

## "Mental Health in an Unequal World."

The International Federation of Social Workers is calling for greater equality.



World Mental Health Day is celebrated on October 10th. This year's theme is: "Mental Health in an Unequal World."

The world is becoming more polarized. Poverty levels are on the rise again. Inequalities based on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., are becoming increasingly more apparent. Experiencing these types of discrimination can often have a negative impact on a person's mental health, it can weaken social cohesion and excludes people.

According to Dr. Tedros, General Director of WHO, mental health is still considered being in second place in comparison to physical ailments. However, health as a public good cannot be won without an increased investment in mental health care, he said. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also emphasizes the importance of mental health for achieving Universal Health Coverage and for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. Access to mental health services is also unevenly distributed around the world, he said. For example, 75% of people suffering from mental health problems in low and middle-income countries have no access to mental health services at all. There isn't much better access in rich countries, he said, because not enough resources are being invested into this sector. Only 2% of all health care expenses worldwide goes toward the treatment or prevention of mental illness.

## **Social work and inequality**

Social workers are aware of these inequalities. They support efforts worldwide to ensure that the mentally ill can exercise equal political and social rights and participate in normal life as full citizens. Whenever possible, social workers want to enable people to live in their traditional environment, e.g. by expanding easily accessible community-based or home-based health services. Through community work, neighborhood work in cities, promotion of self-help groups or individual counseling, they help people with mental illnesses to organize their everyday lives in a self-determined way.

Social workers pay particular attention to social stressors and to the social determinants of health, such as educational opportunities, housing, job opportunities, financial resources, social contacts, and support services in the immediate environment. If we succeed in reducing the level of social stress or inequality in one or more areas of life, it has a relaxing effect, and promotes recovery processes, feelings of belonging, and togetherness. Often, social work interventions are cross-sectoral, as people with a mental health impairment face challenges in a variety of settings in their daily lives. Depending on the problem, social workers try to build bridges between the social, health, economic, judicial, and educational systems. Further, through political influence, they promote developments that create environments and communities in which people with mental illness can feel equal and regain control of their lives.

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