

Symposium | Local minority : [Symposium 45] Bridges of Hope: Uniting for Mental Health Care in East and Southeast Asia

🏠 Fri. Sep 26, 2025 2:50 PM - 4:20 PM JST | Fri. Sep 26, 2025 5:50 AM - 7:20 AM UTC 🏠 Session Room 4 (Large Hall B)

[Symposium 45] Bridges of Hope: Uniting for Mental Health Care in East and Southeast Asia

Moderator: Shailendra Raj ADHIKARI (Beautiful Mind Institute of Psychiatry, Chitwan), Harry Minas (The University of Melbourne)

[SY-45]

Bridges of Hope: Uniting for Mental Health Care in East and Southeast Asia

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[SY-45-01]

A Scoping Review on the Mental Health Needs of Thai Village Health Volunteers: Seeking International Support

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[SY-45-02]

Current Mental Health Landscape in Indonesia (2025)

*Andi Jayalangkara Tanra¹ (1. Hasanuddin University (Indonesia))

[SY-45-03]

Child mental health in Mongolia

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[SY-45-04]

Mental Health for All: Mental Health Support in Cambodia for twenty-eight years

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Keywords : Mental health service, community-based healthcare, International collaboration

East and Southeast Asian countries predominantly fall within the low- and middle-income categories. In many nations, including Laos and Thailand, village health volunteers (VHVs) are the cornerstone of primary healthcare, mainly where healthcare professionals are in short supply. In 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand implemented a policy promoting a recovery-oriented approach to mental health care. VHVs, recognized as community-based healthcare leaders and termed "unsung heroes" by the World Health Organization, played crucial roles in supporting COVID-19 patients and assisting individuals with psychiatric conditions, particularly regarding medication adherence during the pandemic. However, following the pandemic, the overall workload for Thai VHVs has increased, revealing a lack of adequate training in mental health care, especially concerning substance abuse. Additionally, stigma continues to impede both Thai VHVs and other primary healthcare providers in addressing mental health issues. In contrast, Japan is a high-income country known for its exceptional medical care and educational standards. Numerous Japanese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions, such as Cambodia, assist other region's low- and middle-income countries. Supporters for Mental Health (SUMH), Japan's first international mental health NGO, has delivered mental health support in Cambodia since 1996. SUMH continues to promote a 'Community Mental Health Service Model,' emphasizing psychoeducation during outpatient and home visits to patients and their families. This presentation reflects on SUMH's 28-year journey and discusses the ongoing advancements in mental health care in Cambodia. Additionally, the symposium will address child and adolescent psychiatry in Mongolia, another low- and middle-income country in East Asia, where Japanese psychiatrist teams have contributed to developing local psychiatric services for young people. The discussions will involve psychiatrists from East and Southeast Asia, focusing on the existing mental health systems, challenges faced, and strategies for strengthening these systems, mainly through international collaboration.

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[SY-45-01] A Scoping Review on the Mental Health Needs of Thai Village Health Volunteers: Seeking International Support

*Chonnakarn Jatchavala¹, Kreuwan Jongbowonwiwat¹ (1. Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, Prince of Songkla University, Songkhla, Thailand (Thailand))

Keywords : Village Health Volunteers, Mental Health, Primary Healthcare, Community-Based Training, International Collaboration

Background: Village health volunteers (VHVs) play a crucial role in primary healthcare across many low- and middle-income countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Laos, where there is a shortage of healthcare professionals. Earlier research on their roles has been more general and has not explicitly addressed their mental health practices. In 2019, Thailand implemented a policy promoting a recovery-oriented approach to mental health care. Nevertheless, the support they require from academic institutions and international partnerships has not been thoroughly investigated.

Method: The Scopus and PubMed databases were explored for published studies related to "Village Health Volunteer," "Thailand," and "Mental Health," focusing on research themes, clinical practices, and policies or interventions in mental health following the pandemic (2023-2025). The authors examined their responsibilities and assessed the support needed from both international and national academic institutions and professional organizations.

Results: Most studies indicated that Thai Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) expressed concerns about the lack of community-based training for mental health practices, particularly regarding severe mental illnesses, such as the rehabilitation of schizophrenia patients. Some online screening tools and brief interventions, particularly for alcohol addiction, have been developed by higher education institutions. While health literacy was encouraged among the VHVs, no studies have reported on their mental health literacy.

Conclusion: The establishment of Thai Village Health Volunteers by the government during the Cold War illustrates a complex relationship between health and politics, aimed at promoting community health initiatives and countering communist influences. As a result, a conflict of paradigms has arisen regarding international collaboration for the practical implementation of VHVs, particularly in mental health care. Nonetheless, during this time, VHVs have become a cornerstone of the Thai health system, and they require additional support in training for severe mental illnesses and addiction from both national and international academic institutions and organizations.

