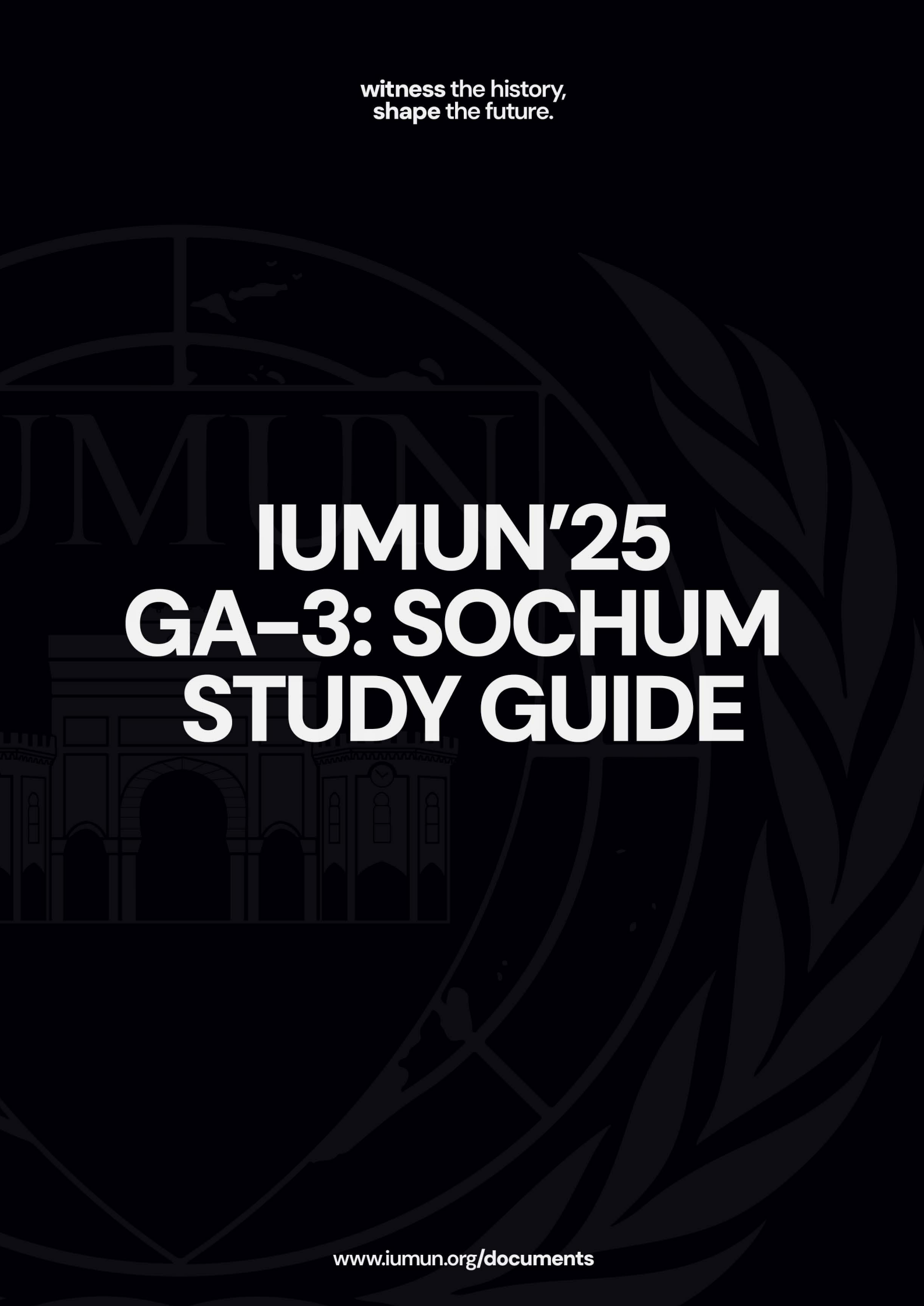witness the history,
shape the future.

IUMUN'25
GA–3: SOCHUM
STUDY GUIDE

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

It is my greatest privilege to address you all at the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) of IUMUN 2025. As Secretary-General of this year's conference, I barely have words to express how excited and proud I am to see so many great, passionate, and driven minds coming together in one location to tackle two urgent issues "The Unethical Use of AI in Creating Non-Consensual Explicit Content" and "Enhancing Access to Mental Health Services."

The the first agenda, the production of non-consensual explicit images and videos using artificial intelligence, addresses an unpleasant reality that most individuals are confronted with in our fast-changing digital age. It poses a threat to our perception of privacy, consent, and human dignity. It impacts real lives, silencing and shaming the victims for something they did not consent to. I want you all to consider this problem with sensitivity and compassion. Remember: each statistic is a human life behind it to be heard, seen, and spoken up for.

The second agenda broaches something routinely silenced—mental health care. Globally, millions remain not to have the support, access, and information they need regarding their mental health. Whatever through policy failure, resource limitation, or stigma, this is an area we must take heed to. In SOCHUM, you can think out of the box, be bold, and inclusive in the solutions you present. Think about those whose voices are being silenced by current systems. Be revolutionary. Present solutions that are as possible as they are empathetic.

I would also appreciate thanking Under-Secretary-General Fatma Betül Bulut and Academic Assistant Selinay Çetin, who have labored so diligently to create this study guide for this committee. Their tireless efforts, care, and attention to detail are evident on every page, and I have no doubt that it will be a beacon of guidance through your hearings. SOCHUM is an environment of thinking critically, intense

debate, and genuine collaboration. You are not here to debate—you are here to engage, learn, and be inspired.

