

Statement submitted by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues and co-sponsored by the International Association of Applied Psychology, the International Council of Psychologists, the World Council for Psychotherapy, the American Psychological Association and other accredited members of the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations

Statement in support of the Assessment of the Status of Implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development

7-11 April 2014, United Nations, New York

Although some progress has been achieved in the priority areas established at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPAD), many challenges remain, especially for persons and groups that are minorities, poor, female, and disabled. We, members of the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN), offer this statement advocating for (1) the importance of psychosocial factors to the implementation of the goals of the 1994 ICPAD; (2) fulfilment of the physical and mental health and psychosocial well-being of children; and (3) the human rights of international migrants.

I. Ensure that Psychosocial Well-being and Mental Health are Protected as Human Rights for All Population Groups

Human rights standards and UN documents increasingly recognize psychosocial well-being and mental health as basic human rights (5). The psychological literature confirms that maltreatment from childhood abuse and deprivation due to various conditions including poverty, inflict psychological and mental health wounds across the lifespan and generations. Research further affirms the World Health Organization's inclusion of mental health as a crucial factor in overall health (10). Poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, including conditions of isolation and inadequate access to education, economic resources and social services. Multiple stressors cause anxiety and depression, negatively impacting an individual's ability to cope, resulting in an intergenerational persistence of poverty.

Therefore, PCUN recommends that Governments and all stakeholders:

- Include psychosocial well-being as a contributor and an outcome of sustainable development.
- Make quality mental health care accessible to all sectors of society, as a requirement of human rights and social justice.

- Implement the Social Protection Floor Initiative, including access to mental health care within primary health care, taking care of basic human needs of all vulnerable groups.
- Provide mental health counsellors and social workers, trained in culturally-specific methodology and techniques, to train and work with local communities in recognizing mental health problems.
- Ensure that all services are implemented according to ethical principles that affirm the dignity of everyone.

II. Limit the Exposure of Children to Toxic Stress that can Affect their Health and Psychosocial Well-Being

In all world regions, children are being exposed to high levels of stress from various debilitating conditions including: poverty and preventable diseases; disparities in access to physical and mental health care; disparities in access to and outcomes of formal education; abuse and exploitation; violence against children in the family, the community, and in armed conflict; hazardous child labor; harmful traditional practices; and loss of family care due to death of parents and separation during migration.

When a child is threatened, the biochemical reactions in the child's body result in increased heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones. A supportive relationship with family or other adults lessens the child's stress responses to a tolerable level (3).

Scientific findings suggest that without adult support, consequences of exposure to toxic stress may have mental and physical health consequences lasting into adulthood (1, 2), including increased risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (6,12).

Use Best Practices to Fulfil Children's Rights to Health and Psychosocial Well-being

PCUN recommends that governments and the international community:

- Invest resources and front-load science-based investments to support infant and early childhood development (8).
- Integrate physical and mental health services supporting life-long holistic health.
- Provide parents and early childhood caregivers with expert assistance and education to help children exhibiting symptoms of abnormal stress responses before these produce pathology.
- Provide specialized interventions and services for children who have been trafficked, involved in armed conflict, hazardous labour, or sexual exploitation.
- Provide stress management training for children in formal education programs.
- Increase the availability of assessment and treatment for children with serious stress-induced physical and mental health problems (6).

III. Support the Human Rights of International Migrants

Ratify and Implement Human Rights Standards in Support of the Well-Being of International Migrants (4)

PCUN recommends that:

- Countries of Origin Practice Good Governance to fulfil the human rights of people within their borders, thereby reducing the pressures toward migration.
- Governments Ratify and Implement the Core HR Instruments, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their families and the ILO Conventions.

Governments, UN Agencies, Civil Society and Humanitarian Organizations protect the rights of international migrants to participation in decisions affecting their welfare.

Address Vulnerabilities Experienced by International Migrants

Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia. Although international migrants contribute to development in transit and host countries, many experience human rights violations stemming from racism and xenophobia which put their physical, psychological and social development at risk (11).

PCUN recommends that:

- Host Countries and Civil Society Organizations Launch Media and Education Campaigns to Discourage Xenophobia and communicate about the human rights and contributions of migrants.
- Governments Develop and Implement Laws, Policies and Practices to Protect International Migrants from Racial Profiling and Violence.
- Governments review and transform their laws, policies and practices on migration to comply with international human rights standards.
- Both countries of origin and host countries protect children of migrant mothers who were raped and children of mixed racial/ethnic parentage.

Gender Discrimination. Gender discrimination intersects with racial/ethnic discrimination and other risk factors resulting in gender-based violence including: trafficking, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, and exploitation in domestic and care-giving work (7,9).

PCUN urges Governments, UN Agencies and Civil Society Organizations to:

- Promote Gender Equality and Social Justice for migrants through gender equality legislation, human rights education and public awareness campaigns.

- Develop legislation that institutionalizes penalties for trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation and processes for apprehending violators of these laws.
- Provide human resources, facilities, and services to promote the mental health, psychosocial recovery, and well-being of women and girls who have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence.

Vulnerabilities to Children and Adolescents. Children who leave their countries of origin, are left behind, or are born to migrant parents in transit and destination countries experience special risks to their development (3). Many migrant children are victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation and labour exploitation. Unaccompanied child and adolescent migrants are exposed to dependency on adults who may abuse or exploit them.

PCUN recommends that Governments:

- Conduct birth registrations of migrant children and collect family data disaggregated by age, sex, race/ethnicity, disability status and national origin.
- Provide access to physical and mental health care for migrants.
- Ensure that young children and adolescents are not separated for long periods from attachment figures (parents, guardians, siblings) and that migrant children and adolescents are not isolated or ostracized in transitional educational environments or detention.
- Provide access to education for all migrant children as an effective tool to integrate migrant children into host societies and break intergenerational effects of poverty (UNICEF, 2012).
- Ratify and implement the ILO 2011 Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

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