



ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHIATRISTS IN NIGERIA

SECRETARIAT: Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, P.M.B. 2008, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria
www.apn.org.ng; e-mail: president@apn.org.ng; secretary@apn.org.ng;
latshe1@gmail.com; jomoaregba@yahoo.com Call: 08023345948; 08037004611

PRESS RELEASE BY THE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHIATRISTS IN NIGERIA ON THE HUMAN RIGHT ABUSES OF PERSONSWITH MENTAL ILLNESS

PREAMBLE

Attention of the Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria (APN) has been drawn to recent events regarding the cruelty to and human rights abuses of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria as published by the Human Rights Watch. The Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria categorically rejects these acts of human rights abuses in all its ramifications in this modern era and totally condemns it. It is also worthy to note the spiraling increase in suicides (especially among youths) and substance abuse disorders in Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

Mental well-being is a state of good health in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. This positive dimension of mental health is stressed in the World Health Organization's definition of health that; "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This fact file highlights the important aspects of mental health and disorders; *mental well-being is not a mere absence of mental illness.*

It has been estimated that 25-40% of the world population have one form of mental illness or the other at some point in their lifetime. The situation is appalling especially in low-income countries like Nigeria. Nigeria with an estimated population of about 200 Million is not immune to these challenges. With the current adversities of poverty level, violence and social difficulties, the prevalence of mental disorders in Nigeria is likely to be higher than the already stated statistics.

The health care delivery in Nigeria is still in precarious state without of pocket spending among over 80% of citizens, with the inherent difficulties accessing qualitative and efficient health care services in our communities (especially, rural communities), as such many citizens are struggling with challenges of communicable and non-communicable diseases. The current situation regarding health care workers portend great dangers as the already inadequate healthcare workers are leaving in droves in search of greener pastures and better working conditions in developed countries.

The state of mental health and psychosocial services in Nigeria is appalling, considering the lack of structured service provision, poor mental health and psychosocial facilities and very importantly the numbers of trained mental health care professionals vis-a-vis the population of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities. There are fewer than 300 psychiatrists in the country! Thus we have one (1) psychiatrist to about one (1) million Nigerians. Nigeria is yet to liberalize mental health services due to lack of proper legislation, non-implementation of the National Mental Health Service Delivery Policy, refusal to shift from the legacy of colonial mental health systems, with heavy reliance on stand alone Federal Psychiatric and lack of adequate mental health professionals.

Dr. Taiwo Lateef Sheikh
(President)
Dr. Ladipo A. Adepoju
(Vice President)

Dr. Joyce Ohiolo Omoaregba
(Secretary General)
Dr. Appolos Chidi Ndububa
(Assistant Secretary General)

Dr. Hannah Iyabo Okunriboye
(Treasurer)
Dr. Kingsley Mayowa Okonoda
(Auditor)

Prof. Olatunji Aina
(Journal Editor)
Dr. Bassey Edet
(Ex-Officio)

Human Right abuses abound in our society, but of particular interest to Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria are the ones directed towards people living with mental health and psychosocial disabilities. The Association of Psychiatrist in Nigeria appreciate the efforts of Human Right Watch (HRW) towards bringing to the public attention the human rights abuses of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria and specifically their concern and interest in ensuring qualitative mental health care and respect for human dignity for people living with mental health and psychosocial disabilities. The recent report (by HRW), vivid photos and videos have lend credence to the previously circulated media briefs and press releases of the Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria on issues that bothers on the cruel nature of care for persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria.

CHALLENGES

1. There is no Mental Health Law in place in Nigeria other than the Regional Lunacy Law of 1958, which in content and context violates fundamental human rights of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities. It is a law, which lacks a focus on human rights and non-discrimination, access to services and least restrictive treatment alternatives. It's definitions are largely inadequate in terms of humaneness and scope as it continues to employ denigrating terms such as 'lunatic', 'idiot' and 'unsound' mind while focusing almost entirely on custodial care, and the wordings are derogatory and highly stigmatizing. Despite all efforts at getting new mental health legislation, it is quite disheartening that for over two decades of struggles, we are yet to have a humane and compassionate National Mental Health Law enacted.
2. There is evidently lack of public mental health promotion and mental illness prevention programs in Nigeria due to non-implementation of the National Mental Health Service delivery Policy (2013), the current approach is only treatment directed. In addition to this is the failure of Government in regulation of treatment practices, there by giving room to many quacks exploiting the populace through the myths of cultural practices and religious belief and misconceptions about mental health and psychosocial disabilities. This has lead to increase in proliferation of unorthodox treatment and detention centers such as traditional healing homes and religious/spiritual centers that takes advantage of the vulnerable in our society. There have been reported cases of deprivation (food and water) physical, sexual and emotional assaults on persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities.
3. There is unprecedented level of myths and misconceptions, which are further entrenched by ignorance, poverty and wrong beliefs system about mental health and psychosocial disability. These beliefs, myths and cultural practices contribute to human rights violations of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities. Parents and relatives give away their wards easily to some of these detention centers with the hope of getting help, succor and solutions to mental health issues.
4. The lack of strategies for mental well-being promotion and mental health and psychosocial disability prevention activities has lead to overarching increase in the prevalence of mental health and psychosocial disabilities, increase in suicides (especially among the youths) and substance abuse disorders in Nigeria.
5. There is lack of equitable distribution of the few modern structures of service delivery for persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria, it is non-existent in the rural areas where vast majority of Nigerians who need it reside.