On behalf of the Secretariat as a whole, I welcome you again. I look forward to seeing the exceptional work that you will produce in the coming days. Let us make this an experience to remember—collectively.

With best regards,

<div align="right">

Secretary–General

Öykü Taş

</div>

LETTER FROM THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the IUMUN'25! My name is Fatma Betül Bulut, as I write this letter I am reminded of my first IUMUN experience. It brings me such nostalgia because it was also SOCHUM. I had just finished my sophomore year in highschool, never visited any universities, very anxious since it was my first university MUN then it all vanished into thin air. After the first session I was in a place where I felt like I belonged. Now with our Academic Team's wits and loveliness as well as our Organisation Team's I am sure to see I belong in such a safe and sound place. I hope to see all you experience such a feeling since it led me studying in this school.

It is my honor to serve as your Under-Secretary-General for SOCHUM at IUMUN'25. This year, our committee will address two important topics:

Agenda Item 1: The Unethical Use of Artificial Intelligence to Generate Non-Consensual Explicit Content: This agenda addresses the growing crisis of AI-generated explicit content, particularly deepfake pornography affecting women worldwide. By 2024, this issue has led to severe mental health consequences and regulatory challenges across the globe.

Agenda Item 2: Enhancing Accessibility to Mental Healthcare: Mental health is a human right, yet financial barriers, stigma, and inadequate support prevent many from accessing essential care. Our committee will work to establish a universal framework ensuring equitable mental health care for all.

I've seen first-time delegates become confident speakers, and others stay up researching countries they'd never heard of before. If you're nervous or unsure, that's okay. All you need to do is show up, listen, learn, and try.

If you have questions, want help, or just want to say hi before the conference, feel free to reach out. Here's my email: acebetulaceae@gmail.com

Warmest regards,

Under-Secretary-General

Fatma Betül Bulut

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION OF SOCHUM

The United Nations General Assembly Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee) has played a crucial role in addressing global social and human rights issues since 1947. As the world evolves, SOCHUM continues to adapt, tackling challenges like human rights violations, migration crises, post-conflict recovery, and the growing influence of technology on society. By collaborating with UN agencies and international partners, the committee works to protect fundamental freedoms, promote social development, and foster cultural understanding worldwide.

2. INTRODUCTION OF THE AGENDA ITEM 1: THE UNETHICAL USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO GENERATE NON-CONSENSUAL EXPLICIT CONTENT

During the deliberation of the first agenda item, delegates will investigate and find solutions to a latest raising problem: explicit AI contents. We can specify these problems with many examples but one of them is generating a serious problem especially between women: Deepfake pornographies. Even though the beginning of the cases isn't so close, in 2024 it led to a crisis in many parts of the world. This new wave of AI-manipulated media can lead to severe mental health consequences, thus; SOCHUM committee will indulge in the regulatory ways of this issue and the ways to deal with its effects on human mental health.

3. TERMINOLOGY

https://www.istockphoto.com/tr/foto%C4%9Fraf/deepfake-ai-disinformation-fake-news-newspaper-on-mobile-tablet-screen-gm1744371258-543120339

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence refers to computer systems that are able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as understanding speech, recognizing images, or making decisions.

Deepfake

Deepfakes are videos, audio, or images that have been digitally manipulated using AI to make it appear as though someone said or did something they never actually did. They are often very realistic and difficult to detect.

Non-Consensual Content

This refers to any image, video, or audio shared or created without the permission of the person involved. This is especially harmful when it includes private or explicit content.

Digital Consent

Digital consent means someone's clear agreement to allow their personal image, voice, or data to be used online or in digital media.

Generative Adversarial Network (GAN)

A GAN is a type of AI that creates realistic fake content. It works by having two computer models compete—one creates fake content, and the other tries to spot it—improving quality over time.

Right to Privacy

The right to privacy is a human right that protects individuals from their personal

information being shared without permission. This includes control over how your image or voice is used.

Misinformation

False or misleading information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to deceive. Deepfakes are often used to create and spread misinformation.

Freedom of Expression

The right of individuals to share their opinions and ideas freely. However, this right must be balanced with the protection of others' rights and dignity, especially in the digital world.

Vishing

Short for "voice phishing," vishing is a scam in which criminals use AI to fake someone's voice and trick people into giving away money or private information.

Regulation

Regulation refers to creating rules or laws that allow the use of certain technologies—like AI-generated content or deepfakes—but with specific limitations. These rules might include requiring consent before using someone's image or voice, labeling content as AI-generated, or punishing those who misuse the technology.

Example: A country allows deepfakes for movies and entertainment but bans their use in politics or pornography without permission.

Prohibition

Prohibition means completely banning the use or production of a certain type of AI technology, such as deepfakes, in specific areas or altogether. This is often proposed when a technology is considered too dangerous or harmful to control effectively.

Example: A country passes a law that makes it illegal to create any deepfake video of a real person without government approval or the person's consent.

