



Social Justice
for People with
Mental Illness



World Mind Matters Day
5th September 2016

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MEDIA RELEASE

A third of UN member states don't permit people with mental illness the right to vote or marry

WPA reveals global extent of social discrimination against people with mental health problems and urges urgent action in 'Bill of Rights for Individuals with Mental Illness'

GENEVA, 5th September 2016: On World Mind Matters Day 2016, a global survey funded by the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), of laws and policies in 193 United Nations (UN) member states reveals the level of discrimination faced by people with mental illness in the areas of marriage, voting rights employment and right to contract.

The survey results were included in the 'Social Justice for People with Mental Illness' report published in the *International Review of Psychiatry*¹ and conclude that:

- **37 per cent of countries** prohibit marriage by people with mental health problems
 - **In 11 per cent of countries**, mental problems can render a marriage void or can be considered grounds for annulling a marriage
- In **36 per cent of countries**, people with mental health problems are not allowed to vote
- In nearly a **quarter of countries**, there are no laws preventing discrimination in the recruitment of people with mental health problems.
- In **over half** of countries, there is no explicit protection in laws against dismissal/termination/suspension of employment on grounds of health reasons including mental health problems
- **38 per cent of countries** deny right to contract to persons with mental health problems
 - **42 per cent** do not recognize the right of people with mental health problems to write their own will and testament

The findings have led the WPA to create a **Bill of Rights for Individuals with Mental Illness** which urges ALL governments to ensure that persons with mental illness/mental disability/mental health problems are not discriminated against based on their mental health status, and are treated as full citizens enjoying all rights on an equal basis with others. The Bill of Rights has been supported by **18** organisations.

Dinesh Bhugra, President of the World Psychiatric Association said: "Those with mental illness/mental disability/mental health problems have the capacity to hold rights and exercise their rights and should, be treated on an equal basis with other citizens. The challenge for policy-makers, clinicians, and individuals with mental illness is to fight discrimination using strategies similar to civil liberties, gender equality, sexual minority (LGBT) communities, which in many parts of the world have proven to be useful."

He continued, “It is important, that clinicians around the globe work with patients, their carers, and their families, as well as with relevant organizations representing these groups, to challenge discrimination, change laws, and ensure that these are applied equally. There is simply no explanation for continuing discrimination against individuals with mental illness, their families, and those who care for them, whether they are professional or lay carers.”

Mental health was set as a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, highlighting that world leaders recognize the promotion of mental health and well-being as a health priority within the global development agenda. UN state leaders therefore committed to the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, including behavioural, developmental and neurological disorders, which constitute a major challenge for sustainable development. One of the targets of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals is to reduce premature mortality from these diseases by one third by 2030 through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being².

The ‘Social Justice for People with Mental Illness’ report and ‘Bill of Rights for Individuals with Mental Illness’ can be viewed at <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/iirp20/current>.

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For further information or to arrange an interview with Dinesh Bhugra or another member of the WPA Executive Committee, please contact:

Email: wpamedia@munroforster.com

Direct: +44 20 7089 6104

Mobile: +44 7817 864 815

NOTES TO EDITORS:

About the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)

The WPA is the world’s leading psychiatry organization. It is an association of national psychiatric societies, which aims to enhance the knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively in the field of mental health and in the care of people with mental illness. It has 139 member societies from 117 countries representing over 225,000 psychiatrists.

The WPA has more than 72 individual scientific sections that cover almost every aspect of psychiatry. The purpose of the sections is to collect, analyse and disseminate information on research, training and services in the specific areas of psychiatry and mental health that they represent.

The WPA works to achieve the objectives through meetings, research, education, publications and collaboration with other health/ mental health and government organizations. Visit <http://www.wpanet.org/> for further information.

About the Social Justice for People with Mental Illness Global Survey

In its 2014– 2017 Action Plan, the WPA decided to look at the public mental health agenda along with discrimination against people with mental illness. WPA is committed to challenging discrimination against individuals with mental illness. It commissioned the Centre for Mental Health Law to conduct the global survey of 193 United Nation Member States, studying their laws for discrimination in areas of employment, voting rights, funding, and other potential aspects of individual functioning. A list of the UN member states can be found at <http://www.un.org/en/member-states/#gotoU>.

The results of the survey were published in the *International Review of Psychiatry* in August 2016 and can be viewed at <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/iirp20/28/4?nav=toCList>.

About World Mind Matters Day

The WPA launched the first ever 'World Mind Matters Day' in 2015, a global campaign with the main goal of achieving fairness in mental healthcare for all across the world. More information can be found at <http://wpanet.org/WMMD/>.

References

¹ Bhugra D et al. Social Justice for People with Mental Illness. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 2016 vol. 28, No. 4, 335-419. Available at www.tandfonline.com/toc/iirp20/28/4?nav=toCList. Last accessed August 2016

² World Health Organisation. Mental health included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Available at http://www.who.int/mental_health/SDGs/en/. Last accessed August 2016