

Preface

Ensuring Mental Well-being in Bhutan

The Covid pandemic may continue to evolve but trends indicate that most of the world has decided to surmount the crisis mode and move on. This is particularly relevant for Bhutan, which is already in an era of major transformation and reform, to focus on building a 21st century nation for future generations. This evolution promises to be historic but the reality is that the challenges to human existence will also continue to evolve.

The pandemic is one of numerous impediments that has and will continue to aggravate and threaten the process of human development. Climate change is now a threat of overpowering proportions; so are the relatively new complexities of technology, including social media, and the age-old challenges like violence and conflict, inequities and discrimination, and health hazards created by human lifestyle itself.

Globally one in eight, or 970 million people, suffer from a mental health disorder, with 224 million children in depression. Six out of seven people are insecure (UN). Mental distress affects human development in many ways, also leading to mental disorders associated with poor performance in education or work, poverty, premature mortality, disability and poor overall health. The stigma that often accompanies mental disorders makes matters worse. And when personal relationships suffer, people are left isolated and vulnerable.

Another unfortunate impact of mental health problems is that poor countries suffer the most, and the vulnerable - women, children and the elderly - are most affected. Low-income people, especially those who struggle to afford basic needs such as rent and food, suffer disproportionately in several countries.

Even as mental health issues are recognised as the leading cause of disability and economic distress, countries, on average, spend less than two percent of their health care budgets on mental health.

UNDP's 2022 Human Development Report, *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives*, explores how inequalities in human development are perpetuated across generations, how the confluence of mental distress, inequality, and insecurity foments an injurious inter-generational cycle that is a drag on human development.

The Spring 2023 issue of *The Druk Journal* looks at the need to create a more resilient society by adopting human well-being as the long-term answer to past, present and future threats. Bhutan became concerned about mental health in recent years, with society dealing with an entire range of problems, from mental stunting caused by congenital iodine deficiency which was common in the past, to the more recent disorders related to digital addiction and social media.

Among Bhutanese youth, substance abuse and violence, both physical and cyberbullying - is a driver of mental distress, sometimes leading to self-harm. Behind what ought to be the safe walls of a home, a growing number of vulnerable people are subjected to domestic abuse, with either the perception or the reality of no escape. The Covid-19 pandemic, with quarantine regulations and lockdowns, was illustrative.

The articles in this issue of the journal will focus on the impact of environmental, economic, and social challenges, especially at the growing violent, abusive, discriminatory, and addictive behaviour leading to depression, anxiety and disruption of life on a debilitating scale.

This issue highlights the impact of these trends, encourage thought and discussion on their urgency, and offer possible answers and responses that are needed today.