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1. Rise of AI and Deepfakes

The early 2010s marked a remarkable period for Artificial Intelligence, particularly generative modeling. A big milestone came in 2014 when Ian Goodfellow and his team introduced Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). This system paired two neural networks: one created realistic synthetic images while the other distinguished real from fake. GANs produced lifelike images, paving the way for what we now know as 'deepfakes'. Their emergence has influenced research in synthetic media and changed how unsupervised learning works. Researchers found ways to create realistic visuals without the need for extensive data collection and manual editing, using automated deep learning. Unfortunately, this ease of creation has led to misuse of deepfake technology, particularly in non-consensual adult content. What started as a tech novelty has now become part of digital culture, with studies highlighting its impact on politics, celebrities, and personal privacy. This raises serious ethical and legal issues around consent and privacy. As deepfakes spread throughout various aspects of life, the discussions from this era are still crucial for addressing the new challenges in our digital world. GANs from 2014 truly reshaped the landscape of AI, bringing both advancements and complex ethical dilemmas.

https://pg-p.ctme.caltech.edu/blog/ai-ml/what-is-generative-adversarial-network-types

4.2. Early Instances of AI-Generated Nonconsensual Explicit Content

Between 2017 and 2018, the rise of non-consensual explicit content started with the emergence of Deepfake technology. This trend of creating fake intimate images of women sparked serious ethical and legal concerns. A Reddit user called 'Deepfakes' began posting videos that used machine learning to put the faces of

celebrities onto the bodies of porn actresses by late 2017. These realistic videos quickly gained popularity and formed a subreddit where users could share and request such content. The trend spread beyond Reddit, with 4chan also hosting similar materials. Many of these deepfakes featured women's images taken from public sources without their consent.

The ethical issues around these manipulated images are serious. Artificial Intellegience has made it easier to create and share non-consensual sexual content, particularly harming women. Making such explicit content without consent violates privacy and bodily autonomy, worsening existing gender-related harm online. As public awareness grew, Reddit banned the deepfakes subreddit and stopped the distribution of AI-generated porn without consent. They aimed to hold illegal content, but due to the internet's decentralized nature, such material moved to other sites, showing the challenges of regulating deepfake pornography. This situation emphasizes the urgent need for legal protections against the misuse of artificial intelligence in creating non-consensual images. It calls for action from policymakers and technologists to protect individuals' rights in the digital world.

4.3.   Global Spread of DeepFake

Deepfake technology underwent a dramatic evolution in 2019–2020 from a specialized research tool to a phenomenon that began to impact all areas of society. It was initially associated with non-consensual pornography, but artificial media soon became an effective tool for the spread of misinformation, with manipulated videos and audio files starting to appear in political spheres. Selling convincing forgeries of public officials was raising alarm about the risk of tricking voters and eroding trust in democratic institutions. Even if the fakes were disproven, the mere fact that they had been manufactured created suspicions about the authenticity of digital information and undermined the foundations of public debate.

Meanwhile, all this was occurring, audio deepfake technology improved to the point where it was now feasible for criminals to record the voices of high-level managers. In one highly publicized case, scammers successfully cloned the voice of a senior executive so realistically that they tricked a CEO into authorizing a large cash transfer. It was the beginning of a larger risk in which voice cloning, or "vishing," presented a new battlefield for financial fraud, compelling banks to rethink traditional methods of authentication and safeguarding. The rapid development of technology in creating realistic images, videos, and sound made it possible to lose confidence in all digital media. As it became increasingly difficult to separate real content from sophisticated forgeries, there was a situation in which the power to generate plausible authentic deepfakes undermines public trust, also known as the "liar's dividend.". This blanket cynicism about what is real has the potential to destabilize not only media institutions but democratic processes as well, with citizens incapable of identifying truth in a world where even established sources are called into question.

In the Middle East, deepfakes have been used to manipulate political leaders, fueling already tense tensions. Stereotype-videos purporting that politicians made inflammatory speeches they never made have been circulating online, fanning anger and threatening diplomatic relationships. The volatile political climate of the region, coupled with its history of media manipulation, has made it most vulnerable to the destabilizing influence of fake media. Deepfakes have invaded political politics and election security in Europe. The Slovak parliamentary elections were one of the most notable events, as a deepfake video claiming election manipulation went viral, further dividing society and strengthening mistrust of democratic institutions. Since then, the European Union has opened the door to discussing regulatory actions to stop the malicious use of deepfakes. As deepfakes of political candidates went unchecked online during the 2020 presidential elections, election security concerns increased in North America,

which includes the United States. Whether or not they were proven false, these falsehoods fuelled growing polarisation and mistrust of political institutions. Deepfake technology has also been used outside of politics in financial scams, where AI-generated voice clones of executives have been used to approve fraudulent transactions, resulting in enormous financial losses.

In Africa, where disinformation and online manipulation have already been gigantic problems, deepfakes have added another dimension of depth to political instability. Before the 2020 election cycle, digital rights organizations warned that AI-generated deepfakes could be used to produce hyper-realistic but fake videos of political figures, further destabilizing electoral processes. The potential for deepfakes to be deployed to delegitimize opposition voices or authorize state crackdowns on political opposition remains a cause for concern about their misuse. Latin America, while not yet experiencing high-profile deepfake incidents, is most vulnerable to the risk because of existing networks of disinformation and political tensions. AI-generated content would be readily available to influence public opinion or invalidate political opponents, and inadequate legal frameworks and technological defenses ensure it would prove difficult to oppose such incitement.

In addition, even in nations such as Japan and South Korea, deepfakes have contributed to existing issues regarding privacy and unwarranted video. In cultures where certain privacy invasions have been tolerated to a certain degree, misuse of deepfake technology to fabricate sexually explicit content against someone's will has introduced a new kind of personal and social harm. Not only are reputations and emotional health under threat, but the capacity to have an unfamiliar system of law are threatened by victims. These changed barriers have unleashed an international need for a combined response. Ever more, it is recognized that protecting democratic institutions, financial structures, and the privacy of people now requires integrated legal, technical, and education

responses. Governments, technology companies, and global institutions are already discussing how to implement effective countermeasures, ranging from new legislation and increased security measures to public information campaigns aimed at improving digital literacy. Collective experience of the time has reaffirmed that deepfakes are no innovation but a real menace that knows no boundaries across countries unless the laws that should be implemented within the change.

