

## Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association Inputs for the 12 Session of the UN OEWG

Enosh is honored to submit this input on the older persons' right to contribute to Sustainable Development and Economic Security for the 12 UN OEWG session. This paper will highlight the intersection between the elderly and mental health regarding the two questions raised by the working group, based on Enosh's work in Israel.

### Leaving no one behind – under the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a universal plan of action that supports realizing human rights for all people, particularly the most vulnerable in society. The group of **older persons living with psychosocial disabilities** is one of the most neglected groups. With a steady rise in the aging population in Israel and the proportion of older persons living with mental illness, there is a significant impact on their autonomy, rights, and quality of life. COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this exclusion and vulnerability, with segregation and isolation of older people in need, in the name of health and safety. It has exasperated the triple jeopardy of ageism, ableism, and sanism faced by elderly persons.

### Elderly in Israel – Data <sup>i</sup>

- In 2015 people over 65 were 11% of the population in Israel 939,000. By 2035 the estimation is 14%. There are no current formal data regarding the population of elderly with mental illness.
- **Loneliness** - 33% of the elderly (65+) feel lonely often.
- **Suicide rates** among the elderly (75+) are increasing
- **COVID-19 pandemic** had an enormous effect on the elderly and decreased physical and mental health: 85% of the elderly experience more mental health difficulties, and 51% reported a decrease in fragility measures.<sup>ii</sup>

### The dignity of Older Persons Coping with Psychosocial Disability

Dignity is a fundamental concept that undergirds the effective treatment of mental illness and comprises independence, social inclusion, justice, equality, and respect. Older persons cannot be recognized as active agents of societal development and economic security without upholding their dignity. In Israel, there are several gaps in achieving a dignity and rights-based approach to supporting elderly persons with psychosocial disabilities:

- Continued discrimination based on ageism and sanism manifested in a lack of access to services.

- The laws that support elderly persons in Israel do not have specific accommodations to support persons with psychosocial disabilities – compared to other physical disabilities.<sup>iii</sup>
- Although Israel has community-based mental health rehabilitation services by law,<sup>iv</sup> In practice, most of the population of people with severe mental illness who need these services **cannot access them** due to a lack of appropriate services. We know of many cases of people with severe mental illness that are driven into the medical model and institutions from a very young age as they do not have the proper support to function independently with their mental illness.
- Large parts of the elderly with mental health issues suffer from loneliness. Some are with limited social skills. It is hard to get used to changes, cognitive deterioration, and physical health issues that are getting worse and make it hard to use daily routine.
- There is a separation between the health and welfare services, and many people are "falling between the chairs" between these services.

#### **Steps to a more inclusive society**

- Government must develop accommodations to support the inclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities through their older life following **Israel's Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law**.<sup>v</sup>
- There is a need for one system that oversees the whole aspect and a national coordinator for the elderly in Israel.
- Reaching out is crucial to access rights and services. We know from research that most of people are not accessing their rights.<sup>vi</sup>
- Strengthen the voice of the elderly through supporting advocacy efforts of grassroots organizations and other peer groups.
- Increase professional mental health staff and psycho-geriatrics to promote this population's wellbeing and access to healthcare.

Exploring these gaps led Enosh to recognize the need and develop an intervention model that will support the financial and social aspects of the elderly who cope with psychosocial disabilities.

#### **Good Practice to Support Security of Older Persons with Psychosocial Disabilities**

Enosh operates the "Meaningful Occupation Center" that supports the elderly with psychosocial disabilities. This program provides rehabilitation services and includes daily activity that brings structure into everyday life, tackling loneliness and promoting people's recovery and social integration. The Center serve members over 60 that also cope with physical and psychosocial

disabilities. We focus on vocational and social activities that enhance independent functions and overall wellbeing. The program includes regular physical activity, workshops, and more. We explore new avenues for innovation in elderly mental healthcare and lay the foundations for best practice standards through our work. We are working in and with the community to encourage inclusion and connections. This model is replicable to other countries' cultures and settings, it can help promote a better understanding on the needs of this population group.

[Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association](#) Is a nonprofit organization based in Israel that provides community-based mental health services and promotes the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities and their family members. It aims to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health.

Sincerely,



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<sup>i</sup> Israeli Ministry of Health, 2019; elderly in Israel (Myers - JDC – Brookdale, 2017) (Hebrew)

<sup>ii</sup> Aging in Corona Times – A Survey (Research for Social Impact, Joint – Ashalim, 2020) (Hebrew)

<sup>iii</sup> National Insurance Law, 5728-1968 (consolidated version).

<sup>iv</sup> Rehabilitation in the Community of Persons with Mental Health Disability Law, 5760-2000.

<sup>v</sup> Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law, 5758-1998

<sup>vi</sup> Benish, A., & David, L. (2018). The right of access to the administration in the welfare state: The (non-)take-up of social rights and the duty to make social rights accessible. *Mishpat Umimshal (Law & Government)*, 19, 395–427. [Hebrew]