

# MERCY GLOBAL ACTION NEWSLETTER

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE:  
ANGELA REED RSM, CECILIE  
KERN, SIOBHAN GOLDEN AND  
COLLEEN SWAIN

## GREETINGS FROM THE MERCY GLOBAL ACTION OFFICE!

### *Mercy Global Action Remembers Catherine -November 11th*

On her deathbed, Catherine McAuley said "Now fearing that I might forget it again, will you tell the sisters to get a good cup of tea – I think the community room would be a good place – when I am gone, to comfort one another. But God will comfort them."



This Remembrance Day is like no other; however, the COVID-19 Pandemic has reminded us that in our sorrows and challenges we come together as a Mercy World. In our unity, we find God, comfort and healing, and the encouragement to act in Mercy and Justice. We are called to celebrate the values of our intrinsic interdependence, compassion, kindness, justice and equity and use this time to focus on new creation and a new order.

### *Reflect:*

*Did it bring you comfort this china, the little cup worn at the rim and translucent as the shell of an egg, reminding you of Coolock days, the warm liquid soothing and refreshing? Did you read the leaves all those years ago and know your life would end here in quite another place? Of life filled life emptied. Of call given and fulfilled. Of encouragement and conviviality, bonds of kinship and gesture of gracious hospitality. Taking the cup of your life, the cup of your life. Drinking the sweet-bitter draught that was yours.*

*BAGGOT ST SUITE: CUP AND SAUCER -Mary Wickham rsm*



# THEMATIC AREAS

## DISPLACEMENT OF PERSONS

*'Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 Through a Mercy Lens' Issue Spotlight - Housing*

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally increased the urgency of issues of housing and homelessness and the critical need to put the dignity and well-being of those without a home at the centre of the pandemic response. Homelessness is a cross-cutting issue across the globe and is often attributed to the failure of multiple social, political and economic systems. Approximately, 1.8 billion people do not live in adequate housing. The pandemic is likely to see this number escalate due to the alarming levels of unemployment, loss of livelihoods, poverty, gender-based violence and the lack of social protection and labour rights in many countries. Those living without a home, rough sleeping and living in temporary accommodation are further compounded by other difficulties, including personal and structural drivers of homelessness, making it increasingly difficult for them to be protected from contracting COVID-19. To truly build back better, the issue of homelessness must be addressed with urgency to foster a more just, equitable and humane society.

### What has been revealed in terms of housing:

- **The interconnectedness of housing and health**

As the pandemic unfolded and 'stay at home' orders, physical distancing and lockdown measures became the 'new normal', the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, stated "housing has become the front-line of defence against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation". For those lacking adequate shelter and access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, following the protection measures enacted to safeguard public health has been much more difficult. The need for non-congregate, accessible and affordable housing is vital to protect the health of those experiencing homelessness. Those living in informal settlements, cramped conditions and experiencing poverty and violence, are the most vulnerable to the health and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Protection of their health and well-being is a concern across the Mercy World:

*"We Papua New Guineans are communitarian people; we live together in one house making social distancing an almost impossible challenge." (Mercy Sister, Papua New Guinea)*

*"Due to very high population density, it's not possible to observe social distancing in slums." (Mercy Sister, Kenya)*


The relationship between mental health and a lack of adequate housing has also been revealed. The uncertainty and continued changes of environment for people experiencing homelessness can be extremely traumatic and emotionally distressing. This distress has been further intensified by the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the threats it brings to the economy and public life. Research shows that severe mental health difficulties are more prevalent among people experiencing homelessness and that the longer a person lives on the street, the more likely they are to experience anxiety, depression, substance abuse and violence of some form. Hence, the provision of a place to call home is essential not only for sustaining physical health but mental health too.

- **COVID-19 has further further exacerbated the global housing crisis**

Even before the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the cost of housing was rapidly rising making long term affordability a huge challenge for many low income, disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and families. UN Human Rights experts have highlighted that the global housing crisis has resulted in mass human rights violations



and is due to the promotion of unsustainable economic growth and an exploitative economic model which centres profit over people. The rapid growth among the homeless population has resulted in the increased promotion of short-term interventions, an over reliance on the private sector to provide housing to low-income families, and a lack of outcome oriented systems by governments and local authorities. These short-term interventions often include homeless shelters that are overcrowded and reduce the freedoms, dignity and social equality of those staying there, as they do not offer the social and psychological supports which are often needed.