5.   MAJOR ISSUES AND ETHICAL USE DEBATES

5.1.   Ethical Implications: Consent and Privacy

In a number of countries consent is a must for taking a photo or filming a video, not to mention publishing it and/or using it commercially, even if the person is in a public place. If we look at South Korea, a country most affected by illegal actions with AI, according to the Article 751 of the Civil Act, it is illegal to take a photograph of a person who is subjected to "portrait rights, unless it requires permission. South Korea's portrait rights are too widely recognized compared to other countries. Because of this, it is common for South Korean media reports to blur people's faces in press photos, even if there is no problem of defamation. In contrast, most countries regard blur as a mislead of the truth. Also, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Consent means a conscious, voluntary agreement, free from force, fraud, misrepresentation, or coercion, to have intimate images or videos of you shared. In addition, according to Article 12 of the Human Rights Declaration, no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. A global act shows us the importance of respecting the consent rights and privacy. Ethical look at activities without consent:

In 2018 and 2020, the UNSR on VAW observed that the "publication or posting online without the consent of intimate photographs or photoshopped images that are sexualised" violates the subject's rights to privacy, to dignity, and to live a life free from violence. Foundational ethics of sharing needs to be a concern and respect for people's right to privacy. The collection, processing, storage, and sharing of data, even in data commons, might infringe data subjects' privacy. The more challenging part of this may be to consider the particular practice in relation to which understanding of privacy and which understanding of personal information is at play. Also revenge porn that was created with AI is morally

problematic irrespective of the issue of digital theft, as it involves a violation of the privacy and dignity of victims. It is also morally problematic irrespective of whatever broader societal harms may contribute to making pornography, in general, morally bad. To ensure that pornographic content is viewed ethically, it is essential to respect the conditions of the performer's consent.

The weaponization of generative AI technology to expose people's intimacy presents a real and pressing problem. However, specific proposals to counter this form of abuse are currently lacking. Much of the focus on deep fakes concerns their potential to fuel electoral misinformation and harm the creative industry. This skews the debate, neglecting the immense and ongoing harms inflicted by NCID. Measures like labelling and watermarking, touted as policy responses to protect against synthetic media misinformation, for example, are wholly inadequate to protect individuals – often women and girls – whose privacy is exploited, in particular when content is widely shared online.

Adult content policies are ambiguous, potentially creating loopholes and hindering the protection of victims and survivors.

5.2. Gender and Power Dynamics

For years, women have faced sexual harassment online. And with the rise of artificial intelligence, it's only getting worse. Deepfakes, which use A.I. to create manipulated, but hyper-realistic images and videos of real people in fake situations, are routinely used against women. A 2019 study revealed that a staggering 96 percent of all deepfake videos were nonconsensual pornography. From the United States to Italy, Britain, and Pakistan, female politicians are increasingly becoming victims of AI-generated deepfake pornography or sexualised images, in a troubling trend that researchers say threatens women's participation in public life.The intimate imagery is often weaponised to tarnish the

reputation of women in the public sphere, jeopardising their careers, undermining public trust, and threatening national security by creating conditions for blackmail or harassment, researchers say. While high-profile politicians and celebrities, including singer Taylor Swift, have been victims of deepfake porn, experts say women not in the public eye are equally vulnerable. So deepfakes are used mostly to attack, harass and harm women. Tech giants such as Google have taken some action to date. Updated telecom regulations can play a part. But Canada also needs urgent changes in its legal and regulatory frameworks to offer remedies for those already affected and protection against future abuses. It can be seen as a patriarchal action of the new generation. Since ancient times men have been likely to show their power on women with many activities. And sexual action of technological revolution is deep fake porns.

5.3.   The Debate Over Freedom of Expression vs. Protection of Individual Rights

One of the most complicated parts of the deepfake conversation is finding a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of individual rights. While freedom of expression is a fundamental right recognized globally, such as in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is not absolute. In cases where synthetic media is used harmfully and without consent, the boundaries of expression begin to blur with clear violations of personal dignity.

Supporters of unrestricted expression emphasize that overly harsh regulation of AI-generated content could lead to censorship and place limitations on satire, artistic experimentation, or even political commentary. Deepfake technology has occasionally been used in films or comedy to explore alternate realities or critique public figures in creative ways. Overregulating these forms may hinder public dialogue and innovation in media.

On the other hand, critics underline the significant harm that can result when deepfakes are used for non-consensual or malicious purposes, such as explicit content or character defamation. These practices undermine an individual's autonomy, mental well-being, and reputation. Especially when women are targeted, the impact can be long-lasting, both psychologically and socially. In these cases, freedom of expression cannot serve as justification for content that inflicts real harm.

Some legal scholars and policymakers suggest adopting a harm-based framework, one that evaluates digital content based on its real-world impact rather than its artistic intent alone. Others advocate for clearer legal definitions and collaborative international legislation that protects public dialogue while prioritizing personal safety and privacy.

Overall, maintaining both individual dignity and open communication in the digital age depends on precise legal boundaries and ethical responsibility in technological development.

6. SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS

6.1. Cultural Debates: Balancing Tradition, Modernity and Human Rights

The global spread of AI-generated non-consensual explicit content has not only raised technical and legal concerns but also created significant societal and cultural debates. One of the key discussions centers around how to balance respect for cultural traditions with the need to protect modern human rights, especially when it comes to privacy, consent, and personal dignity.

Around the world, traditions shape the way people understand privacy, gender roles, and public morality. In some cultures, for example, conversations about sexual content even if it's non-consensual or manipulated are still heavily stigmatized. This unmeaningful shyness to talking about sexual content unfortunately leads to victims being blamed or shamed rather than supported, making it much harder for them to speak up or seek help. Again unfortunately, many of these cultural attitudes are rooted in deep-set gender norms, where women are expected to uphold family or societal "honor," regardless of whether they were victims of digital harm which creates a situation where the technology is new, but the judgment and control over women's bodies are not.