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[SY-45-02] Current Mental Health Landscape in Indonesia (2025)

*Andi Jayalangkara Tanra¹ (1. Hasanuddin University (Indonesia))

Keywords : Mental health Indonesia、Stigma、Primary Care Services

National Prevalence: According to the 2023 National Health Survey (SKI), approximately 2% of Indonesians aged over 15 are experiencing mental health issues, with depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia being the most prevalent disorders.

Youth Mental Health: The highest prevalence of depression symptoms is observed among young individuals aged 15–24, particularly females, those with lower education levels, the unemployed, and workers in non-specialized roles.

Treatment Gap: Despite the prevalence, only 10.4% of young people with depression seek treatment, indicating a significant treatment gap.

Community Health Centers (Puskesmas): As of late 2024, only 40% of Puskesmas provide mental health services, with a target to increase this to 50% by 2025 and 70% by 2026.

However, the distribution is uneven, with 60–70% of mental health professionals concentrated in Jakarta.

Psychiatrist Availability: Only 13 out of 38 provinces have a psychiatrist-to-population ratio above the national average, highlighting a significant disparity in access to mental health professionals across the country.

Training Initiatives: The Ministry of Health is intensifying training programs for healthcare workers, aiming to train one million individuals in Psychological First Aid (P3LP) to provide basic mental health support at the community level.

Government Initiatives and Future Plans
Free Health Screening Program (PKG): Launched in February 2025, the PKG is Indonesia's largest health initiative, aiming to provide annual free health screenings, including mental health evaluations, to all citizens on their birthdays. The program targets 100 million people in its first year, utilizing over 20,000 health centers and clinics nationwide. Screenings include assessments for depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.

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[SY-45-03] Child mental health in Mongolia

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Keywords : Mongolia、 Child and adolescent mental health、 Community survey、 Capacity building

In Mongolia, as in many other countries, mental disorders have emerged as a significant health concern. The impact of child and adolescent mental health problems is also high. A study conducted at the public elementary schools in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar in 2018 demonstrated that 21% of the children were classified as high-risk of mental health problems. The study demonstrated socioeconomic and lifestyle determinants. Another study among the patients of child and adolescent mental health department at the National Mental Health Center demonstrated the needs of support for families. Recently, attention towards child and adolescent mental health is getting greater rapidly among general population. The trend is partially attributable to the societal and lifestyle change and increased exposure to information on the internet and social media. The changes towards urbanized and nuclear family-based lifestyles are particularly prominent in Ulaanbaatar. In many low- and middle-income countries, child and adolescent mental health services had been underserved. Like many other countries, in Mongolia, despite the increased needs of child mental health services, human resources to provide mental health services for children had been insufficient. To address this issue, Mongolia developed a formal training program for child and adolescent psychiatry, which was collaboratively developed by the Mongolian National University of Medical Sciences and Nagoya University in 2023. The program started with the aim to train 30 child and adolescent psychiatry specialists over 3 years.

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[SY-45-04] Mental Health for All: Mental Health Support in Cambodia for twenty-eight years

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Keywords : Community Mental Health、 Global Mental Health、 Cambodia、 Mental Health Support

It has been twenty-eight years since the Japanese non-profit organization, the Supporters for Mental Health (SUMH), began supporting community mental health activities in Cambodia. SUMH began field research in Siem Reap Province in 1996 and opened a local office in 2001. With the cooperation of Japanese volunteers, SUMH trained six psychosocial rehabilitation practitioners and opened and operated the only mental health rehabilitation center in Cambodia. It has provided day care and group therapy, mental health education for health care workers and other NPO staffs, outreach services, psychoeducation programs, and psychiatric outpatient clinics at two hospitals in rural areas, as well as deploying a vehicle to provide community mental health services. The following achievements have been made.- 62,589 people receiving psychiatric services- 2,364 home-visit support cases- 5,021 mental health training participants in the community: - Psychiatric education for staffs of all health centers in Siem Reap Province- Numerous cases of release from custody in cages and chains in private homes These activities were then considered effective in addressing global mental health challenges in the following ways Integrating mental health services into the community Improving access to effective psychotropic medications Developing multidisciplinary mental health professionals Provision of community mental health care and rehabilitation for the chronically mentally ill Strengthen the mental health care capacity of all health professionals During this period, Cambodia has developed economically and has been upgraded from a low-income country to a low- to middle-income country. In terms of mental health activities, a new mental health plan through 2032 was announced in 2023 and psychiatric services are expected to improve. SUMH's experience shows that international mental health activities can achieve significant results when conducted from a multicultural perspective, respecting the culture and history of the partner country.