**HOPE IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC**  
RESPONDING TO COVID-19 THROUGH A MERCY LENS

## Issue Spotlight: Housing

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally increased the urgency to end homelessness and the critical need to put the dignity and well-being of those without a home at the centre of the pandemic response.

*Homelessness is often attributed to the failure of multiple social, economic & political systems.*

**THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF HOUSING & HEALTH**




- Adequate, secure, non-congregate housing, along with access to hygiene & sanitation facilities is essential to safeguard public health.
- Uncertainty and continued changes of environment for people experiencing homelessness is extremely traumatic and emotionally distressing.

- The Mercy World continues to be a leading ministry helping those vulnerable to or experiencing homelessness


Increasing vulnerabilities:

- Mass human rights violations.
- Over reliance on the private sector to provide housing.
- A lack of long term outcome oriented systems by governments and local authorities.
- Economic instability.
- Lack of Social Protection.

**COVID-19 HAS EXACERBATED THE GLOBAL HOUSING CRISIS**



**THE MERCY WORLD CONTINUES TO BE A LEADING MINISTRY HELPING THOSE AT RISK OF AND EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**



- Mercy communities have continued to provide essential services to those living on the streets and in temporary accommodation.
- The Mercy World continues to actively advocate at local and international level to end homelessness.

### Call to Action

- **Advocate for the Human Right to Adequate Housing** - Focus on inclusive, safe, supportive, affordable and accessible housing to enable individuals and families to live secure, dignified lives.
- **Promote a new opportunity to shape housing policy** - Enact policies that address the root causes of homelessness and protect the human right to housing. Include those with lived experience of homelessness in decision making and influencing policy.

As the global housing crisis meets the global health crisis, there is an increased risk of forced evictions with families and individuals struggling to pay their rent. Many rent freezes and eviction moratorium which were brought in under emergency legislation in some countries during lockdown are being lifted causing increased uncertainty. The lack of social protection floors to ensure access to shelter, income protection and universal healthcare, compounded with the current economic instability, increases the vulnerabilities of people at risk of homelessness. This is especially evident for migrant workers who have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19.

#### • The Mercy World continues to be a leading ministry helping those vulnerable to or experiencing homelessness

Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners in ministries around the world continue to actively advocate at local and international level for a people-centred and community-centred approach to tackle and address the root causes and drivers of homelessness. The Mercy World fosters the dignity and social and economic potentials of all people experiencing homelessness. Many Mercy communities working on the ground with women, girls and families address the personal and structural drivers of homelessness and provide shelter, support and resources to those in need. Throughout the COVID- 19 pandemic, Mercy communities have continued to provide essential services to those living on the streets and in temporary accommodation.

*“It is indeed a privilege to serve the poor... and to offer them in Mercy some of the necessities, comforts and supports which so many of us often take for granted.”*

*(Mercy Sister, Newfoundland)*

#### Call to Action -

- **Advocate for the Human Right to Adequate Housing**
- **Promote a new opportunity to reshape housing policy**
- **Show gratitude for essential workers**
- **Spread the word** across your own social media platforms by sharing ‘Hope in a Time of Pandemic’ and MIA Global Action’s infographics on COVID-19 and Housing.

The global pandemic has had huge implications for people all over the world. It is described as a global health crisis, but the pandemic has also had enormous socio-economic impacts. This report looks at what has been revealed in terms of the impact on peoples' livelihoods, and focuses particularly on the circumstances of women. Following a discussion on the various impacts on livelihoods, we provide suggestions for action and advocacy.

### What has been revealed in terms of livelihood?

The pandemic has meant that throughout the world, governments and their health teams have had to implement 'stay at home' orders and work lockdowns. For the most part, this has been a preventative measure to stop further spread of the virus and to contain infection. Whilst this has been a significant health and safety strategy, it has had a huge impact on the livelihood of many. In their report on [COVID and the world of work](#), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) states that working hour losses in the final quarter of 2020 are expected to amount to 8.6 per cent, or 245 million FTE jobs. It further states that 'the decline in employment numbers has generally been greater for women than men.'

Workplace closures have, for a significant proportion of workers, meant loss of work hours and hence loss of income. In both the formal and informal economy, livelihoods have been threatened. The risks to livelihood have had a disproportionate impact on women. UN Secretary General, Antonio Gutiérrez, stated in his policy brief on [COVID 19 and its impact on women](#) that 'nearly 60 percent of women around the world work in the informal economy, earning less, saving less, and at greater risk of falling into poverty.' The feminisation of poverty has long been a concern for women and girls throughout the world. However, this global pandemic has highlighted even further, already existing inequalities and marginalisation on account of gender.

In addition to the impact of workplace lockdown and 'stay at home' orders, absence from work due to contracting COVID 19 has meant that many have lost income due to sickness. This is especially evident in the healthcare sector, in which 'women make up 70 percent of the global health workforce, putting them at greater risk of infection. In some cases, the major breadwinner has been incapacitated due to the virus, and in the worst of cases, the sole income provider has died, leaving the family household with acute financial stress. In some cases, this has left families in or at risk of poverty. Globally, as of 21 October 2020, there have been 40,665,438 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 1,121,843 deaths, reported to the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#).



**HOPE IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC**  
RESPONDING TO COVID-19 THROUGH A MERCY LENS

## Issue Spotlight: Livelihoods

Lockdowns, "stay at home" orders, and sickness due to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in loss of livelihood and income for many individuals and families. Women, migrants and workers in the informal economy have experienced particular hardships due to the increased burden of unpaid care work, unregulated working conditions, low wages and a lack of social protections. Throughout the Mercy World, Sisters, Associates and Partners have been responding in a multitude of ways to those suffering from the impacts of COVID-19.

### UNPAID CARE & DOMESTIC WORK

Women spend

**3x**

as many hours as men in unpaid care and domestic work, limiting their access to decent work.

### GENDER PAY GAP

The global gender pay gap is stuck at

**16%**

with women paid up to 35% less than men in some countries

### ACCESS TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Globally,

**65%**

of women had an account at a financial institution in 2017, compared to 72% of men

### FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

Women aged 25-34 globally are

**25%**

more likely than men to live in extreme poverty

### Call to Action

Raise the plight of women and girls in all efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19

Advocate for supporting measures in response to COVID-19 that go beyond workers who hold formal sector jobs and include informal, part-time and seasonal workers, most of whom are women

Celebrate and acknowledge frontline workers, recognising that they are vital workers in our society who are valued and make a positive contribution





COVID-19 has also majorly affected the livelihoods of those working in industries ranging from the agriculture industry to the hospitality sector. Farmers have been faced with loss of livelihood due to varied supply and demand, and lack of workers. Transport both nationally and internationally has been drastically reduced, resulting in major breakdowns of supply chains and causing further job loss. The hospitality sector has also been hit hard, with most restaurants and cafes being closed whilst trying to contain the virus. This has resulted in loss of jobs and income, especially for casual and flexible workers who often do not receive any workplace benefits. This lack of workplace security has highlighted the fragile positions in which some workers find themselves. Some governments have provided employment packages for employees to continue to be employed and have an income during the crisis, in the hope that after the pandemic they will resume their positions and their businesses will survive. This, however, has not been the case for many, especially women, who have been noted as having less security in the workplace.

With the increase of children out of school due to the pandemic, extra pressures have been placed on women to undertake unpaid care work. As women take on greater care demands, they risk losing important gains made in the workforce. For women who head up their household this is a major risk factor. The UN Secretary-General discusses the risk to women's paid work in his policy brief on '[The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#)', where he states, 'From past experience and emerging data, it is possible to project that the impacts of the COVID-19 global recession will result in a prolonged dip in women's incomes and labour force participation, with compounded impacts for women already living in poverty'.

At a global level, 60 percent of women work in the informal economy where they generally experience unregulated working conditions, low wages and a lack of social protections (ie guaranteed vacation, social security, health insurance, maternity leave). Without these social protections women are more at risk of discrimination and marginalisation. Women migrant workers are even more vulnerable to these types of conditions. According to a report entitled, Addressing the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Migrant Workers, 'Women migrant workers already have to grapple with multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities, gender-specific restrictions in migration policies, insecure forms of labour, racism, and xenophobia. Women migrant workers face a higher risk of losing their livelihoods, having their labour and human rights violated and contracting coronavirus'.

There is a clear need to design and implement long term livelihood recovery plans with a gender lens. Social protections are necessary to prevent women from being left behind especially as governments work towards recovering from the coronavirus by stimulating their economies. A social protection floor will free women from dependency and increase economic opportunities.

### **The Mercy World continues to be of service to vulnerable populations, especially women who are experiencing risks to their livelihoods**

Throughout the Mercy World, Sisters, Associates and Partners have been responding in a multitude of ways to those suffering from the impacts of COVID-19. In many places throughout the world, Mercy is the point of reference for individuals and families. Numerous anecdotes shared from the Mercy World in 'Hope in a Time of Pandemic' attest to the fact that many vulnerable populations are being assisted in some way. This is evident through ministries that are, providing direct health care, comforting those experiencing grief, providing food and shelter to those in need, offering financial assistance through livelihood projects and praying for all those in need of care.



**Read the complete article [here](#) to learn more about our Call to Action**



# THEMATIC AREAS

## DEGRADATION OF EARTH



- *Mercy Global Action Attends Virtual Faith For Nature Conference*

The Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action Conference was convened 5-8 October 2020 at the historic Skálholt Cathedral in Iceland where high-level sessions were livestreamed. This global event was designed to lay the foundation for inter-faith collaboration for sustainable and regenerative development to achieve the SDGs. The concept of the Faith for Nature Conference aimed to increase ambition towards the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly which will be held in February 2021 in Nairobi with the overall theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”.

The conference focused on the role of values, ethics and moral responsibility towards nature based solutions when responding to issues of poverty, inequity, climate change and biodiversity loss. Throughout the week, participants were broken down into regional UN Environment hubs to discuss themes such as contribution of values, ethics, spirituality and faith based action as drivers of sustainable development, the challenges for faith-based organizations, and the way forward for action.

The conference successfully concluded with the adoption of a declaration “Our Sacred Commitment”. The declaration is a bold statement of commitment to action recognizing the key role of faith communities in working together for our common home and means in which to maintain prosperity, peace and partnership.

The conference was addressed by more than 30 high-level faith and thought leaders and attracted 450+ participants from 60 countries. Recorded sessions from the global event can be found at: <https://faithfornature.org>





- *Towards a Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights*

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased vulnerability and suffering of workers and affected people throughout the global supply chains. It has revealed the stark realities of why we cannot delay in addressing transnational corporate rights violations. The Open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights (OEIGWG) met for its 6th session from 26-30 October. Prior to this session, the OEIGWG released the 2nd draft of the legally binding instrument on business activities and human rights.

Mercy Global Action signed on to a joint oral statement which was pre-recorded ahead of the session. The joint oral statement addressed Articles 5-7 of the draft legally binding treaty focusing on protection of victims, prevention, and access to remedy, seeking to include specific references to the rights of children and girls. Sessions can be viewed [here](#).

Human rights abuses and violations particularly due to extractive industries go hand in hand with environmental degradation. A virtual side event entitled “Human rights abuses and environmental degradation – what the treaty can bring” examined two cases from Zambia and Chile involving pollution and waste from mining activities. These two cases exemplified the legal gaps that prevent communities to access and obtain justice. Panelists, including the Special Rapporteur on Toxic Waste analyzed the degree the current draft treaty covers, the gaps, and what needs to be done to have an effective international framework. Watch here!



Mercy Global Action continues to urge states to actively engage in this UN process towards a legally binding instrument and work to ensure the rights and dignity of people and the planet over private profits.

**For more information see:**

- <https://bindingtreaty.org/>
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/wgtranscorp/pages/igwgontnc.aspx#:~:text=At%20its%2026th%20session%2C%20on,to%20elaborate%20an%20international%20legally>
- <https://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/binding-treaty-un-process/>
- <https://www.cidse.org/areas-of-work/corporate-regulation/>
- [https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/binding-treaty/?utm\\_source=Business+%26+Human+Rights+Resource+Centre+Updates&utm\\_campaign=51850f61f3-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_10\\_26\\_10\\_44&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_c0049647eb-51850f61f3-182120705&mc\\_cid=51850f61f3&mc\\_eid=a9dafbf25a](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/binding-treaty/?utm_source=Business+%26+Human+Rights+Resource+Centre+Updates&utm_campaign=51850f61f3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_10_26_10_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c0049647eb-51850f61f3-182120705&mc_cid=51850f61f3&mc_eid=a9dafbf25a) <https://www.ncronline.org/earthbeat/past-events>

# AT THE UNITED NATIONS THROUGH OUR ECOSOC EYES...



## The International Day of the Girl

By Siobhan Golden (MELF 2019-2020)

On the 11th of October 2020, the United Nations invites us to celebrate the ninth annual International Day of the Girl (IDG) and to raise awareness of girls' situations, struggles and potentials all around the world. This year's theme centres on building equity for girls, recalling the oppression, challenges and discrimination faced by girls and the vital need for girls to get equal opportunities with their male counterparts. The Day of the Girl was officially declared by the UN General Assembly on the 19th of December 2011, with the adoption of [Resolution 66/170](#). Girls are powerful agents of change, especially when their voices are heard, they are involved in decision-making, they are given equal opportunities, and can demand transformative action. The celebrations of the International Day of the Girl encompass energy, enthusiasm, fearlessness, courage and hope, as girls and young women share their voices, talents, art and experiences of resilience, while advocating for the attainment of their basic human rights.

For me, the International Day of the Girl is one of the most important celebrations worldwide, as it demands that the challenges, stereotypes, violence and disempowerment of girls are addressed. As a child, I grew up with the privilege of not having my abilities, opportunities and behaviours limited due to gender norms, which limit some girls' lives from birth. Being from a small village in the west of Ireland, I spent six years as the only girl in a class with seven boys and not once did I feel inferior or discouraged to compete because of my gender. I can still remember the confusion, sadness and anger I felt, as a seven year old, trying to understand that not all girls were born with the freedom, opportunities and hope that I was.

Every Lent we were given a Trócaire donation box in school to bring home and collect donations to support the work of Trócaire in the global south. There was a photo of a seven year old girl on the outside of the donation box with the caption "give her an opportunity to be educated so she can know more than poverty". I was baffled. I couldn't understand how a girl, my age, needed to be given an opportunity to be able to go to school. I went to school everyday, it was never a question. Why was it not the same for her?

This was my first lesson on gender, discrimination, injustice and privilege. From that moment on, the true power of education, and the stereotypes, obstacles and oppression of girls became much clearer in my day to day life.

Traditionally, the International Day of the Girl celebrations have taken place at the United Nations Headquarters in NYC and compiled of a number of events organised by girls from around the world. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's celebrations look a little different. The events have been adapted and digitally transformed into an online global celebration, by sharing experiences, holding conversations and posting girls' submissions across popular social media platforms.





The Working Group on Girls has organised the main events which includes the Girls Speak Out, the Girls' Rights Townhall, and of course, the 11 Days of Action leading up to the International Day of the Girl. The 'Girls Speak Out' will be live streamed on Youtube and will premiere a video compiling submissions from girls all around the world. Girls will be speaking out about the gender imbalance, as they continue to be overlooked and disproportionately impacted by poverty, inequalities and crises.

The IDG submissions by girls from around the world have been informative, empowering and creative. Ufoma from Nigeria highlighted the importance of advocating for equal and quality education for girls. Education increases girls' levels of health and nourishment, and improves their chances of employment and better livelihoods. She wrote "the fight for girls' rights needs me because I believe that as a youth, I have what it takes to create social change with education, because education is power".

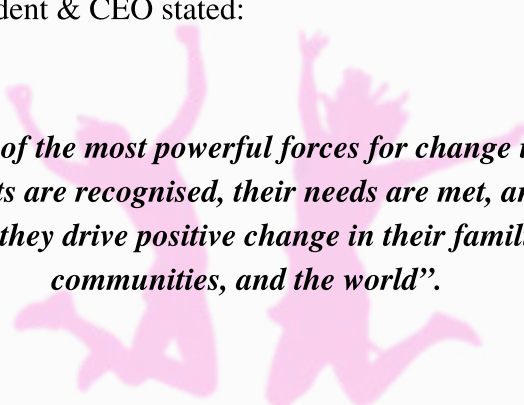
The past twenty five years have seen a lot of progress in the realisation of girls' rights, as a result of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, especially Critical Area L, which focuses specifically on the girl child. A recent report by UNICEF states that the number of girls out of school dropped by 78 million between 1998 and 2018. However, what seemed like tremendous progress is now at risk of being lost due to the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls. The pandemic has exposed the systemic inequalities which prevailed in the world before COVID-19, and which failed to protect the dignity and well-being of girls in all of their diversities. The UN has revealed that 11 million girls may not return to school post-pandemic which is alarming for their health and well-being. During the 11 Days of Action Twitter chat, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd emphasised the importance of keeping girls in school stating that "they will be more likely not to go back when schools reopen and fall into early marriage, child labor, and teen pregnancy. Keeping girls in school keeps girls safe."

The COVID-19 pandemic makes us more conscious than ever of the systemic root causes of gender inequality, exploitation of girls, gender-based violence and poverty. The pandemic not only risks reversing the progress made on girls' access to education, but it also risks reversing the many achievements made to reduce child marriage and gender-based violence around the world. Throughout the IDG submissions, girls' voices are loud and clear calling for their own protection against violence. Maya, from the USA, states that "We shouldn't have to be afraid in our own communities or at home in our own houses. We should feel just as equal and supported [in] our differences and our genders". In her poem, Imaan from India, wrote, "So when the world asks 'why do girls need rights? I say 'I want safety and freedom to give'. To be yourself truly and unrestrictedly, is a human right, Yet there are those who are denied them day and night."



We must listen when girls speak out! We must reflect their voices in our efforts to build an equitable, sustainable and peaceful world. We are inspired by girls who are boldly demanding action against the discrimination they experience daily. Mercy Global Action encourages girls everywhere to speak out to improve girls participation, strengthen girls empowerment, increase female leadership, and champion their right to make their own decisions. As Kathy Calvin, former United Nations Foundation President & CEO stated:

***"Girls are one of the most powerful forces for change in the world: When their rights are recognised, their needs are met, and their voices are heard, they drive positive change in their families, their communities, and the world".***



# World Mental Health Day

## By Anastasia Freeman (MELF 2019-2020)

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization in announcing the theme for World Mental Health Day 2020 “Mental Health for All: Greater Investment – Greater Access” stated, “The world is accepting the concept of universal health coverage. Mental health must be an integral part of UHC. Nobody should be denied access to mental health care because she or he is poor or lives in a remote place.” In the wake of COVID 19, the need for universal access to mental health services has become even more urgent. His statement cuts to the heart of the global mental health response, much of the world’s population still do not have access to psychologists, psychiatrists, or any kind of treatment for psychological illness or substance use disorders. In Australia, mental health awareness during the past decade has grown significantly, as has funding for it. Yet globally mental ill-health is widely under-reported and underdiagnosed, particularly in lower-income countries.

In lower-income countries where mental health research is sometimes non-existent, lower numbers of mental ill-health are documented and therefore treated. However, the WHO estimated one in four people globally will suffer from a disabling mental illness or neurological disorder at some point in their lives and estimated that 5% of the population are diagnosable for significant mental disability in any one year. This quite broad definition includes many forms; depression, anxiety, bipolar, eating disorders, and schizophrenia.

Most people use the terms of mental health and mental illness interchangeably. Yet the WHO definition refers to health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”. So we must consider mental health as the objective for all of us, mental illness is “generally characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others”. This difference is extremely important. Many agree mental illness should be completely de-stigmatised because it is essentially another kind of health problem. Yet if you have never experienced severe mental illness in yourself or with people close to you, it is hard to grasp what destigmatising mental illness looks like in practice. Mental illness is by its very nature relational because it affects thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Where physical ill-health locates illness in a body, mental ill-health does not just affect a single mind/body. It affects relationships and affects not just the mind of the individual, but all the minds linked to this individual by chance or by choice.

De-stigmatisation of mental illness thus requires a radical re-thinking of how we relate to others, and not just to those with a diagnosed condition. It calls for insight into the process of our minds while practicing compassion and patience when we encounter, what we consider to be abnormal thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in others.

Yet, the caveat here is that “abnormal” and “normal” behaviour are socially constructed at any given point in time. Thus, interrogating one’s understanding of what is considered normal and abnormal behaviour is an essential part of de-stigmatising mental ill-health and understanding how to respond compassionately when you meet someone who may be experiencing a mental illness or crisis. If you do experience a mental illness in your life, whether you receive timely adequate treatment and your basic human rights are respected, all depends to a great extent on where you are located geographically.







Having talked to many people for a long time about mental health issues in very frank and personal terms, the most common thing I hear from those who have experienced mental illness at some point in their lives is that the kindness, patience, and compassion from others is what they needed most at that time. My own experience is the care of others saved me, along with medication. What most people need when they are experiencing a mental illness or crisis is a community of care that can assist with everyday tasks and checking in on sleep, personal hygiene, and making sure they are eating regularly. This can become burdensome if it is only one or two people doing the caring, which is why a community of support is needed. The other role a community of care assists with is deep listening, practicing non-judgment, and staying with the experience of the other in a calm way, no matter what arises for as long as they need. Here is what one friend would like me to share with you about her recent experiences:

*“Mental illness can affect anyone...I am suffering from severe depression, a few times I felt suicidal because I lost my job, friends, and my dignity. I’ve always been self-sufficient; I’ve always had more than enough so I always helped people in need. Now I feel helpless and I don’t recognise myself anymore...Most days I just want to sleep the whole day, sleep helps me not to think. Time freezes and it’s the only time I don’t think of my problems...I didn’t know this could happen to me...I live in a country that has a ‘survival of the fittest’ policy, so if I don’t have a job to support myself, I am on my own....What do I crave most at this time? Someone to be with me, to drag me back, to shine a candle into my darkness, to tell me ‘it’s ok not to be ok’ and tell me ‘it’s gonna be ok, I don’t have anything to give but you have my friendship’ because I feel so alone and I feel like I don’t have anyone.”*

I wanted you to hear her words directly because she expresses through her lived experience many of the themes mentioned in this article. Her words should remind us that though all the statistics, data, and talk of global mental health issues, there is an individual human in need of connection and support. Destigmatising mental illness is showing up and giving that support, in the same way we do for people who have a physical illness.



**If you have never encountered mental illness before, here are some of my top things to remember:**

- Mental health plans are wonderful things to share with friends and family when we are healthy, that way in a time of crisis friends and family will know our wishes or how they can be of assistance.
- Do be there for your friends and family experiencing hardship, spend time with them, and listen to them. Check-in on them, don't be offended if they don't ever call you, they may not be able to. Rally a community of support around them.
- Don't post or share videos online of people who are acting strangely and who are possibly experiencing a psychotic episode.
- If you meet someone or encounter someone with poor personal hygiene, be kind, do not be rude to them, or say anything. They may be aware of their situation but are struggling with doing basic life skills for themselves. There is no need to mention it to others after. All humans have a smell, even you.
- If someone confides in you about how they are feeling, or is hearing voices or is having suicidal thoughts, urge them to seek professional help. Unless you have experienced this exact thing yourself, hold off from giving advice. Sit with them and listen, ask questions. Seek details and try to encourage them to see a professional.
- If you have a friend or family member who is amid a crisis, don't try to help them all on your own, seek help and support from others in a respectful way. Make sure you don't put your mental health at risk in trying to assist them

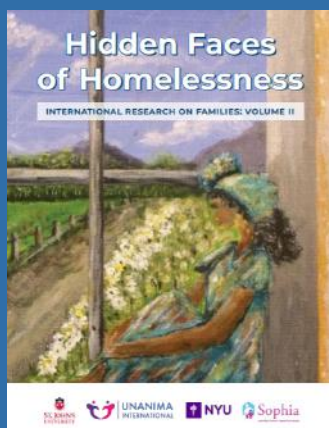
Click [here](#) to access the complete article on *Mercy eNews*

# “USEFUL RESOURCES

Faith For Nature - Humans and Nature as an Integral Whole



UNANIMA International - Hidden Faces of Homelessness: International Research on Homelessness Vol II



UN75  
#TheWorldWeWant Exhibit

**#TheWorldWeWant**



A Rights-Based Economy: Putting People and Planet first



## UPCOMING EVENTS AND INTERNATIONAL DAYS

- 2 November - International Day to End Impunity of Crimes against Journalists
- 5 November - World Tsunami Awareness Day
- 6 November - International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict
- 10 November - World Science Day for Peace and Development
- 14 November - World Diabetes Day
- 15 November - World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims
- 16 November - World Day for Tolerance
- 19 November - World Toilet Day
- 20 November - Africa Industrialisation Day
- 21 November - World Television Day
- 25 November - International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
- 29 November - International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People
- 30 November - Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare

**Mercy International Association (MIA) maintains a comprehensive and up to date website and produces an informative weekly e-newsletter (MercyNews).**

**Visit our website to discover more about MIA and our global activities: [www.mercyworld.org](http://www.mercyworld.org)**

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