On the other bright side, in some countries where individual rights are more strongly emphasized, the focus often shifts to personal freedom, digital safety, and mental well-being. However, even on this side, there are tensions. Some argue that regulating and implementing laws on deepfake content too strictly might limit freedom of expression or artistic creativity. So now, the debate isn't just about protecting people, it's also about figuring out where to draw the line between expression and harm.

Another important point is that these cultural debates don't happen in isolation. The internet is global, and deepfake content can spread across borders in seconds. That means a video created in one country can have harmful effects on someone in another, with completely different cultural rules which raises the question of how to make international regulations that respect local customs but still defend basic human rights. It's especially and unfortunately complicated in places where international human rights law is sometimes seen as Western-centered or disconnected from local realities.

What makes things even more complex is how power and gender come into play. Studies show that most of the victims of non-consensual deepfakes are women, which shows us that this isn't just about new tech, it's about old inequalities being repackaged in digital form. These videos are often used to humiliate, silence, or control women, especially those in public or political roles, showing that deepfakes aren't just a privacy issue they're also a gendered form of digital violence.

To respond to these challenges, it's not enough to rely only on law or tech solutions. There needs to be a wider cultural shift: one that includes education, open dialogue, and more awareness about digital rights. Respecting tradition doesn't mean ignoring harm. The goal should be to evolve cultural values in a way that protects people in today's digital world, while still being mindful of local perspectives.

7.   POSITIONS OF RELEVANT STATES

United States

In May 2025, the U.S. passed a new law called the Take It Down Act, which has bipartisan support. This law targets the sharing of intimate images that aren't shared with permission, including deepfakes created by artificial intelligence. If someone reports this kind of content, online platforms are required to take it down within 48 hours. If they don't comply, they could face jail time of up to three years. The Federal Trade Commission is in charge of making sure this law is enforced effectively. While a lot of people think this law is a good idea, some digital rights groups are a bit worried. They're concerned that it might go too far and could have negative consequences for free speech. It's a tricky situation where we want to protect people's privacy and safety online, but at the same time, we don't want to limit the freedom to express ideas and opinions. It's an ongoing conversation about striking the right balance between keeping everyone safe and ensuring that everyone can speak freely.

China

China has strict rules for the internet, especially regarding sharing content. The Cyberspace Administration of China enforces a rule that requires AI-generated content to be clearly labeled. This is meant to help prevent misinformation and ensure it aligns with "core socialist values." AI companies also have a big job. They need to check their content to ensure it isn't harmful or misleading. While these rules aim to prevent misuse, some people criticize them, saying they give the government too much control over information and silence opposing views. This has sparked ongoing discussions about safety versus free speech.

United Kingdom

The UK is addressing a major issue with the Online Safety Act of 2023, making it illegal to share deepfake porn without the person's consent. This is an important step to protect people from harmful tech misuse. In 2024, they updated the law to include the production of such content, underlining their commitment to combat AI-related issues. United Kingdom, continuously adjusting their laws to match new tech developments while also safeguarding individual rights. It's a tough balance, but they're dedicated to ensuring everyone feels safe in this fast-changing tech landscape.

India

India doesn't yet have laws specifically for AI-generated explicit content that wasn't agreed to. But some existing laws like the Information Technology Act and parts of the Indian Penal Code are used to deal with these problems. A new Digital India Act is in the works, which should include rules about AI and deepfakes, showing that the country is moving toward better regulation. There are still issues with enforcing these laws and making the public aware, but India is starting to see the importance of having focused laws in this area.

Brazil

Brazil is starting to talk seriously about handling AI-generated content, focusing on the ethical issues and risks involved. Right now, there aren't specific laws for deepfake porn, but privacy and defamation laws could help when explicit content is made without consent. It's great to see Brazil joining the global talks as everyone looks for ways to prevent AI misuse. This topic is tricky, but the country shows it's aware of the risks while wanting to promote responsible use of this tech. As more people and groups address this issue, Brazil needs to find its place in the discussion and help set standards that protect individuals and encourage

innovation. Overall, it's a complex area, and Brazil's involvement highlights the growing concern about these issues worldwide.

8. QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

- How can member states develop and strengthen international legal frameworks to prevent the creation and distribution of AI-generated non-consensual explicit content, while respecting national sovereignty and cultural differences?

- What measures can be implemented to ensure that AI development is conducted ethically and with built-in safeguards against misuse, particularly regarding consent and privacy violations?

- How might member states collaborate to create systems for identifying, tracking, and removing non-consensual AI-generated explicit content from the internet, while balancing freedom of expression and data protection laws?

- In what ways can educational initiatives and digital literacy campaigns be used to raise public awareness about the dangers of deepfakes and their psychological, social, and legal impacts—especially on marginalized groups like women and youth

- What role should private sector technology companies play in regulating and moderating the use of AI on their platforms, and how can SOCHUM encourage accountability across these platforms globally?

- How can the rights of victims be better protected through access to justice, legal recourse, and psychological support in cases of AI-generated non-consensual explicit content?

- Is there a need for the creation of an international AI ethics charter or treaty under the UN that addresses human rights implications of emerging technologies, and if so, what core principles should it include?

