

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN31577
Country: China (PRC)
Date: 27 March 2007

Keywords: China – Mental illness – Depression – Post traumatic stress disorder

This response was prepared by the Research & Information Services Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. This research response may not, under any circumstance, be cited in a decision or any other document. Anyone wishing to use this information may only cite the primary source material contained herein.

Questions

- 1. Please provide information on the attitude of the Chinese authorities to people with mental illness in China.**
- 2. How are people with mental illness treated by the authorities in China?**
- 3. Please provide information on the resources and financial support available for people with mental illness in China.**

RESPONSE

Research response CHN30418 provides information on the treatment of psychiatric patients and on the forensic psychiatric system (RRT Country Research, 2006, *RRT Research Response CHN30418*, 1 August – Attachment 1).

- 1. Please provide information on the attitude of the Chinese authorities to people with mental illness in China.**

In the lead up to the Olympics, an official was reported as saying:

But he said the Chinese capital is looking into how to keep the mentally ill from ``damaging the public interest" during the games. ('Official Denies Beijing Plans To Expel Migrants During Olympics' 2006, *New Zealand Press Association*, 29 September – Attachment 2).

Generally, mental illness is viewed with negative connotations:

And the quantity and quality of mental hospitals are also far from adequate, Yu said.

"Mental hospitals are usually located in suburban, rural or even remote areas, because people regard mental health sufferers as dangerous and think they should be kept away." (Feng, Z. 'Problems Widespread In Mental Health Treatment' 2006, *China Daily*, 11 October – Attachment 3).

There appears to be a strong stigma attached to mental illness, compounding the problems associated with the lack of support/treatment:

Depression is as common an ailment here as it is in the West, but there is huge social stigma attached to depression in China, combined with a lack of awareness of how serious it can be.

Medical experts agree that China's booming economy and increased pressure to succeed is taking its toll on the nation's mental health, but in the absence of good research, data is sketchy. The China Mental Health Association says the number of people suffering from depression in China is over 26 million and that around one in 10 will receive treatment.

...

The director of the clinic, Dr Wang Gang, says one problem with dealing with depression in China is that there is not much awareness of the problem and research on the condition is limited.

"There is a lot of social pressure and stress on people now and there is a lot of undiagnosed depression. Definitely more people are feeling stress. Awareness of the problem is getting better but it's still not enough," says Dr Wang Gang.

Depressed Chinese have to deal with the stigma within the family, often having to keep it secret from their parents. (Coonan, C., 'China's first depression clinic has no shortage of clients' 2006, *Irish Times*, 17 January – Attachment 4).

The government has recognized the discrimination involved and a spokesman for the Ministry of Health said:

"Mao said the ministry is aiming to increase public awareness of mental diseases and psychological illnesses to eliminate discrimination. ('Mental disorders make up 20 pct of China's total medical spending', 2006, *Xinhua*, 11 October – Attachment 5).

2. How are people with mental illness treated by the authorities in China?

3. Please provide information on the resources and financial support available for people with mental illness in China.

Treatment varies, with Shanghai having more advanced facilities, though generally there is a lack of services:

34.16 As reported in the *South China Morning Post* on 15 January 2005, "According to Ministry of Health figures, China has 16,055 psychiatrists – one for every 87,500 people. This figure doesn't reflect disparities in rural areas, where qualified psychiatric care is non-existent." According to the same source many hospitals don't have real psychiatrists. Instead they have neurologists and other doctors who have been briefly retrained and then sit and listen to patients before writing prescriptions. [17j] As reported by the official *People's Daily* newspaper on 21 March 2005, China has less than 3,000 people engaged in psychological services whereas most developed countries have one psychological worker for every 1,000 people. [12n]

34.17 As noted by the WHO Project Atlas (a project of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence, WHO, Geneva) in their Country Profile for China, available via their website, "Among all the cities of China, Shanghai has the most developed psychiatric

setup...Services at each of the three levels-municipal, district and grass-root level are available” [53b]

34.18 As reported by Radio Free Asia (RFA) on 15 September 2006, “Currently, fees for an hour's psychotherapy in China range from 200-500 yuan (U.S.\$25-62), well out of the reach of any of the country's 900 million rural residents, among whom suicide rates for women are alarmingly high.” [105g] (UK Home Office 2006, *Country Of Origin Information Report China*, 22 December – Attachment 6).

Awareness of the mental health issue is increasing, and acknowledgement that there has been a significant increase in reported cases:

In big cities like Beijing or Shanghai where awareness of these problems is on the rise, a lack of trained professionals impairs many health institutions' abilities to treat or even diagnose mental ailments, many of which are still relatively unknown in China.

