



EHMA 2024

Shaping and managing
innovative health ecosystems

A Case Study on the Mental Health of Children in the United Arab Emirates

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Background

- **17-22%** Estimated prevalence of mental disorders in the UAE younger population (YP)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder: **71%** in the total UAE population vs **59.8%** YP



- **75%** of people in the Middle East region who need help, do not usually seek it
- **1 in 4** Adults Worldwide experience mental health issues at some point in their lifetime

Research Agenda

Aims:

- This case study explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected mental health policy amongst children in the UAE.
- How knowledge translation products were created to help kids cope with the pandemic (during and post-era).

Funding

WHO Grant 2018-24

MBRSG Grant 2018-24



Research Agenda

● Approach/Methods:

1. Priority setting exercise
2. Two policy brief reports
3. A national policy dialogue
4. Evaluation: 2 policy brief and dialogue
5. A post-dialogue survey
6. These knowledge translation (KT) tools.

Mohammed Bin Rashid School Of Government
POLICY BRIEF
Policy Brief No. 54 April 2020

Summary

Children in the UAE are facing increasing mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their daily routines are interrupted and the world they know is changing, as they stay at home isolated from their peers and friends. This policy brief addresses children's mental health in the UAE amid the COVID-19 pandemic and analyzes the impact of the pandemic on mental health policy. Mental health in the UAE has witnessed gradual advancement in the past few years, however, there is still more to address, especially in relation to children's mental health and wellbeing. The local mental health scene is clouded by various challenges, including shortage in service providers, fragmentary regulations, and social stigma. The COVID-19 pandemic, as globally predicted, will lead to an exponential increase in mental health patients, and the UAE is not an exception. It is true that the pandemic presents unprecedented challenges to the mental health system, however, it also offers many opportunities to advance it.

Are the Children OK?

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on UAE Children's Mental Health - Policy Analysis and Recommendations

Lama Zakzak, Engy Shibi

Issue Overview

A significant proportion of the world's population has experienced mental and psychological disabilities. Recent global estimates show that almost 1 in every 20 people suffers from depression (WHO, 2017). These numbers are expected to grow exponentially. People around the world are facing increasing mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak has forced millions to stay physically isolated, while consuming extensive news coverage on the pandemic and an unknown future, and children are among those impacted.

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**PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH
AND WELLBEING FOR
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كلية محمد بن راشد
للإدارة الحكومية
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Policy Brief December 2021
MENTAL HEALTH POLICY SUPPORT, NEEDS & RESOURCES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
IMMANUEL AZAAD MOONESAR; REEM GAAFAR;
DUAA SULEIMAN; NANCY HEE CHUNG

**INTERNATIONAL
PUBLIC POLICY
INSIGHTS**

Even the best health systems are confronted by the significant human and financial consequences of child mental health concerns. Despite recent improvements, the health care system is still unprepared to tackle this issue. The study's purpose was to give policy recommendations for dealing with childhood mental disorder in the UAE. We conducted a desk review to uncover the root causes of the issue and offer appropriate policy solutions. To address governance, budgetary, and service delivery concerns, three policy options were recommended: ICT, integrated service systems with targeted capacity training, and school-based health clinics. Different barriers and solutions have been identified at various levels. Promoting children's mental health requires continuous progress review, identifying policy gaps, and implementing evidence-based therapies.

"The secondary association between mental problems and unhealthy behavior leading to communicable and non-communicable diseases, further adding to treatment expenses, is predicted to cost the world economy roughly US\$1 trillion each year."

Editors: Moonesar, I.A., Stephens, M. & Warner, R.

ABMENA International Public Policy Insights 2021 Volume 1 Issue 8

Findings

● Description of Stakeholders Participated in Litmus Test and Policy Dialogue

Stakeholder category	Number who were consulted in Litmus Testing	Number who attended Policy Dialogue
Policymakers or civil servants (Ministry of Health, DHA, DOH, CDA, Al Jalila Children's)	3	2
Civil society organizations and patient advocacy group	2	2
Primary healthcare representatives	1	3
Researchers in public health and mental health	4	3
Healthcare providers, including mental health specialists	2	5
Representatives of professional associations	1	2
School Counsellors/ Psychologists	4	3
International health organizations	1	1
Health system payers	1	1
Total	16	22

● A policy brief outlining components of a policy approach to address the issue was developed from **key stakeholder findings, knowledge translation products**, and a **thorough evidence synthesis**.

● Among the factors that the policy brief's evidence and participants favored, the most prominent one was the need to incorporate mental health into **primary health care (PHC)** services.

Findings

- **Stratified Outcomes and Impact in relation to Knowledge Translation Products (KTP)**

Recommendations adopted	Examples of change	KT product associated
Policy Option 1: Information and communication technology (ICT)	Applications, social media support guides, programs, and a 24/7 call center.	Policy brief [22, 32] Policy dialogue [14]
Policy Option 2: Targeted Capacity Building and Integrated Service Systems	Standards for telehealth services decree was revised for the inclusion of mental services for children.	Policy brief [22, 32] Policy dialogue [14]
Policy Option 3: Undergraduate and postgraduate education training	Government entities and Universities developed curricula and training.	Policy brief [22, 32] Policy dialogue [14]
Policy Option 4: School-based health centers	KHDA guides and programs for schools.	Policy brief [22, 32] Policy dialogue [14]

Policy brief (Zakzak et al. 2020 & Moonesar et al. 2021)

Policy dialogue (Zakzak et al. 2020 & Moonesar et al. 2021)

Findings

- UAE used knowledge translation for evidence-based mental health interventions.
- Multiple solutions offered a holistic, long-term approach to complex causes.
- Case study identified opportunities to influence government policies.
- MBRSG provided evidence for the National Mental Health Program.
- Policy briefs and dialogues informed policies and prompted actions.

Findings

- ICT apps like "Doctor for every citizen" and DOH RemoteCare offered anonymous, accessible care.
- National Mental Health Policy integrated services into primary and community healthcare.
- Focus on expanding child mental health training and literacy.
- School health centers provided comprehensive support, especially during COVID-19.

Policy Implications

Enablers and Barriers:

- Key enablers included appropriate stakeholders, skillsets, and MBRSG and K2P center support.
- COVID-19 posed barriers to face-to-face interactions, stakeholder engagements, and legislative changes.

Limitation of Case Study:

- Only 10 out of 22 participants completed the policy brief assessment.
- No causal association asserted between KTP process and outcomes.
- COVID-19 pandemic limited the timeframe for capturing long-term changes.
- Absence of service users/advocates from Litmus Test stakeholder groups.

Key Learning and Next Steps

- Knowledge translation was crucial in advancing children's mental health on the policy agenda.
- Access to mental health treatments in schools and primary healthcare remains insufficient and inequitable.
- Need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of evidence-informed policies.
- Future efforts should focus on assessing the impact of policy changes on health outcomes.
- Importance of stakeholder engagement and continuous evidence-informed policy development.



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Thank you / Shukran / Merci

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