9. FURTHER READING

You can focus on page 6 to 18 if you would like to read more upon the topic:

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380455.locale=en

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11. INTRODUCTION OF AGENDA ITEM 2: ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY TO MENTAL HEALTHCARE

The next agenda item, enhancing accessibility to mental healthcare, focuses on a fundamental truth: mental health is a human right. Yet, for many people, accessing proper mental health care remains a challenge. Financial barriers, societal stigma, and inadequate governmental support prevent individuals from receiving essential care. Concerns over mental health medication, rising suicide rates, and the need for effective group therapy programs highlight the urgency of comprehensive policies. Therefore, the committee will engage in discussions to establish a universal framework ensuring equitable access to mental health care for all.

12. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

12.1. Evolution of Mental Healthcare Policies

Mental healthcare policies have changed a lot over time, reflecting how people think about mental health, medical improvements, and new laws. Back in the early 1800s, the idea of "mental hygiene" came about, which focused on keeping our minds healthy through education and community support. The mid-1900s saw a big change with the National Mental Health Act of 1946. This law set up the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and pushed for better mental health research and services at the national level. Then, in 1963, the Community Mental Health Act tried to move away from institutional care by funding community centers and promoting outpatient services instead of long stays in hospitals. Later on, the Mental Health Systems Act in 1980 aimed to boost community mental health services, and the Mental Health Parity Act in 1996 made sure that mental health and physical health conditions got equal insurance coverage. Even with all these changes, there were still issues. That's why the Affordable Care Act in 2010 worked to expand mental health coverage and integrate services better. Most recently, in 2024, new federal rules have come out to make mental health care more accessible, ensuring fair insurance coverage and tackling ongoing barriers. These changes show that more people recognize how important mental health is and are working hard to improve access and quality of care.

12.2. Mental Healthcare Challenges in Each Continent

Mental health issues show up differently all over the world, shaped by things like culture, economy, and healthcare systems.

In Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, there aren't enough mental health resources or trained professionals. Many people also feel ashamed about mental illness, which stops them from getting help. There are efforts to include mental

health services in regular healthcare and train community health workers to fill gaps.

In Asia, stigma around mental health is a big problem, leading to fewer people reporting issues and getting treatment. With cities growing fast and students facing heavy academic pressure, mental health problems among young people are on the rise. There are new programs to spread awareness and make it easier to get care.

Europe has seen mental health issues worsen due to COVID-19, especially among healthcare workers facing anxiety and burnout. Even though many European countries have solid healthcare systems, some people still struggle to access care because of stigma and other barriers.

In North America, particularly the U.S., there are clear gaps in mental health care, with access varying widely by region and community. Social and economic factors, along with race and insurance status, play a big role in the quality of mental health services people can get.

In South America, countries struggle to provide good mental health care because of limited resources. Stigma continues to be a major hurdle, and there's a real need for care that respects local cultures.

In Oceania, particularly in Pacific Island nations, mental health services are often hard to come by, and cultural beliefs can discourage people from seeking help. Issues like climate change and natural disasters add extra stress, affecting the mental well-being of communities.

13.   MAJOR BARRIERS TO MENTAL HEALTHCARE ACCESSIBILITY

13.1.   Financial Barriers

A big reason people can't get the mental healthcare they need is money. We often talk about how important mental health is, but getting a therapist, a diagnosis, or meds can cost a lot. This is a problem everywhere, whether in poorer countries or richer ones. In many low and middle-income countries, people usually have to pay for mental health services themselves because it's not covered by insurance. Even in wealthier places like the U.S., there are still huge gaps. Some folks have no insurance, while others have plans that don't cover enough. This often leaves them facing high out-of-pocket costs or skipping care altogether.

It's also about hidden expenses like taking time off work for appointments, paying for transportation to the nearest clinic (which can be far away in rural areas), or needing a solid internet connection for online therapy. For families who are already struggling, these extra costs make it even tougher to get mental healthcare. Many people end up waiting too long for help or not getting it at all. And the longer they wait, the worse their situation can become. Untreated mental health issues can lead to serious problems like losing a job, becoming homeless, or even worse. Plus, a lot of governments don't put enough money into public mental health services, which means fewer options for those who need help the most. Some places are attempting to improve this by including mental health in basic health coverage or providing support for those who can't afford care. But overall, financial barriers remain a huge obstacle. If we want mental healthcare to be available for everyone, addressing these money issues needs to be a top priority.

13.2. Social Stigma

Social stigma is one of the biggest obstacles people face when it comes to getting help for their mental health. Even though awareness about mental health is increasing, a lot of people still feel judged, excluded, or misunderstood when they try to speak up or ask for support. This fear of being seen differently often keeps people from reaching out even when they really need help.

A lot of this stigma comes from stereotypes and outdated beliefs. Mental health conditions are sometimes seen as a sign of weakness or failure, instead of what they really are real health issues that deserve care and compassion. These harmful views can lead to people being left out at school, work, or even by their own communities. Over time, this can cause someone to hide what they're going through or avoid treatment until things get worse. Stigma isn't always something that comes from others, it can also be something people turn inward. This is called internalized stigma, and it can be just as damaging. When people start to believe the negative things, they hear about mental illness, they may feel ashamed or blame themselves. That makes it even harder to ask for help and can seriously affect their self-esteem and overall well-being. Some groups feel the impact of stigma even more strongly. Teenagers, LGBTQ+ individuals, refugees, and people from minority backgrounds often deal with multiple kinds of discrimination at once. For them, stigma around mental health is just one part of a larger struggle, which makes it even harder to access the support they need.

Luckily, there are many efforts around the world to break this cycle. Campaigns that raise awareness, mental health education in schools, and honest stories in the media all help challenge stigma and encourage open conversations. Peer support groups and community programs are also really powerful; they give people safe spaces to talk and feel less alone. And when mental health care is made part of everyday health services, it helps make treatment feel more normal and accepted. At the end of the day, fighting stigma is about changing the way we think and talk

about mental health. If we don't address it, even the best healthcare systems can fall short. Everyone deserves to feel safe and supported when they ask for help, no exceptions.