...

Shanghai's health department places the city's instances of mental illness at 1.55 percent, up from 0.32 percent in the late 70s and that only 20 percent of China's mentally ill are currently receiving treatment.(Dalby, C. 'Private Care Centers Give Lifeline to Chinese Mentally Disabled' 2006 www.china.org.cn website, 30 October, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/news/186794.htm> - Accessed 26 March 2007 – Attachment 7).

Existing services appear to be stretched and unable to cope with demand:

Says Michael Phillips, a psychiatrist at Huilongguan Hospital, “Two million Chinese try to kill themselves annually, yet almost none of those who survive get psychological treatment at the time.”

... But the other side of the problem is the poor treatment that awaits many who show the first signs of needing help. China's 750 or so state-run mental-health institutions can't keep pace with the rising demand for their services—and are often too costly for the staggering number of patients who lack insurance. Many Chinese have no choice but to turn to cheaper alternatives, like Web sites, school counselors or—at best—one of the country's roughly 1,200 private hospitals. “Some are small or poorly qualified—but they're better than nothing at all,” says Dr. Zou Yizhuang, vice superintendent at Huilongguan Hospital.

...

Although the late Mao Zedong maligned psychiatry as a bourgeois discipline, the current government will have to pour more money into the field if they want to rectify a growing imbalance: psychiatric ailments that account for one fifth of China's public- health burden now receive only 2 percent of the health budget. China has not yet promulgated a long-awaited national mental-health law, which would obligate the state to shoulder at least some of the cost of care. And today China has only about 14,000 qualified psychiatrists, “about the same number as France, with 60 million people—compared to China's 1.3 billion,” says Zou. “There's a huge gap between supply and demand.” Until the government addresses that imbalance, far too many Chinese are going to have trouble finding peace of mind. (Liu, M. 'China: Finding Peace of Mind' 2003, *Newsweek International Edition*, 24 November, <http://www.msnbc.com/news/994225.asp> - Accessed 26 March 2007 – Attachment 8).

The Central Government did run for 2 years a programme for poor people with serious mental illness:

In early 2005, the central government launched a programme in 30 provinces and regions to help poor people suffering serious mental illnesses get care and treatment.

A total of 60 pilot sites, half of them in rural areas, have been established. In every site 1,000 patients are registered and given free medical treatment.

A total of 10 million yuan (US\$1.2 million) was invested in the programme, which will end in December. (Feng, Z. 'Problems Widespread In Mental Health Treatment' 2006, *China Daily*, 11 October – Attachment 3).

A new clinic for depression which opened in Beijing, was full within half an hour, with some people travelling 4 hours to get there:

The clinic in Beijing's Anding Hospital opened earlier this month, at 6.30am. Within half an hour all 30 specialists were booked up. The patients, most of whom are young and affluent, are pleased there is finally a designated clinic for dealing with this growing problem.

...

"I've been depressed for 10 years because of problems with the family and I've been coming to this hospital, though the clinic is new. I take a four-hour bus ride to get here from Hebei province," says the 35-year-old. (Coonan, C., 'China's first depression clinic has no shortage of clients' 2006, *Irish Times*, 17 January – Attachment 4).

There is a series of forensic hospitals in China, though the US State Department report implies that admission to these institutions is not clearly defined or regulated:

According to foreign researchers, the country had 20 ankang institutions (high-security psychiatric hospitals for the criminally insane) directly administered by the Ministry of Public Security. Persons committed to these institutions had no mechanism for objecting to public security officials' determinations of mental illness. Some dissidents, persistent petitioners, and others were housed with mentally ill patients in these institutions. Patients in these hospitals were reportedly given medicine against their will and forcibly subjected to electric shock treatment. The regulations for committing a person into an ankang psychiatric facility were not clear. Credible reports indicated that a number of political and trade union activists, underground religious believers, persons who repeatedly petitioned the government, members of the banned China Democratic Party, and Falun Gong adherents were incarcerated in such facilities during the year. These included Wang Miaogen, Wang Chanhao, Pan Zhiming, and Li Da, who were reportedly held in an ankang facility run by the Shanghai PSB. Activists sentenced to administrative detention also reported they were strapped to beds or other devices for days at a time, beaten, forcibly injected or fed medications, and denied food and use of toilet facilities. (US Department of State 2007, *China – Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, March 6 – Attachment 10).

These Ankang institutions are also used to detain Falun Gong practitioners "In addition, hundreds of Falun Gong practitioners have been confined to mental hospitals, according to overseas groups" (US Department of State 2007, *China – Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, March 6 – Attachment 10).

The UK Home Office reported on one case where a person was detained in the Ankang system:

13.10 As reported by HRW in their report entitled, *China: Political Prisoner Exposes Brutality in Police-Run Mental Hospital, Eyewitness Testimonies from Notorious Ankang Asylum*, published 1 November 2005:

"Wang Wanxing [detained in June 1992] is the first known released inmate of China's notorious Ankang system, out of an estimated 3,000 or more political detainees held in police-run psychiatric custody since the early 1980s, to have left China and be in a position to speak out about his experiences. However, according to Wang, the last thing one of the

Beijing Ankang officials said to him before he boarded his flight to Germany was, 'If you ever speak out about your experiences at our hospital, we'll come and bring you back here again.' ... Wang told Human Rights Watch about the general conditions of his confinement at the Beijing Ankang asylum, and about how he and the other inmates were treated there... According to Wang, the extent of patient-on-patient violence in this ward was terrifying. He frequently had to force himself to stay awake all night to avoid sudden and unprovoked inmate attacks." [7d] (p1)

13.11 This report continued, "Since his initial detention in June 1992, Chinese authorities have consistently maintained that Wang suffered from either 'paranoid psychosis' or 'political monomania' – the later condition is not found in any internationally recognized list of psychiatric illnesses." [7d] (p2)

13.12 The same report also noted:

"All staff at the Beijing Ankang, including medical and nursing personnel, are full-time officers in the Public Security Bureau, and all inmates are persons who have been detained for criminal offenses committed while allegedly under the influence of severe psychiatric illness. There are currently around 25 Ankang institutes for the criminally insane in China; the government's eventual plan is to build one Ankang for every city with a population of one million or higher. There are more than 70 cities of this size around the country... Only a handful of foreigner observers have ever been allowed inside these high-security psychiatric facilities. In 1987, for example, a WHO-led delegation briefly visited the Tianjin Ankang. But the great majority of such facilities are strictly off-limits to outsiders of any kind, including Chinese. The Public Security Bureau acts as sole judge and jury over who is compulsorily admitted to Ankang custody, and inmates have no right of appeal or even of periodic medical review of their cases. According to Chinese authorities, the average length of stay in Ankang custody is five years. Many inmates are held for 20 years or more. According to Wang Wanxing, several of his fellow inmates at the Beijing Ankang had been there for 30 or 40 years." [7d] (p3-4)

13.13 As reported by HRW on 17 March 2006, psychiatric experts examined Wang on 3 and 4 of January 2006 and concluded there were no medical grounds for his incarceration. [7e] (UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report: China*, 22 December – Attachment 6).

There is also a report that a mentally challenged person was forcibly sterilized "A media ban was also issued after a Nanjing newspaper publicized the forced sterilization of mentally challenged teenagers in Nantong, Jiangsu Province" and that the law forbids marriage for those who are unwell "The law forbids the marriage of persons with certain acute mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia" (US Department of State 2007, *China – Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, March 6 – Attachment 10).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/index.htm>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

Copernic <http://www.copernic.com/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

CISNET (Department of Immigration Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Research, 2006, *RRT Research Response CHN30418*, 1 August
2. 'Official Denies Beijing Plans To Expel Migrants During Olympics' 2006, *New Zealand Press Association*, 29 September – FACTIVA
3. Feng, Z. 'Problems Widespread In Mental Health Treatment' 2006, *China Daily*, 11 October – FACTIVA
4. Coonan, C., 'China's first depression clinic has no shortage of clients' 2006, *Irish Times*, 17 January – FACTIVA
5. 'Mental disorders make up 20 pct of China's total medical spending', 2006, *Xinhua*, 11 October – FACTIVA
6. UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report: China*, 22 December
7. Dalby, C. 'Private Care Centers Give Lifeline to Chinese Mentally Disabled' 2006 [www.china.org.cn website](http://www.china.org.cn/english/news/186794.htm), 30 October, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/news/186794.htm> - Accessed 26 March 2007
8. Liu, M. 'China: Finding Peace of Mind' 2003, *Newsweek International Edition*, 24 November, <http://www.msnbc.com/news/994225.asp> - Accessed 26 March 2007
9. 'Low Income Groups To Receive Free Medication In Shanghai' 2006, *Asia Pulse*, 12 October – FACTIVA
10. US Department of State 2007, *China – Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, March 6