Background: Mental Health during COVID-19

- 89% reported that MHPSS was part of their national COVID-19 response plans
- 93% of the countries reported disruption in their mental health services
- 25% increase in the prevalence of major depressive and anxiety disorders in 2020
- 17% ensured that full additional funding is available for MHPSS activities

Methods

A web-based survey was sent to Ministries of Health (MoH) and WHO Regional and Country Offices in the African Union member states (55 countries)

Results

- To what extent were MHPSS activities included in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic in African countries?
  - 68% of the countries implemented less than 50% of the recommended MHPSS activities
  - 57% Establishing MHPSS coordination group
  - 45% Developing an MHPSS strategy
  - 57% Implementing the developed MHPSS strategies
  - 28% Developing activities for children
  - 21% Establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Challenges

- The lack of political commitment and low prioritisation of mental health
- The lack of financial and human resources
- The lack of monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms
- Failure to apply lessons learned from previous emergencies
- Competing priorities in emergency situations

Opportunities

- Capitalising on the increased attention to mental health during COVID-19 to integrate it into emergency response plans and strengthen mental health systems in the longer term
- Sustaining multi-stakeholder coordination of MHPSS activities beyond emergencies
- Building regional networks to facilitate sharing experiences and learning between countries in the region
- Drawing from lessons learned in previous crises to inform the preparedness and response to future emergencies

Recommendations

- Establish an MHPSS pillar as part of future responses to emergencies
- Sensitize national leaders to the importance of MHPSS in emergency preparedness and response
- Undertake an in-depth review of MHPSS components of the national responses to COVID-19 and identify lessons learnt
- Improve data and information systems in routine national mental health systems to improve this function during emergencies

This infographic was prepared by Muhammad Alkasaby, UK Public Health Rapid Support Team. For more information: muhammad.alkasaby@lshtm.ac.uk