anxiety, insomnia, loss of hope, fear and increased stress levels.

Testimony

"My name is Michael and I am 29 years old. I come from Greece and the past few months I have been living rough on the streets of Athens.

It has been about 10 years now that I am suffering from delusional ideas and thoughts, I hear things that I cannot see. Often, I hear a voice that is commenting on my acts and laughs with me.

This is so scary and stressing; it makes it so difficult for me to concentrate. Sometimes I drink alcohol in order to get rid of all these!

I was lucky to have arrived at Doctors of the World Polyclinic, I asked for help and the Social Worker who worked with me directly referred me to the Psychiatrist.

The doctor was welcoming and understanding, he gave me the time to talk about my story and my problems and accepted the fact that I did not wish to be hospitalized as I have been traumatized by restraint before.

I took his advice under consideration and nowadays I am doing much better. However, I know my recovery pathway is not going to be an easy one."

Mental health is determined by a range of socioeconomic, biological and environmental factors



Main mental health disorders*

- 32 %** Mood disorders
- 27,5 %** Anxious, somatoform and stress related disorders
- 5 %** Psychotic disorders
- 5 %** Personality and behavior disorders
- 4 %** Disorders related to drug use & addiction
- 3,5 %** Episodic and paroxysmal disorders

* Out of total Psychiatric consultations Jan-Jun 2018, "OPEN MINDS" project



Mental health and migration

One major direct consequence of the refugee crisis is a cross-cutting deterioration of the psychological and mental health condition of migrants stranded in Greece. People live in limbo and uncertainty, they feel de-motivated, and their morale is low. Overcrowding, inadequate and insufficient living conditions, lack of protection contribute to deterioration of people's mental health. The absence of dignified approaches and lack of adequate information provision about the future of persons in the centers all compound a difficult situation and generate severe distressful reactions.

Many children (especially unaccompanied) are unprotected from sexual harassment, signs of domestic violence and neglect are quite evident and deteriorating with time. There is a worrying increase in suicide

attempts and self-harm among young people, while drug consumption seems to be used as a way to cope with the seemingly ever ending misery. Behavioural problems among the adult population are also arising (anger, violence, substance/alcohol abuse, self-harming, GBV incidents). Women complain about exhaustion and frustration (which often results at impatience with their children and risk of depression) and report anxiety and fear due to the shared living conditions and the lack of protection from the authorities/camp managers.

Both men and women present sleeping problems, nightmares and a generalized loss of interest in daily life. Men are frustrated because they cannot provide for their family and they have nothing to do, while women are mainly busy with child rearing. Uncertainty and loss of family members increases also the level of frustration and depression.

Key facts

Greece is one of the **main gateways** to Europe, together with Italy and Spain in the Mediterranean region

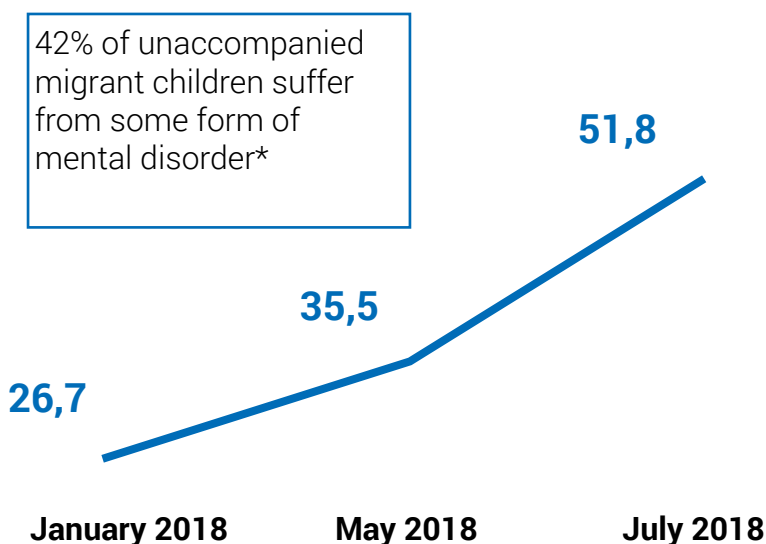
1,091,514 estimated refugee and migrant arrivals (January 2015 - July 2018)

As of the end of May 2018, an estimated **58,100** migrants and refugees were stranded in Greece

35,052 migrant arrivals in 2017

More than **50%** of the arrivals are **women and children**

Percentage of UAC with mental disorders*



*Data from MDM' shelter for UAC in Athens, Jan - July 2018



MdM Action

The OPEN MINDS project aims to promote mental health and well-being of people facing multiple vulnerabilities (migrants, refugees, uninsured and destitute Greek nationals) by providing them access to mental and psychosocial support and by ensuring that they can exercise their basic human rights.

This goal is achieved through the provision of necessary mental health care and psychosocial support services, capacity building to the public mental health professionals and data collection as well as testimonies through which the inadequacy of the public system will be highlighted. At the same time, the project aims at working together with the public mental health system in order to reinforce it.