13.3.   Governmental Institutional Gaps

Even though people are starting to pay more attention to mental health, many governments still struggle to set up effective systems for providing care. One big problem is that responsibility for mental health services is split among local, regional, and national levels. This causes confusion, wasted efforts, and, most importantly, gaps in services, especially for vulnerable groups like those in rural areas, young people, and marginalized communities.

In lots of places, mental health just doesn't get enough funding from national health budgets. It gets a small share, even with the rising need for services. Mental health is often an afterthought when it comes to making policies and allocating funds. This lack of investment makes it hard to hire skilled staff, create community mental health centers, and run long-term programs that suit different cultures.

The laws and regulations around mental health also show major shortcomings. In some areas, outdated laws treat mental illness mainly as a safety issue instead of a health one. These legal frameworks usually don't clarify how to protect patients' rights, ensure consent, or guarantee equal insurance coverage for mental and physical health. This means people face not only stigma but also red tape that can keep them from getting the care they need.

Another key challenge is the poor link between mental health services and primary care. While many governments say they support universal health coverage, family doctors often don't have the time or training to handle mental health issues in their everyday practice. Without good referral systems and follow-ups, early warning signs can get ignored, leading to bigger problems down the line, which ends up overloading emergency services and psychiatric hospitals.

What we really need is a change toward a more inclusive approach to governance, where mental health isn't just part of health departments but is also included in education, housing, work, and justice sectors. This needs a long-term commitment from politicians, better teamwork among agencies, and real involvement from communities. Governments should not just throw money at the issue but work on building strong systems that can adapt to the needs of the public and tackle the challenges of mental health for future generations.

13.4. Limited Availability of Mental Healthcare Professionals

A major reason people struggle to get help for their mental health is the shortage of professionals. Imagine finally deciding to reach out for support, only to be faced with months of waiting for an appointment. It's really frustrating and can make people give up on seeking help altogether.

In many countries, especially those with limited resources, there are few psychiatrists, psychologists, or counselors available. Even in places with better healthcare systems, small towns and rural areas often lack mental health providers. That can force people to travel long distances, which takes time and money they might not have. In some areas, there simply aren't enough professionals to meet the needs of the population. On top of that, many mental health workers are overloaded with too many patients. This can lower the quality of care and the individual attention someone receives. Long wait times are especially hard on those facing crises or needing urgent help.

The whole situation shows that mental healthcare isn't prioritized the same way as physical health. There aren't enough training programs or well-paying jobs in this field, which discourages students from entering it. Even trained professionals may leave because the job can be stressful and underfunded. To improve access to care, we need to invest more in mental health education and professional training. Governments should support programs that help train more people and

encourage them to work in areas that really need help. Using digital tools and telehealth can also reach more folks, especially where local professionals are scarce.

13.5.   Challenges in Medication and Treatment Access

One major problem with mental health care is that when people finally decide to ask for help, it can be hard to get treated or find the right medication. It's not just about visiting a doctor; it's also about being able to pay for the meds, finding the ones that work, and sticking with a treatment plan. In many places, especially in low-income countries, basic mental health medications can be hard to find. Even in countries with good healthcare systems, some meds are expensive or not covered by insurance. This makes it tough for people who need to stay on their medications for a long time. On top of that, some doctors might not have the right training in mental health, which can result in folks getting wrong prescriptions or experiencing too many side effects, leading them to stop taking their meds altogether. Another challenge is keeping up with treatment if you don't live near a clinic or hospital. Therapy and check-ups take time and money, not to mention transportation. For people juggling jobs, school, or family, managing all this can be tough. Plus, language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, or poor service might stop people from seeking help again. Digital mental health tools like apps or online therapy are trying to help, but not everyone has internet access or knows how to use these tools. While some of these resources can be helpful, they aren't a full solution yet. In the end, mental health treatment needs to be more affordable and easier to access, and people need clearer information about it. Otherwise, even when someone reaches out for help, they might not get the treatment that could really change their life.

14.   CURRENT GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH TRENDS AND ISSUES

14.1.   The Rise in Suicide Rates and Psychological Distress

Recently, we've been seeing a rise in suicide rates and mental health issues around the globe. It's not just limited to one area or group—it's happening everywhere, especially after COVID-19. Many people are feeling more anxious, hopeless, and emotionally drained, and sadly, some see ending their lives as the only escape. One major factor is how isolated life has become. Social media, financial stress, school demands, and job worries can make individuals feel like they're failing, even if that's not the case. When people feel trapped and like no one gets them, their mental health can really take a hit. This is especially true for young people, who often find it tough to reach out for help because they worry about being judged. Getting mental health support is tricky too. Services can be hard to access or too pricey, so even if someone is looking for help, they might not find it. This adds to their sense of helplessness. Some may not even realize they're in a crisis until things get bad. There's still a stigma around mental health, leading many to suffer in silence. While governments and organizations are working on raising awareness and offering things like crisis hotlines and school support, it just isn't enough right now. What people truly need is a system where mental health care feels as normal and accessible as visiting a regular doctor. If we don't make these changes soon, we risk losing more lives to an issue that can often be prevented with proper support.

https://www.statista.com/chart/15390/global-suicide-rates/

14.2.   The Role of Technology in Expanding Mental Healthcare Access

Lately, technology has really changed how people get help for mental health. Especially after COVID-19, things like online therapy, mental health apps, and AI chat tools have become more popular. It's not just about being easy to use for

folks in remote areas or those on a tight budget, these tools can be their only option.

