

**Establishment of a set of mental health  
indicators for European Union**  
executive summary

based on the Agreement No SOC 98 201412 05F03 (98CVVF3-509-0)  
between the Commission of the European Communities and  
the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health  
STAKES

## **Executive summary**

In the 1990s, mental health issues have received increasing attention across Europe and indeed the whole world. Mental ill health has become a major public health concern. Epidemiological studies conducted have shown that up to one fifth or one quarter of the general population suffer from some sort of mental disorder at a given time. Up to half of the population may be at risk of contracting a mental disorder at some point during their lifetime. Moreover, disability due to psychiatric disorder has received increasing attention since the Global Burden of Disease report. A quarter of all morbidity was attributed to psychiatric illnesses and major depression as cause of disability was ranked fifth.

According to the Key Concepts project<sup>1</sup> supported by the European Commission and the Consultative Meeting "Promotion of Mental health on the European Agenda" held in January 1998, development of mental health indicators was one of the priority areas of action in the field of promotion of mental health in Europe.

The Health Monitoring Programme (HMP) of the European Commission was established in 1997. This was preceded by enhancement of the public health responsibilities of the European Union. The HMP has the aim *`to contribute to the establishment of a Community Health Monitoring System`*. The activities of the HMP are conducted under three headings, or pillars:

Pillar A: Establishment of Community Health Indicators (indicator projects)

Pillar B: Development of a Community-wide network for sharing health data (HIEMS)

Pillar C: Analyses and reporting (health reports)

### ***The project***

Since the beginning of 1999, STAKES (The National Centre for Research and Development in Welfare and Health in Finland) has coordinated under the EC Health Monitoring Programme a project to establish a set of a few good indicators to monitor mental health in Europe. The project has had participants from all the EU Member States and Norway. A group of Active Partners

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<sup>1</sup> Lahtinen et al. "Framework for Promoting Mental Health in Europe", STAKES & EC, 1999.

from seven countries have collaborated more closely during the work. The project was finished by 15 November 2001. (See Appendix 1. for names of the participants and Appendix 2. for the time schedule of the project).

The project has collected information on existing mental health and well-being indicators and information systems. Furthermore, the partners have selected, as their proposal, a set of mental health indicators, which can be integrated into European a comprehensive health monitoring system. Clear and unambiguous definitions have been pursued when devising the set of indicators.

The project has additionally sought out to test the validity, reliability and comparability of the drafted set of indicators by collecting data from existing data sources and conducting a pilot survey.

The present report is the final report of both of the project aiming at establishing indicators for mental health in Europe.

### ***The basic starting points***

As a comprehensive health monitoring system must cover the multiple aspects of mental health, the following points have been considered while outlining the set of indicators:

- a) The mental health indicators with unanimous definitions must describe the important aspects of mental health (e.g. affective experiences and emotional resilience) as well as its interactional and societal prerequisites or consequences (e.g. social environment, level of well-being, quality of life).
- b) The system must be sensitive to change within time and cultural differences.
- c) Different mental health activities (promotion; primary, secondary and tertiary prevention; and prevention of excess mortality) must be covered by the system.
- d) The set of mental health indicators will be an integrated part of a comprehensive community health monitoring system. The indicators must provide comparable and reliable data of mental health in the Member States. Ideally the indicators would be based as much as possible on data already collected routinely in the Member States.
- e) The system should include indicators to describe relevant and feasible aspects of the mental health service system.
- f) The system must have relevance for planning and political decision making.
- g) Citizen's participation and user's views are increasingly important elements in mental health today. These have to be

taken into account if the needs of the population at large are to be served in the best possible way.

A set of mental health indicators will serve both the European Commission and EU Member States enabling the satisfactory follow up of the mental health situation of populations. A common set of indicators facilitates establishment of joint efforts in the field of mental health, comparison of policies and activities in different Member States as well as evaluation and dissemination of good practices. The deliverables of the mental health indicators can also be used in the joint effort to enhance the visibility of mental health issues in the European context. These indicators can be used in defining the minimum amount of data needed for monitoring community mental health.

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