

Society and Mental Health

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Reform of Mental Health (MH) services has been conducted in Georgia since 2011. There has been a reduction in the number of beds in large psychiatric hospitals. Some general hospitals have established acute psychiatric units. Crisis intervention services and a pilot program of Mobile Assertive Care Service have been created. Unfortunately, the reform path is partial, fragmented and inconsistent two years after the reform government and the professional community started constructing a Mental Health Strategic Plan. In this context, societal attitudes toward mental health play a crucial role as public opinion could be the basis for predicting success in building community based services.

Method: Societal beliefs about mental health issues, psychiatrists and people with mental disorders were measured by a survey, "Mental Health and Society." The survey contained 25 questions with multiple choice answers. The poll involved 250 adults (mentally healthy subjects).

Results: Only 8% of respondents agree that they would contact a psychiatrist in the case of "signs of mental disorders, as well as emotional disturbances." Almost 45% of respondents believe that there is "no protection of confidentiality of medical records", and that is caused by technical staff (32%) and psychiatrists (28%), or both. Despite expressions of sympathy toward mental patients, 36% of respondents believe that "it is necessary to stop the spread of mental illnesses by certain social restrictions (prohibiting birth, etc.)". Noteworthy is the fact that 32% of participants in the study still believe that "Georgian psychiatrists have medications that will lead to the development of mental disorders in mentally healthy individuals". The answer: "I do not know," was received in 40% of surveys, while only 8% denied the existence of "such medication".

Conclusions: The data clearly indicate that attitudes of society to mental health is a constraint and is preventing people from gaining access to appropriate psychiatric services. Ongoing mental health reform needs involvement and more communication with community and mental health service consumers for stigma reduction along with stimulation and development of "formal and informal" community based mental health services.