

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Severe mental disorders in the community**

The Hamdard Force members in the districts of Haripur and Kohat are helping to identify people with mental health needs, offer basic psychosocial support, and refer them to the MHPSS service. The specialist mental health services in the districts are limited to tertiary care hospitals that are not easily accessible and are costly in the private sector. Existing referral links between the MHPSS community, primary healthcare and the specialist services are non-existent. The MHPSS service offers a detailed assessment and psychosocial management support remotely and refers to the nearest mhGAP trained doctor or local specialist, or consultation from the MHPSS specialists when needed.

**Case 1 received through the Hamdard Force app:**

“Stress”

Assessment by a clinical psychologist described a middle-aged married woman who had two children and her husband worked in the Middle East. She had been experiencing significant emotional distress over the past three months and reported persistent fear, excessive worry, irritability and sleep disturbances. She had recently lost her job; faced financial stress; had limited social support; and was experiencing harassment from her father-in-law. She was not inclined to inform her husband, seek formal protection, or legal support, as it would further complicate the family dynamic.

Challenge: She lived in a district which has no psychological services, she was dealing with multiple stressors, including harassment, had limited support and suffering from a mental health condition.

Outcome: The clinical psychologist helped explore her options, offered problem-solving intervention, focused on reducing stress, strengthening social support from her family and provided emotional support through this process. She spent some time with her mother, recovered from the stress and was able to set boundaries at home.

**Case 2 received through the Hamdard Force app:**

“جڑ جڑا”

Assessment by a clinical psychologist documented a single, middle-aged lady who works as a teacher, and had been unwell for one year. The symptoms include persistent “burden” in her head, frequent ‘tightness in chest’, irritability, a consistent low mood, with feelings of worthlessness and indecisiveness. She started self-medicating with sleeping tablets (benzodiazepine) and a muscle relaxant for two months.

Her stressors include domestic and financial responsibilities to support five family members, caring for an unwell parent, social pressure and critical remarks for not being married. Despite many marriage proposals, she faces the conflict between the decision to get married and her family’s financial dependence.

Challenge: Domestic, financial and social stressors; untreated depressive illness and risk of dependence on benzodiazepines.

Outcome: The clinical psychologist provided psychosocial support and psychoeducated her about the risks associated with sleeping tablets; guided her to manage stress using the MyCare+ app; referred her to a mhGAP trained doctor who prescribed an antidepressant and helped stop taking sleeping tablets.

**Case 3 received through the Hamdard Force app:**

“depression, becheni aur besakooni, neend na ana”

Assessment by a clinical psychologist revealed a middle-aged married man, who has two daughters, and has been experiencing persistently low mood, loss of interest in activities, restlessness, disturbed sleep and appetite, and social withdrawal for the last 8 months. He also experienced intense anger and frequent thoughts to touch electric poles to kill himself. He lost his job in Dubai during COVID-19, has been facing severe financial crisis and was dependent on his family.

Challenge: He was very unwell, didn’t understand his mental health condition and could not afford to seek psychiatric services.

Outcome: The MHPSS team offered him psychosocial support and referred him to mhGAP trained doctor in the nearest clinic for treatment. The clinical psychologist conducted multiple sessions to prioritize his safety and help manage his stress and emotional outbursts.

