



UNHRC

Human Rights Council

Topic: Protecting the human rights of those facing mental health challenges by addressing abuses and enhancing access to quality care



Committee: United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

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I. Committee Background

The Human Rights Council is the main intergovernmental body within the United Nations responsible for human rights. Established in 2006 by the General Assembly, it is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The Committee's work promotes the enjoyment of civil and political rights, resulting in numerous changes of law, policy and practice.

The committee is responsible for encouraging each state to improve and practice laws, in order to enjoy rights. One of the great strengths of the Committee is its status which derives from the fact that its members represent all parts of the world rather than representing a single geographic or national perspective. The Committee speaks with a global voice, but one of the current issues is the violations and crimes committed by the Venezuelan government.

II. Topic Information

Mental health is crucial for overall well-being, enabling individuals to effectively use their skills and engage in daily activities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 970 million people worldwide lived with mental disorders in 2019, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent. However, people with mental health issues often face significant challenges, including marginalization and vulnerability. They experience a



range of human rights violations, such as lack of access to food and housing, as well as restrictions on voting and marriage. Stigma and discrimination further limit their participation in society, impacting their access to education and employment.

To address this topic we need to know and understand how social attitudes affect access to resources and support, understand the laws and policies protecting the rights of individuals with mental health issues, evaluate the availability and quality of mental health services across regions.

a. History of the Topic

The history of protecting the human rights of individuals with mental health challenges has evolved from the abusive institutionalization era to the deinstitutionalization movement of the 1960s–1980s, which aimed to provide community care but often fell short in support systems. Key legal advancements, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, prohibited discrimination against those with mental health conditions. Today, organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) advocate for enhanced access to quality care, combat stigma, and promote the integration of mental health services, while ongoing challenges such as disparities in care highlight the need for continued advocacy to ensure dignity and respect for all individuals.

b. Current Issues

The protection of human rights for individuals facing mental health challenges is a global issue with significant variations in how it is addressed across countries and regions. While international human rights frameworks provide guidelines for the protection of people with mental health conditions, many challenges persist, including abuse in care facilities, limited access to quality mental health services, and widespread stigma and discrimination.



- **Abuses in mental health institutions:** Mental health institutions have long been associated with abuses such as over-medication, physical restraints, and involuntary confinement. These issues are exacerbated by a lack of oversight, poor funding, and outdated treatment models that prioritize containment over care. Many institutions force individuals to undergo treatments without their consent, which violates their human rights.
- **Poor living conditions:** Mental health facilities are underfunded and staffed. Patients often live in overcrowded conditions with limited access to fresh air, exercise, or adequate nutrition. These conditions can deteriorate their mental and physical health.

c. Bloc Positions

- **United Kingdom:** The UK recognizes mental health as a fundamental human rights issue. The country aims to improve mental health care by ensuring it aligns with international human rights standards and emphasizing patient autonomy. The UK is reforming its Mental Health Act, aiming to reduce involuntary treatments and ensure patients have more say in their care. The proposed reforms focus on patient rights, making sure that involuntary treatments are only used as a last resort.
- **Italy:** Italy has been a global leader in community-based care, advocating for a mental health system that prioritizes human rights, dignity, and patient autonomy. The healthcare system runs on public and private services, including psychiatrists and psychologists. While Italy's public system provides many services, only around 3% of healthcare funds contribute to mental health facilities and care.
- **Argentina:** Argentina is known for its progressive stance on mental health care, treating it as a key human rights issue. The country advocates for voluntary treatment and the elimination of institutionalization as a standard practice. One of the most remarkable achievements in Argentina



was the approval of the National Mental Health Law No. 26657 in 2010, this legislation established the foundation for mental health care in the country.

- Canada: Mental health care access and the reliance on institutional care have been historical issues in Canada, but the country is now addressing these through systemic reforms. Indigenous communities, in particular, face mental health disparities due to historical trauma and neglect recognizing that mental health services must be equitable and accessible to all.

III. Conclusion

Protecting the human rights of people facing mental health problems is crucial to fostering an inclusive and equitable society. Addressing abuses (such as discrimination, coercion, and inadequate care) requires a commitment to ensuring legal protections. Improving access to quality mental health care is equally vital, requiring investment in resources, training for health care providers, and integration of mental health services into primary care settings. Promoting patient-centered approaches that prioritize informed consent and respect for autonomy can empower people in their treatment process. By prioritizing these areas, we can create a world that not only respects the rights of those suffering from mental health issues, but also provides them with the support they need to live their lives fully. Finally, this approach benefits society as a whole by promoting well-being and reducing the burden of untreated mental health problems.

IV. Essential Questions

1. What are the common forms of abuse experienced by individuals with mental health conditions?



2. How can we ensure accessible and affordable care for individuals with mental health conditions?
3. What existing policies protect the rights of individuals with mental health conditions?
4. How can we effectively combat stigma surrounding mental health?
5. What role do healthcare providers play in safeguarding the rights of individuals with mental health conditions?
6. How can community-based services be improved to better serve individuals with mental health conditions?
7. How can individuals with lived experience be involved in policy making?
8. How can we ensure that mental health services are culturally competent?
9. What best practices exist for monitoring abuses in mental health care?
10. How can collaboration among government, non-profits, and communities be strengthened to address mental health rights?

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