

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

Child mental health crisis ‘magnified’ by COVID, warns UN chief

UN News (Jul. 8, 2021)

In a video address to an event organized within the on-going High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), on mental health and wellbeing, he said that mental health services have long suffered from neglect and underinvestment, with “too few children” accessing the services they need.

Services cut

“The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the problem. Millions of children are out of school, increasing their vulnerability to violence and mental stress, while services have been cut or moved online.

“As we consider investing in a strong recovery, support for children’s mental wellbeing must be a priority”, said Secretary-General António Guterres.

“I also urge governments to take a preventive approach by addressing the determinants of mental well-being through robust social protection for children and families”, he added, saying that mental health and psychosocial support, together with community-based approaches to care, are “integral to universal health coverage. They cannot be its forgotten part.”

Child’s view paramount

He also urged authorities everywhere to take the views and lived-experiences of children themselves, exposed to increasing on and offline threats, into account when formulating policies and protection strategies.

“Children play an important role in supporting each other’s mental wellbeing. They must be empowered as part of the solution. Let’s work together for sustainable, people-centered, resilient societies, where all children live free from violence and with the highest standards of mental health”, he concluded.

Children contribute

The meeting co-organized with the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations, and the Group of Friends on mental health and wellbeing, featured a video with contributions from children from 19 countries who took action to support one another.

UN Special Representative on Violence Against Children, Maalla M’jid, highlighted the devastating impact of violence on the mental health of children: “Exposure to violence and other adverse childhood experiences can evoke toxic responses to stress that cause both immediate and long-term physiological and psychological damage.

“In addition to the human cost, the economic cost of mental illness is significant”, she added.

Opportunity for change

The recovery phase of the pandemic, provides an opportunity for countries to invest in this field, she said, emphasizing that “we cannot go back to normal. Because what was ‘normal’ before the pandemic was not good enough, with countries spending on average only 2% of their health budgets on mental health.

“In addition to more investment, we need to change our approach to mental health. Building on the lessons of the pandemic, mental health and child protection services must be recognized as life-saving and essential.

"They must be incorporated into both emergency preparedness and longer-term planning and children must also shape the design, delivery and evaluation of responses”, she added.

The meeting contributed to raising awareness of the impact of violence on the mental health of children, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples were shared of effective approaches to supporting children's mental health from different regions and in different settings; to identify what steps are needed to embed mental health best practices; put child protection and social protection services into action to build back better after the pandemic, while also supporting the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs by 2030.

Video: Children taking action around mental health during Covid19 pandemic -High level event United Nations (United Nations Violence against Children) - [hyperlink](#)

UN News, 2021. “Child mental health crisis ‘magnified’ by COVID, warns UN chief.”
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1095492> (accessed on November 10, 2021).