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Press release

In a seminar on 'Mental health Act: England perspective and the scenario of Bangladesh', the speakers stressed on the need for a law on mental health and highlighted the problematic provisions in the existing draft Mental Health Act that requires reconsideration.

Today, on 19 April 2017, a seminar titled 'Mental Health Act; England perspective and the scenario of Bangladesh' was held at the Liberation War Museum, Shegun bagicha.

Barrister Najrul Khasru, a British-Bangladeshi Tribunal Judge from the UK, spoke at the seminar where he gave an overview of the current Mental Health System in England and the topics he covered included overall aspects of medical treatment of people with mental disorders, their rights under the law, treatment of persons with mentally disorders under the criminal justice system and the rules of mental health tribunals of England in the seminar. Additionally, he also gave an insight into the existing gaps in the current draft version of the Mental Health Act of Bangladesh.

Guest Speaker, Dr. Md Faruk Alam recapitulated the perspectives on the situation of mental health in Bangladesh which revealed data suggesting that almost 16% people from the total population are suffering by different types mental illness. That is to say, for almost 2.25 crores people only 300 hundred psychiatrists are allotted in Bangladesh, which is very inadequate in number. Moreover, among the 16%, only 10% are taking treatment for the mental illness or mental health problem. The rest of the 90% are being deprived of mental health treatment. He also mentioned that to ensure mental health service for all citizens, we should start taking initiatives from the grassroots level. Furthermore, the supply of essential medicines to all citizens should be ensured.

Adv. Khondoker Shahriar Shakir said that “The Lunacy Act 1912 from colonial times was directed towards the treatment of mental health patients. He observed that the current draft law should set out the rights of persons with mental health issues but unfortunately, the concept of rights is not present in the draft mental health law. Mental health professionals or community focused psychiatrist were also not addressed in the draft law. He concluded by saying that no substantial budgetary allocation has ever been made towards the mental health cause”.

Other participants at the seminar provided recommendations to take essential measures for raising awareness on mental health issues and expressed the



বাংলাদেশ লিগ্যাল এইড এন্ড সার্ভিসেস ট্রাস্ট (ব্লাস্ট) Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)

opinion that the mental health act should be passed with some much required amendments. .Participants noted that the current draft law does not address the need to maintain confidentiality of patient’s details and fails to set out the accountability of those liable for violating the human rights of persons with mental health disorders. The need to increase coordination between psychiatrists and therapists and other medical practitioners was also emphasized upon.

Sara Hossain, Honorary Executive Director, BLAST who chaired the seminar summarized the discussion points and stressed on the main comparisons between the English Mental Health System and the one in Bangladesh. She concluded by stressing on the need to think about the definition of ‘mental disorder’ and expressed the hope that there is still scope to dedicate some effort into making some favorable changes to the draft Act.

Advocate Md. Idrisur Rahman, Advocate Khurshid Alam Khan, Advocate Abu Obaidur Rahman, Advocate Ainanunnahar Siddiqua, Doctor Kamruzzaman Mozumder, Dr. Md. Tajul Islam, Different Development Organization representatives- Monira Rahman; Nasima Akter; Shamsin Ahmed were present at the seminar among others.

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