

Global Societies of Inclusion or Exclusion?

SOCIAL WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH IN CYPRUS; INCLUDED OR EXCLUDED

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SOCIAL WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH; A LONG LASTING RELATIONSHIP

- Social Work profession has been active in many areas of health and social welfare ,family, aged care, migrants and ethnic communities.
- Purpose of mental health social work is to promote recovery, restore individual, family and community well being.
- Two domains of social work in mental health are indicated: social context and social consequences of mental disorders
 - Social Context: social work is concerned with the way each individual's social environment shapes their experience of mental illness and the problems caused.



SOCIAL WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH ; A LONG LASTING RELATIONSHIP

- Social consequences: social work is concerned with the impact of mental illness and mental health problems on the individual, the family, personal relationships and the broader community.(AASW,2008)



MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL WORK

○ USA.

- Mental health social workers are the profession with the largest representation amongst mental health professionals.

○ UK

- *Good social workers can and do make a huge difference in these difficult situations. They are needed now as much, if not more, than ever. Their professional skills and knowledge can help people to take back control of their lives, through a genuine partnership between the social worker and the service user. (Social Work Task Force Final Report 2009 p7)*



MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL WORK

- “the focus of public services will be on mental well-being rather than on mental ill-health. The balance of power will no longer be so much with the system, but instead there will be more of an equal partnership between services and the individual who uses, or even chooses, them” (the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health , 2007)
- **The Department of Health’s new strategy for the next decade of mental health service development,**
 - *“reduce the burden and long-term consequences of mental health problems by setting out a framework for early intervention and promoting well-being across society”*



MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL WORK

- Mental health influences:
 - The individual's physical, psychological and social aspects of his/her life
 - His/her family
 - His/her working environment, the economy
 - The broader community,
 - stigma, exclusion, inclusion



IT IS NEEDED!

- Social work has particular expertise in relation to the social and environmental factors that contribute to mental distress through the life course. This includes the impact of abuse and stigma on personal development and social opportunity.
- Social work has long provided a key and integral contribution to Mental Health services.



CYPRUS AND MENTAL HEALTH: FACTS AND FIGURES

- Cyprus does not have a National Health System neither an advanced Mental Health System. Psychiatric reform has officially begun since 1990's without a legislative framework.
- Mental health services are provided through insitutional and community settings:
 - Athalassa Psychiatric Hospital
 - 3 psychiatric units in the three major cities of Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca
 - Community settings
 - Day centres, counselling centres and vocational rehabilitation units (2)



Disciplines amongst mental health professionals	Total Personnel of Mental Health Services
Nurses	325
Occupational Therapists	29
Psychologists	40
Psychiatrists	23
Total	417



CYPRUS AND MENTAL HEALTH: FACTS AND FIGURES

- The majority of mental health professionals in public mental health services are nurses who have been trained under traditional psychiatric methods (the medical model) and up until very recently graduated with a university degree.
- During their training they did not get in depth training in mental health settings It is suggested then that further education and training on mental illness and therapeutic strategies could result in the development of more positive attitudes for these mental health workers.
 - **IS IT ENOUGH THOUGH TO TRAIN NURSES?**



MEASUREMENT OF ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS (N=311) AND THE GENERAL POPULATION (N=933) IN CYPRUS (PANAYIOTOPOULOS, ET AL.,2011)

○ **Results**

- The general population **holds less negative stereotypes** ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .61$) than mental health professionals ($M = 1.93$, $SD = .59$) [$t(734) = 13.34$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$].
- Mental health professionals **are less optimistic** about the competences of a patient with a mental illness ($M = 1.92$, $SD = .61$) than the general population ($M = 2.2$, $SD = .37$) [$t(854) = 8.1$, $p < .001$, $d = .56$].
- Mental health professionals **are more likely to encourage openness** ($M = 2.26$, $SD = .3$) than the general population ($M = 2.19$, $SD = .28$) [$t(927) = -3.67$, $p < .001$, $d = .24$].



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- It was also found that professionals such as social workers, who are responsible for community liaison of the mental health system with the general society and could have leading role in raising awareness campaigns either in local (local authorities) and national (governmental policies) level are absent for community mental health network.
- It is important to report that mental health services are not available in primary care services.



ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN PRIMARY CARE LEVEL AND THE GENERAL POPULATION TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS (POLINIKI,2011)

- This particular study compared general health professionals in primary care level and the general population:
 - Only 5% of health professionals (n=255) were negative towards mental illness whereas the general population had more negative attitude 23,7% (n=701)
 - Both groups believe (45% & 55%) that mental health patients feel guilty for their illness.



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION OF MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS

- Panayiotopoulos et al (2009), in Cyprus indicated that mental health patients have a lack of information as far as their rights related to welfare benefits, and social inclusion.
- This particular study indicated low rates of integration of mental ill people into the labor market. Numbers demonstrated a major gap in the provision of preparatory programmes (1 for at least >500) provided by mental health services in comparison with other groups of vulnerable people who are more geared towards vocational rehabilitation.
- There was an also inadequacy in the welfare system to provide alternatives as far as vocational rehabilitation is concerned.



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- Vocational rehabilitation in Cyprus is focusing solely on the integration of mental health patients into the labour market.
 - This particular study indicated no work at family level, lack of community work and lack of case management. Families were not involved into any action plan
 - Social worker was employed as a job coacher and not as a mental health social worker.
 - Poor relations with Social Welfare Services amongst the two services.



DOES SOCIAL WORK HAVE A FUTURE UNDER THE CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES?

- The Cypriot chair of the parliamentary committee for health issues claimed:
 - “ that the complexity of problems individuals or groups with mental illness encounter are due to social stigmatization and prejudices towards those people. They are also due to the lack of informative programmes and raising awareness campaigns aim to the social integration of those people.
- The above claim is leading all the involved parties (mental health professionals, academics, policy makers, professional bodies) to reconsider the way they work (bio-medical vs bio-psychosocial), the fact that no social workers are employed in mental health services and the reason behind this situation.



CONCLUSIONS, THOUGHTS

- Social workers with mental health literacy are needed in a system that overemphasize the need for medical treatment and forgets the psychosocial element of mental disorder.
- The social component is imperative in any kind of psychiatric assessment especially nowadays where community mental health is increasing.
- Studies in Cyprus have indicated:
 - the absence of social workers from multi-disciplinary teams
 - The need for support of families and relative of mentally ill.
 - The need for professionals who know how to network, link and involve the community.



○ Thank You for your Attention

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