One of the main ways technology makes a difference is through teletherapy. This simply means getting therapy online, whether it's through video calls or texting. Platforms like BetterHelp and Talkspace let people chat with licensed therapists from the comfort of their home. This access is really important, especially for those in rural areas or students who can't afford in-person therapy. Mental health apps are also gaining popularity. Apps like Headspace, Calm, and Woebot provide guided meditation, mood tracking, and even AI support for times of stress or anxiety. They don't replace therapy, but they can be helpful for people coping between sessions or when they can't see a professional right away. Meaning, it's not all smooth sailing. Not everyone has internet access or feels comfortable discussing sensitive issues on a screen. There are privacy issues, and not all apps are backed by professionals. So, while tech has its benefits, it's important for it to fit into a larger plan that emphasizes quality, safety, and real human care.

14.3.   The Importance of Community and Group Therapy Programs

When it comes to mental health, realizing you're not alone can really make a difference. That's why community and group therapy programs are so important. A lot of people think they have to face their problems by themselves, but being in a group lets them share their experiences and see that others are going through similar things. It builds a support network that can make someone feel more empowered. Group therapy isn't just about chatting, either. These programs teach people how to manage stress, deal with emotions, and improve their relationships. It's different from one-on-one therapy because it creates a space where everyone learns from each other. Plus, for those who can't afford private sessions or live in places with few therapists, group therapy offers a more affordable option. Community programs are also beneficial since they often cater to local needs. In some areas, community centers may run sessions for kids battling anxiety or

trauma, while others might focus on helping refugees or people overcoming addiction. These programs can include support groups, workshops, or even art and movement sessions—it really depends on what works for that community. These initiatives don't just help individuals; they also strengthen communities. When we treat mental health as a shared concern, it helps lessen the stigma around it. So, if we want more people to access mental healthcare, building strong community and group support systems should be a priority.

15. POSITIONS OF RELEVANT STATES

Sweden

Sweden is a great example of a country that prioritizes mental healthcare. Thanks to its universal healthcare system, most mental health services are provided by the government, and family doctors usually handle early mental health issues. The Swedish government is working to better support young people, especially by focusing on mental health services in schools and local clinics. Still, people in rural areas face challenges, like long wait times and fewer specialists. Sweden is expected to back global efforts that push for better public mental health services, early intervention, and teamwork across different sectors.

Canada

Canada has really stepped up its focus on mental health, especially after the pandemic. They're working to make mental health services part of the overall healthcare system. One way they're doing this is by using telehealth, so people can get help from home. There are also community programs to make these services more accessible. In some provinces, therapy can even be funded by the government or offered through local programs. This is a big help for those who can't afford it. But access varies depending on where you live, particularly for Indigenous peoples, refugees, and young adults, who often struggle to get support. Canada wants to ensure mental health resources are available for everyone, combining community options with new tech. While there's progress, more needs to be done to guarantee equal access for all, no matter their background or location.

India

India is working on improving mental health care, particularly with the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017, which recognized mental health as a right. But there's a

huge gap in treatment, about 80% of those with mental health issues aren't getting the help they need. There also aren't enough professionals, especially in rural areas. Stigma around mental illness is still a big issue, leading many to seek informal or traditional care instead of going to clinics. While India might look into affordable solutions like community programs and digital resources, it may be hesitant to respond to outside pressure to boost public spending on mental health.

United States

In the United States, there are some decent options for mental health care, but they mainly benefit those who can pay for it, which is not a lot at all. The healthcare system relies heavily on private insurance, and despite laws requiring equal treatment for mental and physical health, that doesn't always happen. Over 75% of counties lack professionals who can prescribe mental health medication, which is a big issue for people in rural areas, those without insurance, and often overlooked communities. The focus tends to be on new technologies and short-term fixes instead of pushing for a public healthcare system. When discussing healthcare with other countries, the U.S. typically leans towards tech-driven solutions rather than universal health care.

Nigeria

Nigeria really needs to improve its mental health care. There's a lack of trained professionals, and most services are only in big cities, which pushes many people to religious leaders or traditional healers. The stigma about seeing a psychiatrist makes it even harder, as there's a lot of fear of being judged. On the bright side, projects like HAPPINESS are working to make mental health support more accessible. They're teaming up with general hospitals and training nurses to provide better care to people who usually don't get it. Nigeria is open to international funding and culturally appropriate solutions, but there are still some

infrastructure and policy issues. There is hope for better mental health care, especially with HAPPINESS and other programs working together.

16.   QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

- How can member states work together to strengthen international health frameworks that prioritize equitable access to mental healthcare, particularly in regions facing financial and infrastructure limitations?

- What strategies can be implemented to combat the stigma surrounding mental illness through national and international education campaigns, especially targeting youth, marginalized communities, and rural populations?

- In what ways can member states support the development of a trained global mental health workforce, including incentives for professionals to work in underserved regions and the expansion of community–based care models?

- How can international cooperation address the financial barriers to mental healthcare, including advocating for universal health coverage that integrates mental health services as a core component?

- What role should digital, and telehealth solutions play in expanding access to mental health services, and how can countries ensure that these tools are inclusive, affordable, and culturally appropriate?

- How might member states revise existing legal and policy frameworks to better protect the rights of individuals with mental health conditions, while also ensuring accountability in service delivery across healthcare systems?

- Is there a need for an international treaty or guiding declaration on mental health equity, if so, what core principles should it include to promote access, dignity, and the right to mental healthcare for all?

17. FURTHER READING

You can read between pages 19 to 33

https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Discussion_Paper-A_Rights_Based_Approach_to_Disability_in_the_Context_of_Mental_Health_15.03.2021.pdf

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