

BRIEFING PAPER

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SUMMARY

The research's overarching objective is to explore the level of mental health issues and the situation surrounding the provision of mental health care utilization as a result of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. This includes both Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Ukraine and people who were not affected by war (the general population) in government controlled areas. A mixed methodology was used, consisting of national surveys with IDPs (n=1000) and the general population the (n=1000) with a representative sample reflecting age, gender, and a territory. Also, interviews with professionals in mental health support and representatives of charities and international organisations were conducted (n=21).

A key finding from the survey is that 20% of IDPs and 12% of the general population have moderately severe or severe anxiety. The prevalence of moderately severe or severe depression was 25% of IDPs and 15% of the general population. Within this 16% of IDPs and 8% of the general population are either moderately severely, or severely, anxious and depressed. The mental health of women is more affected by displacement in respect to anxiety than men. Despite these very high figures only 1.2% of IDPs and 0.3% of the general population self-reported mental health issues when answering a survey question if their day-to-day activities are limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. In terms of general health problems 18.5% of IDPs have issues in mobility, 7.4% significant problems with vision, 6.1% with hearing and 15% have other impairments which limits their day-today activities.

Only 21.7% of IDPs and 9.5% of the general population who have clinically significant anxiety and depression have tried to obtain mental health support. Most of those who receive professional psychological help, did so only once. Women sought psychological help slightly more often than man and most of IDPs and the general population were satisfied with the help they received. The most significant ways to improve the situation in relation to mental health support are not only in establishing free psychological services but also in providing accommodation and access to pensions.

The most common tactics amongst IDPs and the general population in dealing with long-term anxiety and stress are talking with friends (63.7%), music/films (45%), walking/hiking (35.3%). Alcohol and smoking are popular ways to deal with stress for only 16.7% of informants, while addressing psychologists among the least used practices with only 2.8% of informants approaching them. The professionals who were interviewed noted numerous barriers stopping more people from seeking help. These include, the prevalence of 'old' structures such as the Soviet legacy of treating mental health issues with inpatient care, the lack of measures to prevent mental health issues, the poor organisation of patients' support system, a lack of specialists and affordable and qualitative programs for professional training and obsolete or inaccurate protocols. Experts stressed that among the population there is little recognition of the importance of mental health, and coping tactics in most cases do not include addressing to health care professionals due to the prejudice and stigma that surrounds seeking such help.

THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Create stronger links between institutional support and that of the Non-governmental sector – with the inclusion of family doctors into the mental health provision sphere
- 2) Introduce a licencing system for those undertaking psychological provision and bring together professionals and communities to develop innovative approaches in mental health care
- 3) Improve the accessibility of services – especially for IDPs
- 4) Ensure that gender and age specific approaches to supporting mental health are developed and well publicised – the State to lead a cultural shift on reducing stigma around mental health issues

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