



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)  
LEGAL AID BOARD

## **Sierra Leone: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 25 August 2009**

### **Information on available health care including psychiatric services**

The *World Health Organisation* states under section Mental Health Facilities:

"Mental health is a part of primary health care system. Actual treatment of severe mental disorders is available at the primary level.

Regular training of primary care professionals is not carried out in the field of mental health.

There are no community care facilities for patients with mental disorders. Some traditional healers and general practitioners provide mental health care in the community setting." (World Health Organisation (2005) *Mental Health Atlas 2005, Sierra Leone Country Profile*)

The *US Department of State* reports:

"Psychiatric patients at the Kissy Mental Hospital were usually restrained by being chained to their cots for the first few weeks of treatment due to the lack of soft restraints." (US Department of State (25 February 2009) *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Sierra Leone*)

The same report states:

"Women did not have equal access to education, economic opportunities, health facilities, or social freedoms. In rural areas women performed much of the subsistence farming and had little opportunity for formal education. Women also experienced discrimination in access to employment, credit, pay for similar work, and owning and/or managing business." (Ibid)

The same report under the section Children:

"The government was committed to improving children's education and welfare; however, it lacked the means to provide basic education and health services." (Ibid)

The *Concord Times* reports:

"Consultant psychiatrist has revealed in Freetown that apart from inmates at the Sierra Leone psychiatric hospital in Kissy some 10% of Sierra Leoneans would require psychiatric care, meaning 400,000 have some form of mental disorder in the country.

Dr. Edward Nahim is worried because the nation has only 67 qualified doctors to take care of the entire nation and further disclosed that he was the only psychiatric specialist in the mental health field.

He said the psychiatric hospital, formerly the Kissy Mental Home, is the only mental health facility in the country. He complained that when it comes to allocation of the few resources that the country has, mental health is all but forgotten." (Concord Times (29 April 2008) *Sierra Leone: 400,000 Cases of Mental Disorders?*)

The same article also reports:

"The mental health system in Sierra Leone faces many challenges including stigma, discrimination, lack of qualified personnel, insufficient infrastructure and poor funding. Another, more immediate challenge, is simply feeding the patients.

For the past month patients at the hospital has not been receiving food as part of its daily care. This places a heavy burden on family and staff taking care of patients at the mental hospital.

Upon entering the wards patients immediately begin asking visitors for food. Many of these patients are chained to their beds. The heavy, naked chains keep those wearing them from moving around. These patients cannot be allowed to leave the hospital, as they may go looking for food." (Ibid)

The *UK Home Office* states:

"The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2005 Sierra Leone Country Profile states: "Given the destruction Sierra Leone has experienced, post-war activity has focused mainly on resupplying basic services. However, mental health issues remain largely neglected. A large, but indeterminate, number of people have suffered conflict-related stress and there is only one hospital (Kissy, in Freetown) that provides (extremely basic) services for what has become a huge problem."

The Kissy Mental Hospital is Sierra Leone's only mental health hospital. A World Federation for Mental Health newsletter, published in 2002, reports on a visit made by Florence Baingana, a World Bank Senior Health Specialist, to the Kissy Mental Hospital. The newsletter states:

"...The hospital [Kissy] was built in the mid 1800s and for the most part, has not been renovated since then."

"I [Baingana] had a note that allowed me entrance and a tour. The staff member in charge happily agreed to take me round. He informed me that he was a nursing aide. There is only one psychiatrist and one psychiatric nurse in the whole country of 5 million people. Non-specialist staff like medical officers and general nurses are not willing to work at Kissy Mental Hospital."

"As we walked to the very first ward, which he called the acute male admission ward, he suddenly said 'watch out where you step.' I was about to step into what

looked like human excrement. In the first ward, there was not a single bed or mattress. The patients were all chained to rings in the floor. Most patients were naked. The ward had no door or windows. It was in a very dismal state.”

“We made a tour of the whole hospital. The wards progressively got better but most patients were still chained to the beds. The reason given was the lack of adequate staff, no isolation rooms and inadequate medications. An attempt was made to provide some art materials as recreation but the drawing was carried out while the patients sat on the beds to which they were chained. The occupational therapy room was overgrown with weeds, and so was the mortuary.”

“Kissy Mental Hospital is the only psychiatric facility in Sierra Leone. There are no psychiatric services of any kind in any of the other hospitals. The only outpatient mental health service in the whole country is the private clinic of the only psychiatrist. Following ten years of civil conflict, some NGOs have attempted to introduce mental health and psychosocial services.” (UK Home Office (March 2006) *Country of Origin Information – Sierra Leone*)

#### *BBC News report:*

” Five years after the end of the civil war and despite a multi-million dollar aid budget, a growing health crisis is developing in Sierra Leone.

This small West African country is heavily dependent on foreign aid, particularly from the UK - with over 60% of its budget supplied from abroad.

It is estimated that up to 40% of the population remain traumatised by the war, yet the country has just one trained psychiatrist.

Despite the aid there is little basic infrastructure, and the largely privatised healthcare system is beyond most people's means, forcing them to seek alternative, potentially dangerous healthcare, such as witch doctors.” (BBC News (4 January 2007) *Sierra Leone's failing health*)

#### *The African Development Bank (AfDB) states:*

”The social costs of the protracted civil wars in Sierra Leone have been extremely high. About 75 percent of the country's health care facilities or about 415 health care units, including 15 hospitals and 150 primary health care centers, were not functional, either because the buildings were destroyed, equipment and supplies vandalized and the lack of staff. Indeed, the provision of social services ceased in the rural areas and most of the urban centers, following the systematic, large-scale destruction of social infrastructure in the country.” (African Development Bank (10 August 2006) *Sierra Leone: Health services rehabilitation project*)

#### *Human Rights Watch reports:*

”In 2007 and 2008 Sierra Leone ranked last in the UN's Human Development Index. At 1,800 deaths per 100,000 live births, the country has the highest

maternal mortality rate in the world, largely due to lack of human resources and corruption in the healthcare sector.” (Human Rights Watch (14 January 2009) *World Report 2009 - Sierra Leone*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre 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. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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