WAY FORWARD

The Association of Psychiatrist in Nigeria condemns in its entirety all forms of abuses to persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities in all its ramifications and therefore proposes the followings.

1. That the government at all levels should implement integration of Mental Health into all levels of health care delivery system in Nigeria as contained in the National Mental Health Service Delivery Policy of 2013, and the policy should be revised.
2. The National Assembly should expedite action on the 2019 Mental Health Bill before it and pass it into Law with input from relevant stakeholders. The present bill aims provide enhancement of mental well being of the citizens through programs that promotes mental well-being, prevent mental health and psychosocial disabilities and provide effective, compassionate, humane and universally accessible treatments for mental health and psychosocial disabilities, and regulation of mental health and substance abuse services, protect persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities needs (from human rights abuse, stigmatization, discrimination, protect their properties and support their families) and establishment of National Commission for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (for effective management of mental health and psychosocial disabilities and other related matters in Nigeria). Association of Psychiatrist in Nigeria believe that the passage of the bill into law will ensure that the Government and all stakeholders implement the content of the National Policy for Mental Health Care Delivery Services (including integration of mental health and psychosocial services at all levels of health care delivery services). It will criminalize abuse of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria, decriminalize substance abuse disorder and increase funding for mental health and psychosocial programs. The rights of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities will be protected. ***Nigeria is long overdue for a humane and compassionate Mental Health Law.***
3. Persons living with mental health and psychosocial disabilities should be considered as disadvantaged and vulnerable, Government should make special provisions for them in all spheres of their lives, specifically mental health and psychosocial services should be accessible and declared free for them.
4. There should be adequate funding of Mental Health Services and provision of psychosocial support services to persons living with mental and psychosocial disabilities with a view to guaranteeing their mental well being, protecting their fundamental human rights and ensuring social inclusion.
5. Recruitment of mental health professionals into the health care structure at all levels of health care delivery service. Mental health care service should be incorporated into primary health care service to enhance effective and qualitative community mental health and psychosocial services and encourage community participation.
6. Funding for mental health and psychosocial services should be implemented as specified in the mental bill that is being processed by the National Assembly.
7. As mental health is inseparable from physical health, adequate provision should be made for the training of all health care personnel on basic mental health and psychosocial skills for effective task sharing and task shifting generally and specifically, mental health professionals should be routinely trained and retrained on strategies for effective mental health promotion, mental illness prevention activities and early recognition of mental health and psychosocial problems for comprehensive care and mitigation of disabilities.
8. There is need for general public awareness campaign on mental health promotion and mental illness prevention strategies, health education activities to eliminate stigma towards persons

with mental health and psychosocial disabilities, prevent human rights abuses and enhance uptake of mental health and psychosocial services. This will also stem the rates of suicides and substance use disorders in Nigeria.

9. Government as a matter of urgency should establish a National Agency for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for effective management of mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria and other related matters. The Agency will engage in multi-sectorial and multi-disciplinary collaboration that will enhance mental well-being of our citizens.
10. Government should urgently set up a task force that will identify illegal treatment centers and disband all unapproved treatment and detention centers where all forms of unorthodox mental health care and psychosocial services are being rendered particularly those that violate the rights of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities.

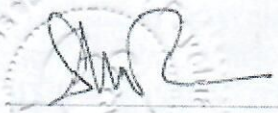
Conclusion

The Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria once again reject these acts of human rights abuses in all its ramifications in this modern era and totally condemns it. Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria has been pursuing legislation of effective and humane mental health law for Nigeria for over twenty years, the most recent is the 2019 Mental Health Bill which is being processed by the National Assembly. The present bill aims to provide enhancement of mental well being of our citizens through programs that promotes mental well being, prevent mental disorders and provide effective, compassionate, humane and universally accessible treatments for mental disorders, and regulation of mental health and substance abuse services, protect persons with mental health/psychosocial needs (from human rights abuse, stigmatization, discrimination, protection of their properties and provision of support for their families) and establishment of National Commission for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (for effective management of Mental Health/Psychosocial Disabilities and other related matters in Nigeria).


Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria believe that the passage of the bill into law will ensure that the Government and all stakeholders implement the content of the National Policy for Mental Health Care Delivery Services (especially integration of mental health/psychosocial services at all levels of health care delivery services). This will criminalize abuse of persons with mental health and psychosocial disabilities, decriminalize substance abuse and increase funding for mental health and psychosocial programs. In this regard, Government should be declare of state of emergency on the mental health and psychosocial services in the country and the National Assembly should make the Passage of Mental Health Bill a priority in order to ameliorate the sufferings of families and people living with mental health and psychosocial disabilities in Nigeria.

Long live Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria!

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!!



Taiwo Lateef Sheikh
President,
Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria



Joyce Omoaregba
Secretary General,
Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria