

Mental Health Matters



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Serving the Health of our Community

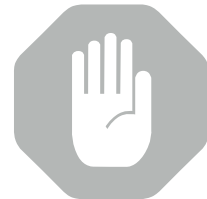
Enhancing our understanding, to provide care and support for those who need it.

an initiative of the SCWA Coalition

Edition 2021-01b

copyright © SCWA – all rights reserved

info@stop-cwa.org





Mental Health Matters — Serving the Health of our Community

Workshop for enhancing our understanding about mental health problems, to be better able to provide care and support for those who need it.

Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. — Isaiah 58:9–10.

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, ... for I was sick, and you cared for me.” Then these righteous ones will reply, “Lord, when did we ever ... see you sick ... and visit you?” And the King will say, “I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!” — Matthew 25:34–40.

INFORMATION AND GUIDE FOR FACILITATOR

Welcome

We believe that God loves people who are living with mental health problems and that he grieves that far too many people with mental illness are oppressed, stigmatised, ill-treated, misunderstood, and marginalised by others in their communities. We believe that you as a facilitator can take others with you on a journey of learning about mental illness, how it affects people, and how we can love, support, and help them. As you do this, God will bless you and bless those doing this course with you. This Facilitator’s Guide gives some information that will help you better understand the purpose of this course as well as practical details of the course itself so that you can prepare well for it.

This *Mental Health Matters* resource is a two-day workshop designed to help church leaders and workers...

- to improve their understanding of mental health problems and of people who are experiencing these problems;
- to learn what they can do to actively help and support children and adults living with mental health problems in their churches and communities; and
- to explore what action they can take to change harmful attitudes towards them.

Mental Health Matters

It is our hope and desire that those that have participated in this *Mental Health Matters* course will go on to share their learning with others in their families, churches, and communities. As this happens, we believe that attitudes towards people with mental health problems will be increasingly transformed, and that communities will become places where people are kinder and more understanding, loving, and supportive towards those who are affected in this way.

How to Use

This *Mental Health Matters (MHM)* training material can be used as a standalone resource, or else as a supplementary module of *The Heart of the Matter (HoM)* training resource. HoM is a seven-module course which aims to contribute to a significant change in thinking and actions in local churches and communities in relation to the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations, especially against children.

- HoM can be accessed here:
– <https://stop-cwa.org/resources/45>

This resource is also designed to be used in conjunction with *Sickness, Health, and Healing (SHH)*. The SHH training material focuses on equipping church leaders (and those in their churches and communities) to help individuals, families, and community groups to develop a biblical understanding of sickness, health, and healing, and to address the issue of child witch accusations arising from sickness and death.

If you are able to run the two workshops, we suggest that you consider running the SHH workshop first, followed by this MHM workshop.

Overview

Context

As human beings, we are wonderfully and intricately created by God (see Psalm 139:13–16) with a mind, body, and spirit that intimately interconnect. Just as our body may from time to time be affected by illness and impairment because we live in a world where disease exists and trauma may happen, so too we may experience mental health problems, whether because of trauma, biological, psychological, or sociological problems or addictions.

Good mental health means we can think, feel, and react to situations in such a way that we can function well in all aspects of our lives. But if we go through a period of poor mental health, it may affect our mental and physical wellbeing to the point where we feel overwhelmed, helpless, and unable to cope with life and its demands. It may affect our relationships and daily activities. This can feel just as bad as a physical illness, or even worse.

No matter what our background, mental health problems are a common part of our experience as human beings. It is estimated that around 792 million people worldwide are affected by mental health problems.¹ Just as people living with physical health problems need our loving care and support, so too do those with mental health problems. However, sadly, people with mental health conditions are often deeply misunderstood and stigmatised. Through fear and ignorance, they may be shunned by others in their communities and even mistreated. Fingers may point at them and rumours may be spread about them. All too often, people with mental health problems are accused of being demonised or affected by witchcraft. Or they themselves may be accused of being witches. Such accusations increase the distress and suffering of those living with mental health problems.

It is tragic that some church leaders and those in their churches may be as fearful and ignorant of mental health issues as those outside of the church. They too may be implicated in spreading false beliefs, harmful accusations, and mistreating people with mental illness, instead of showing them the love and compassion of Christ, and giving practical and pastoral support. As it says in Isaiah 58:10, we are to "...help those in trouble." Yet all too often, our churches may be implicated in causing trouble and oppression for people with mental health problems, or be complicit by the silence and lack of active help and support towards those who are suffering in this way.

So mental health matters! Learning and talking about mental illness is vitally important, which is why we are we are running this workshop.

Purpose

The broad aims of this workshop are...

- to provide a meaningful response to accusations of witchcraft or of demon possession made against children and adults who are experiencing mental health problems;
- to address and change harmful attitudes and practices towards people living with mental health problems, and to encourage and equip churches and church leaders to give practical care and support; and
- to encourage churches and church leaders to advocate with and on behalf of people living with mental health problems, in order to reduce stigma and raise awareness and understanding.

¹ Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser (2018): "Mental Health". *Published online at « OurWorldInData.org »*. Retrieved from: « <https://ourworldindata.org/mental-health> »

Objectives

By the end of this training, the participants will recognise that mental health problems can affect anyone at any time in their lives, and that people experiencing them need our loving care and support. They will learn:

- that people experiencing mental health problems are not witches;
- that mental health disorders rarely have a demonic root;
- that seeking harmful so-called ‘cures’ is to be avoided;
- about different mental health problems, and how best to support a person who is experiencing them and their family in a way that is Christ-like and loving;
- about how to address the stigma of mental health problems.

Follow-Up

At the end of the workshop, participants will be required to complete the Next Steps form (in Annex 2 of Day 2), in which they will create simple plans for the actions they are going to take as a result of the training. As the Facilitator, you will need to intentionally follow up with each of them after three months – whether individually or as church groups – to see how they are managing to apply their learning.

It is strongly recommended that after nine months you bring the whole group of trained participants back together to share with each other their progress, to give mutual encouragement, to reinforce learning and key messages, and to plan for further, collaborative action.

Note: These intentional follow-up steps will be as important as the training itself.

Conceptual Considerations

Adapting to Local Context

This training resource is Bible-based and contextualised to be used in different nations on the African continent. It has particularly been created for use with church leaders and workers who share a Christian worldview, and who speak the language of faith from this perspective. We recognise that people across the continent have differing worldviews and cultures, and that even people from different tribes and regions in the same nation may see situations through different cultural lenses depending on their backgrounds. But we believe that this training tool and approach will be relevant to a broad range of participants and situations, and that it can be adapted for use in different nations.

As the facilitator, you may want to change the names used in the stories to be more locally relevant for the area you are working in. Or you may want to bring out certain

points that are more relevant to your cultural situation. Be led by your own experience, by the shared learning of the participants, and by the Holy Spirit.

Descriptive Terms

In this training tool, we use the following terms interchangeably:

- people living with mental health problems;
- people living with mental health conditions; and
- people living with mental health disorders or mental illness.

All of these terms relate to people who are experiencing poor mental health, whether acute or chronic, to a degree that it is significantly impacting their wellbeing and their ability to cope with daily life. It is important to understand that this is not about normal times of stress, or a low mood or bad day which we all have from time to time – particularly in response to specific, difficult circumstances. We are referring to the debilitating reality of mental health problems which adversely impact the sufferer’s ability to function on a daily basis.

When talking about people who are experiencing mental health problems, it is vital that we see them first and foremost as people who are loved by God, created in God’s image and worthy of loving care, support and respect. Different nations have different derogatory terms for people with mental illness that are often a result of media stereotypes or the way that people with mental health problems are portrayed in films or perceived in local cultures. Terms such a ‘lunatic’ for those who are experiencing severe mental health disorders are hurtful and harmful, and so we must raise awareness and educate others to ensure that these terms are not used.

Increasing Awareness

An important aspect of this MHM workshop is learning to recognise different mental health problems. In Activity 3 of Day 2 we learn about and discuss some mental health problems. Specifically, we look at the following:

- Post-Natal Depression
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Dementia
- Schizophrenia

We hope, in due course, to be able to produce supplementary material describing other mental health conditions for ongoing learning. These will be made available via the online resource hub on our website.

Note: It would be very helpful if you could let us know if there are mental health problems that are particularly prevalent in your area or region that you would like us to include in future supplementary resources.

Be aware when you are facilitating Activity 3 of Day 2 of the workshop that this may be the first time that the participants have been able to learn about and openly discuss mental health issues. Therefore, the participants may say that they have never heard of these different mental health conditions, and that they do not exist in their region. Just because the participants may say that they have never heard of a particular mental health condition or seen someone affected by it, does not mean that it does not exist. It may be that because of a lack of education and understanding about these conditions, and about mental health matters in general, and because of the taboos surrounding them, they are simply not recognised. This is why it will be important to describe the background and signs and symptoms of each condition, and to ask the participants whether they have ever come across people with these signs and symptoms. If they have, how did the community treat those with these signs and symptoms? What name did the community give to the condition the person was suffering from? What did the community say was the cause of the problem?

Practical Considerations

Preparation

We assume that those facilitating this training will be experienced facilitators, so we will not go into detail here about how to organise and facilitate the workshop. However, we would suggest the following:

- You thoroughly familiarise yourself with the contents of this two-day training resource and ensure that you have set aside enough time to diligently prepare for each day of training.
- We recommend that maximum number of attendees should be 30 people for optimum participation in the activities and discussions.
- Those invited to attend the workshop should be leaders and workers in the church or local community who have the authority, influence, and ability to share the training content with others, and also to put into practice what they learn in their churches and local community structures. Ensure to invite those who are willing to do this.
- **Note:** Because of the sensitive subject matter, there should be someone available to help with pastoral counselling, should any of the participants need someone to talk to and pray with because they are personally experiencing or have experienced mental health problems.

Certificates

- At the close of the final day, present each attendee with a certificate to remind them of their participation in the *Sickness, Health, and Healing* workshop.

Timings and Topics

There is a lot of content in this two-day training. You will see that against each activity we have put suggested timings. However, certain types of subject matter may trigger more discussion and questions than others. Therefore, you may need to adapt the timings to your own situation and the pace of the participants.

As facilitator, you will need to skilfully guide any discussion times to ensure the message is not lost amid competing viewpoints or diversions. It is important not to allow an activity to be derailed and participants distracted with endless debate between opposing viewpoints. This will require some skill and careful mediation. At times it may be better to acknowledge that some people may differ in beliefs, but even so, our actions towards children and adults living with mental health problems should always be kind and compassionate, not violent and abusive.

If there is a topic that stimulates more discussion and questions than you have time for, you may want to consider setting up discussion groups in a form that is appropriate to the local context and circumstances, to allow people to continue to talk about and discuss these issues after the main training. Such discussion groups would need to be well facilitated, so that beliefs and understanding are considered and measured against biblical principles, scripture, and the example of Jesus Christ:

- *Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did. — 1 John 2:6.*

Ready to Go!

As you lead this workshop, may God equip you for it and give you blessing, wisdom, and favour!

Sources

The following useful sources were consulted in while producing this resource:

- Joe Hayes, *Depressed or Possessed?*, self-published, Cumbria, England 2006.
 - Chris Cook, "Demon Possession and Mental Illness", Nucleus issue: autumn 1997, Christian Medical Fellowship, 1997, available online here:
– <https://www.cmf.org.uk/resources/publications/content/?context=article&id=619>
 - *The Mental Health Access Pack*, published by Livability, accessible here:
– <https://www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org>
-

Contact Details

Stop Child Witch Accusations Coalition:

« info@stop-cwa.org »