- Psychological support
- Psychiatric care
- Diagnosis
- Social assistance / counselling
- Provision of services based on individual needs assessment
- Comprehensive approach
- Mainstreaming referrals and referral pathways to the NHS
- Clinical Follow up
- Treatment and provision of medicines

Main activities January to June 2018

2 teams:

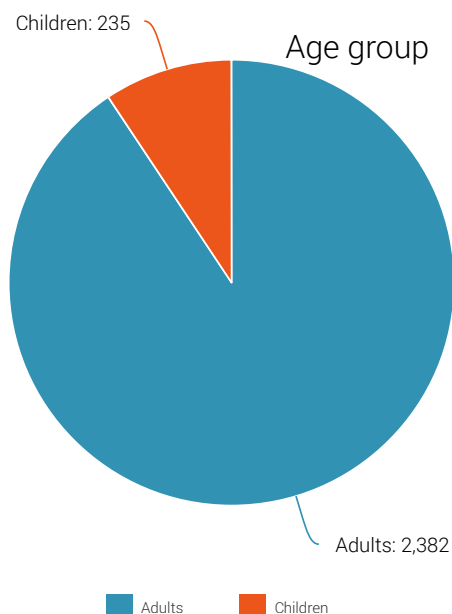
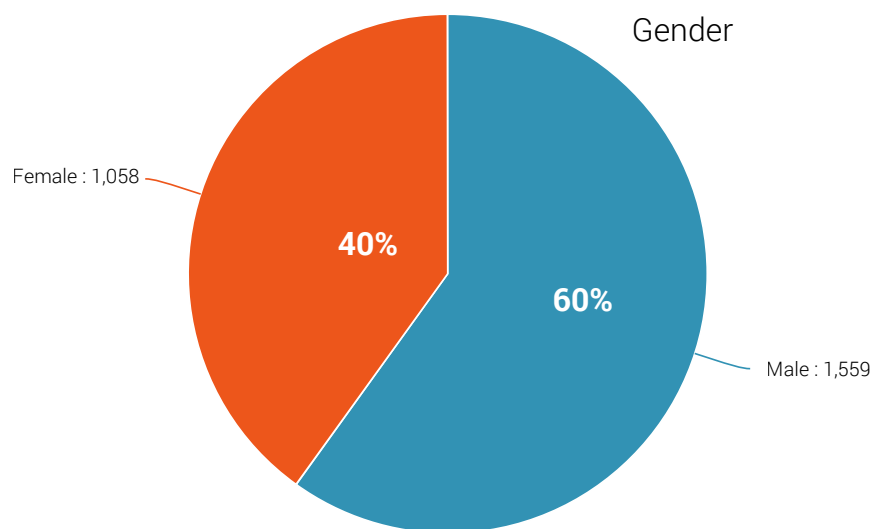
Athens
Thessaloniki



2,617 total consultations



890 Psychiatric consultations



Main nationalities

- Syria 21%
- Greece 15%
- Iraq 13%
- Iran 8%
- Afghanistan 8%
- Pakistan 4%

Voices from the field



'Working as a Psychologist for one of the Athens Polyclinics that Doctors of the World are currently running has been the most inspiring and fulfilling post I could ever wish for. Working within this field gave me the chance to meet all these people coming from different parts of the world, having different cultural backgrounds, different knowledge and ideas around mental health but still being open to share their stories, share their feelings, thoughts and fears hoping that someone will listen to what they want to say with a non-judgmental, respectful and humanitarian way in a friendly environment that will be the beginning of their recovery journey. As a team we are hoping we have managed to create this friendly environment for each and every one of our service users maintaining a person-centered approach, looking at their problems holistically and respecting their dignity at all times. This would not be feasible without the support of the Organisation and achieving the best level of communication within the team members'

Lydia Mylonaki, Psychologist, Mdm Open Athens Polyclinic

Advocacy & networking

A key important aspect of the OPEN MINDS project is the reinforcement of the national mental healthcare system through capacity building and raising awareness activities. In this context two separate workshops have already been conducted in two major cities (Athens and Thessaloniki).

During those workshops, mental health professional coming from different backgrounds exchanged views on the current state of play, the different challenges and the need for comprehensive multi-layered MHPSS services, as to assess different levels of need and address them appropriately.



Key Recommendations

- Develop of new community based mental health services as well as to extend the ones already existing.
- Staff the community based mental health services with trained employees that can also work efficiently with migrants.
- Develop of new psychiatric beds for short-term hospitalization all around the country (being able to serve the patients in their own region).
- Easy access for all service users without prerequisites (Asylum seeking card, permission of residence, visa card, passport, Greek identification card etc.)
- Provide systematic mental health monitoring to service users with follow ups (e.g. projects within public mental health hospitals are only short term and they end abruptly without appropriate referrals).
- Develop community based children mental health units that will also aim to support teenagers.

References

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