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Statement submitted by “Enosh” – The Israeli Mental Health Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Accessibility of trauma-informed mental health services for women victims of sexual abuse

This statement focuses on the intersection between mental health, sexual assault, and lack of accessibility to health services for women and girls with psychosocial disabilities based on sexual abuse. This issue indicates deficiency in implementing both the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This issue should be part of the discussion and global work on universal health coverage.

The intersection between psychosocial disability and sexual assault: research shows that over 50 per cent of women with psychosocial disabilities have endured sexual assault during their lives. Many of these women are badly diagnosed and get psychiatric help that doesn't always address their trauma. People with mental illness suffer from sanism, stigma, and discrimination in all aspects of life. The intersection between sexual trauma and psychosocial disability is stigmatized among professionals and the public. Community mental health services tend to devote more attention to the mental health diagnosis of a person than to supporting people who live with sexual trauma, or complex post-traumatic stress disorder. This statistic requires a holistic and professional means to handle the problem and ensure women grappling with situations of mental health can get help, cope with the assault, and gain tools to integrate into society.

Enosh - The Israeli Mental Health Association has identified this important issue that reveals a lack of access to health care: first, as women who were victims of sexual abuse, and second as women with psychosocial disabilities. The intersection between these two components needs to be addressed by international organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations.

The mental health system in Israel, approximately 250,000 people cope with mental illness to some extent. Of that total, some 150,000 persons endure persistent and severe mental illnesses and utilize services from the public health system. Mental illness does not only affect the individuals themselves; rather, family members, who often become caregivers, are also affected. A cautious estimation of the number of people coping with a mental illness and their caregivers is approximated at over half a million.

According to the National Insurance Institute, approximately half (77,000) of those with severe mental illness are entitled to a disability allowance. Individuals with mental illness represent one-third of the entire group of persons who receive disability stipends; they are also the largest group of disabled people in the country who rely on government stipends. However, only 35 per cent utilize community-based mental health rehabilitation services, which in 2018 totaled 27,000 people through the Israeli Community Rehabilitation of Persons with Mental Health Disability Law, 2000. As we can see, there is a wide access gap to services.

How to tackle mental health and sexual assault: To address the problem of lack of services for women with psychosocial disabilities and complex post-traumatic stress disorder, Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association has put effort into becoming a trauma-informed organization. Together with the Israel Association of Rape Crisis Centers, we developed the SEED model of training for professionals, which provides the basis for sexual trauma-informed services for women with complex post-traumatic stress disorder based on sexual assault. Becoming a trauma-informed organization enabled us to develop community-based services to support women and increase their inclusion in society. We suggest addressing the intersection

through training and innovative services. Achieving independence for women with some psychosocial disabilities can be accomplished through trauma-informed recovery services. The professional training on trauma and sexual abuse leads to improved services that include creating networks and manage recovery in a way that support better in these women. The first training stage provides a framework for self-advocacy and peer support of women. This model offers a holistic approach.

The objectives of SEEDs include independent living skills by means of support, assistance, and maintenance of steady contact with trauma-informed staff: to enable women to rebuild their self-perception that has been distorted due to sexual assault; to identify the history of prior assault as well as the mental health self-condition in order to prevent escalation of the mental health condition; to empower women with psychosocial disabilities who were victims of sexual trauma to advocate on their own and support each other; and to promote an inclusive community.

The impact of the SEEDS programme is its ability to provide more opportunities for women to get involved in the recovery process; to gain more tools to live a successful life with the support that is needed; to drive a decline in the rehospitalization rates, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts; to change the perception of professional training in community mental health services; and to promote peer support and self-advocacy. The SEEDS programme is part of the Zero Project and Ashoka Impact Transfer programme.

Key recommendations: From our experience through years of development of mental health recovery services and the SEEDS model, we have identified key recommendations to better address the intersection between mental health and sexual assault. We call upon international organizations and governments to:

- Promote women's and girls' mental health and create professional and social responsibility and recovery services that will address the intersection between sexual assault and mental health.
- Establish comprehensive services that will create a safe environment to work on mental health issues as a response to sexual abuse and create more trauma-informed mental health spaces in the system.
- Ensure there are emergency services for women who were victims of sexual assault in every public hospital.
- Ensure that women with psychosocial disabilities have access to rehabilitation services in the community.
- Create intergovernmental work that includes legal, social, and health issues of women with psychosocial disabilities.
- Ensure that professionals from mental health services, the justice system, police, and health care are trained on the issues of sexual assault and psychosocial disability and the connection between them.
- Promote special legislation regarding sexual assault victims that provides holistic care through mental health laws and to other legislation.

Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association is a nonprofit organization based in Israel that aims to promote community mental health and provide support and promote the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities and their family members. For more than 40 years, our organization is the leading voice in fighting against the stigma associated with psychosocial disabilities. Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association is a member of regional and international organizations working to improve mental health globally – because mental health is everyone's story.