

SPECIAL ARTICLE:

Fountain House Lahore: A Pioneering Facility In the Field of Treatment and Psychosocial Rehabilitation In Pakistan

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Mental Health Challenges in Pakistan

Like many developing countries, Pakistan is not an exception for its low priority for mental health. Despite reports provided by the World Health Organisation about mental health gaps in service provisions¹ and a recent (unpublished) National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey of Pakistan² showing lifetime and current weighted prevalence of all psychiatric disorders approximately 37%, Pakistan continues to struggle with the delivery of comprehensive mental health care services. Mental healthcare in Pakistan is mostly provided by the public health sector, although there have been some recent developments in the private sector and by the voluntary sector.³ There is still a dire need to establish subspecialties in the field of Psychiatry. General psychiatrists provide most of the services with limited facilities for child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, rehabilitation psychiatry, and old age psychiatry. The last few decades have, however, seen rapid changes in the treatment and management of psychiatric patients in Pakistan.

Revolutionising Psychiatric Rehabilitation

Psychiatric rehabilitation is still in its infancy in Pakistan, and over the last few decades is going through several developments in various areas related to psychosocial rehabilitation.⁴ The major milestone in this journey was the establishment of the Lahore Mental Health Association (LMHA) in 1962 to mobilise community resources for the uplift and promotion of psychosocial rehabilitation in the country. In 1963, the association started a project with the objective of rehabilitation and resettlement of chronically mentally ill patients discharged from Mental Hospital to the community. This day-night rehabilitation facility was started in 1971 and named Fountain House following its links with the Fountain House in New York. Fountain House moved to its present premises in 1976 and presently offers a wide range of community-based treatments for long-term mental health patients.⁵ Since its inception, it has continued to extend its services in the community & has successfully expanded its branches & now operates in three cities of Pakistan - Lahore, Sargodha, and Farooq Abad (Sheikhupura).



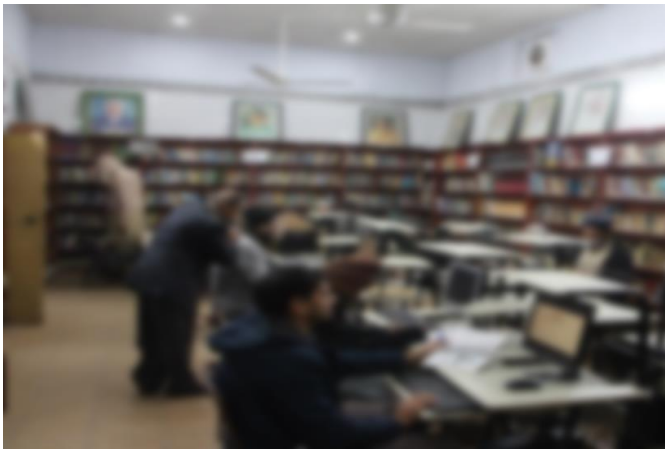
Fountain House Lahore

Delivery of Holistic Mental Health Care

Fountain House provides services to support individuals with mental health challenges, with its 700 in-patient beds offering residential care to female and male patients who need intensive treatment & rehabilitation. Services delivered by the outpatient department (OPD) are also salient features of the Fountain Houses in all three cities. These facilities offer wide-ranging care according to individual needs, follow-ups, and intensive short-term residential support, including consultations, psychological assessments, and counselling sessions. Moreover, the routine follow-up of patients to monitor their treatment adherence is a regular component of the services.



Music Therapy Unit



Reading Therapy Unit

Innovative Therapies in Mental Health

The allied therapies offered comprise various recovery-oriented programs, like occupation, sports & vocational therapies. Additionally, there is provision of music therapy. Spiritual therapy, reading therapy units with agro-based therapies at the Fountain House farm are also available.⁶ The drug abuse treatment unit at Lahore complements the facility with a state-of-the-art service for patients suffering from substance-use/drug abuse-related disorders. While promoting psychosocial rehabilitation Fountain House has started a day hospital to provide psychosocial support to its members for basic learning skills for living. In addition, there is also an outreach programme (ORP) that offers community-based, accessible, and supportive mental health services, and resources for those in need.

Specialised Care for Vulnerable Populations

The Institute for Disadvantaged Children is a day school for intellectually challenged children and adolescents and offers educational programmes leading to recovery and social integration back to the community. Fountain House Lahore has recently extended its services by establishing an Autism Assessment Centre to provide comprehensive diagnostic and therapeutic services for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These services have been extended to Zaidi House, which is a community-based facility and caters to children and adolescents suffering from psychiatric disorders.

Social Support and Economic Empowerment

The Fountain House is extending its support in many social care areas. A support system for patients' families and carers is available at this institution. Mental health experts share knowledge on different mental disorders and related issues with patients, families, and caregivers. Similarly, Fountain House initiated a poverty alleviation Program to support individuals with mental health issues through interest-free microfinance loans. This program has been established in

collaboration with Akhuwat, an NGO working to alleviate poverty in Pakistan through interest-free microfinance loans. With these loans, people with mental problems start their own businesses.⁷ Continuing work in other social care areas, the Fountain House Lahore has expanded its services and opened Compassion Homes at its Farooq Abad campus for adult females with intellectual disability. These homes provide long-term care and rehabilitation services to women who have lost their caregivers or are unable to receive adequate support.

In 2011, the Khwaja sira (Transgender) Support Programme was initiated at Fountain House Lahore in collaboration with Akhuwat Foundation with a vision of this community's respectable and equal social inclusion, along with its honourable economic empowerment. The primary goal is to build a network of support for the Khwaja sira community by overcoming long-standing discrimination against them via group meetings and building living skills among them. The most vulnerable transgenders are also identified and registered, and not only given different kinds of medical support, but also provided monthly funding for sustenance.



Stitching Unit



Khwaja sira Skill Training Program

Advancement of Research, Education and Training

The Pakistan Psychiatric Research Centre, a scientific component of Fountain House, Lahore, was established in 1982. It has assumed paramount importance in national and global research and has published more than 367 scientific publications based on national and international research conducted in collaboration & involvement of the Fountain House workforce. It has also emerged as a centre of excellence for organising educational activities, conferences, symposia, and other academic activities in different fields of mental health. Equally, Fountain House continues offering voluntary placements to students and trainees of psychiatry, psychology, and social work. Fountain House is well equipped with teaching & training facilities for post-graduate studies in the fields of mental health including psychiatry, psychology, and other related disciplines. We are pleased that arrangements are being made to get this institution approved by the College of Physicians & Surgeons Pakistan for FCPS & MCPS in Psychiatry and for DPM (Diploma in Psychological Medicine) and MD programmes with various universities.

A Vision of Accessibility and Hope

In summary, Fountain House, a pioneer facility in psychosocial treatment & rehabilitation, has continued with its services in three big cities of Pakistan since 1971. With its onsite and online services to a sizable population, Fountain House is making mental health facilities greatly accessible for people suffering from mental illnesses and their caregivers and others. Fountain House has continued with its remarkable programs for the last fifty-two years and has, indeed, made a visible difference by making mental health facilities free and affordable with its low-cost services in Pakistan.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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