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COI QUERY RESPONSE

ZIMBABWE – INFORMATION ON AVAILABILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Standard Zimbabwe in February 2024 reported that: “In Zimbabwe, it is estimated that one in four people experience a mental health disorder at some point in their lives. This is a significant number, yet mental health remains a neglected issue in the country.”¹ This document further states that: “Zimbabwe faces significant challenges regarding mental health. The prevalence of mental health issues in Zimbabwe has been influenced by a variety of factors, including socio-economic difficulties, political instability, limited access to healthcare services, and the impact of historical events.”² The document also points out that “Access to mental healthcare services is limited, particularly in rural areas where resources are scarce.”³

Al Jazeera in January 2024 notes that: “In Zimbabwe, a country of 15 million people, there are fewer than 20 psychiatrists. And mental health issues are rife...”⁴

The Bismarck Tribune in August 2023 mentioned that: “Dr. Dixon Chibanda, one of just 12 psychiatrists serving the 16 million people of Zimbabwe, knew he and his colleagues would never be able to provide the mental health support their communities needed alone. Instead of lamenting about the severe lack of access to care, he revolutionized care in Zimbabwe and is now challenging the rest of the world to join him. After witnessing too many people suffer from treatable symptoms with no access to mental health care, Dr. Chibanda decided to act by developing a community-based program called the “Friendship Bench” to help people in need. He turned to a group of people well-suited to help:

¹ The Standard Zimbabwe (26 February 2024) Village Rhapsody: Time to tackle mental health crisis in Zimbabwe

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ Al Jazeera (10 January 2024) How counsellor-grandmothers of Zimbabwe are averting a mental health crisis

community grandmothers. These grandmothers had no formal mental health or counseling training but did have hearts ready to serve and willingness to learn. He provided them with brief training in evidence-based problem-solving therapy strategies and asked them to sit on a “Friendship Bench” in the community to provide support to anyone who needed to come sit and visit with them. Despite little training, these grandmothers set out to – and did – change the landscape of mental health care in Zimbabwe.”⁵

GALZ (The Association of LGBTI People in Zimbabwe) in August 2023 states that: “The high levels of stigma and discrimination facing trans people in accessing healthcare results in harm to their mental health. Almost 80% of trans people reported feeling depressed and isolated; over 50% reporting suicidal thoughts; and 23.1% hurting themselves due to stigma and discrimination at health institutions.”⁶

B-Metro in July 2023 notes that: “With only two psychiatric hospitals and one psychiatrist for every one million people, the vast majority of Zimbabwe's 14 million population, including the 67,8 percent living in rural areas, have limited access to mental health care,’ said WHO Zimbabwe recently.”⁷

In July 2023 the *World Health Organization (WHO)* reported that: “Like most Sub-Saharan African countries, Zimbabwe faces significant challenges in meeting the Mental Health (MH) care needs of its population. With only two psychiatric hospitals and one psychiatrist for every one million people, the vast majority of Zimbabwe's 14 million population, including the 67.8% living in rural areas, have limited access to MH care. In addition, MH resources are concentrated in major cities and hospitals, making the integration of MH care at the Primary Health Care (PHC) level of paramount importance.”⁸

The *US Department of State* Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in March 2023 points out that: “Persons with mental disabilities also experienced inadequate medical care. As of year’s end, there were 20 mental health institutions, including four hospitals, three-day treatment facilities, three outpatient facilities, and 10 community residential facilities in the country with a total capacity of more than 1,500 residents. Residents in these government-run institutions received cursory screening, and most waited for at least one year for a full medical review.”⁹ The report also mentioned that: “A shortage of drugs and adequately trained mental health professionals resulted in improper diagnoses and inadequate therapy for persons with mental disabilities. There were few certified psychiatrists working in public and private clinics and teaching in the country. NGOs reported that gaining access to mental health services was slow and frustrating. They reported persons with mental disabilities experienced extremely poor living conditions, due in part to limited access to food, water, clothing, and sanitation.”¹⁰

⁵ The Bismarck Tribune (29 August 2023) Speaking out: Reversing rising rates of depression requires community involvement

⁶ GALZ (The Association of LGBTI People in Zimbabwe) (11 August 2023) GALZ Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Zimbabwe (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people)

⁷ B-Metro (31 July 2023) COMMENT: Mental Health policy interventions should be applauded

⁸ World Health Organization (WHO) (17 July 2023) Mental Health Revolution in Zimbabwe: FRIENDZ Project Aims to Reach 1 million People

⁹ US Department of State (20 March 2023) 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Zimbabwe

¹⁰ *ibid*

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