

Depression: Meeting the Future Global Health Challenge

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Commentary

Depression has affected human population from the beginning of the civilizations. The World Health Organization (2013) estimated 350 million people worldwide affected by depression. Depression is ranked as the third most significant cause of the global disease burden (4.3%) and the single leading cause of disability worldwide with estimate of 11% of all years lived with disability, particularly for women [1]. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide; Breitbart [2] reported a heightened risk (almost 25%) of suicide for those suffering from depression compared to the general population. Some studies also illustrated the negative prenatal effects of maternal depression resulting in poor growth and development in young children which also negatively influences the next generation [3].

Despite soaring disease burden, mental disorders have thus far not received appropriate visibility, policy attention, or funding. Moreover, for the low and middle-income countries, mental health promotion and public awareness is most often inadequate due to meager resources. At the same time evidence based literature is advancing and presenting the stark realities to the world. If untreated it debilitates an individual's capacities and causes irreversible social and psychological impairment. The economic consequences of depression pose a considerable burden nationally and globally to both high-income and low- and middle-income countries: a research estimated the cumulative global burden of mental illnesses in terms of economic output will amount to US\$ 16.3million between 2011 and 2030 [4]. Currently, there is a paradigm shift in global mental health policy and an increasing number of countries positioning depressive disorders at or near the top of public health challenges and priorities. With the passage of time there is growing realization and acceptance of mental health needs in the society that is reflected in the advancements such as service delivery, human rights of mentally ill, empowerment of service users and reduction in social stigma.

At any event, evidence shows that integrating the basic services like prescribing generic antidepressants and brief psychotherapy in the primary healthcare could undoubtedly help in curing and curbing the disorder [5,6]. The cost-effective analysis points toward successful treatment of depression at the lowest tier are feasible and affordable [7]. Furthermore, improved detection, prevention, treatment, and patient management are the main essence in reducing the burden of depression and its long-term costs [8]. Prevention programs for depression across the lifespan deserve concerted attention that may be provided through organizing effective psychosocial well-being and community engagement approaches. The focus being on strengthening of protective factors and the reduction of risk factors such as school based programs which may target cognitive, problem solving and social skills in children and include programs for affected parents. While preventive programs and interventions may be directed to the vulnerable populations such as elderly, migrants and marginalized population, synchronized work on community awareness is essential on the messages that mental illness is curable, treatable, and preventable should be carried out.

Further, at the macro level united and large initiatives of diverse group of extraordinary visionaries, thinkers, and doers in partnership

with the community may be initiated to take action on a grand scale for these million of affected people globally. The magnitude is alarming and the estimated figures are a wakeup call for addressing and combating this global non-communicable disease. Particularly the long-term goal may be established to bring parity in mental health with physical health at the national health priorities and services. Depression is a mental illness that is pervasive in the world and affects us all, but efficacious and cost-effective treatments are available to our disposal; therefore, it would be imperative to include depression in country's health agenda.

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Received November 27, 2016; Accepted December 07, 2016; Published December 09, 2016

Citation: Das S (2016) Depression: Meeting the Future Global Health Challenge. *J Depress Anxiety* S1: 023. doi:10.4172/2167-1044.S1-023

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