**SSPH+ ANNUAL MEETING 2024: 7-8.05 (12:30- 12:30), ZHAW, Winterthur**

**SESSION GUIDE**

**SESSION: “Students’ Mental Health”, Workshop**

Format**: Workshop** G3 9:00 – 10.00

Moderator(s): Julia Dratva, Emiliano Albanese

**Context:** Mental health is best conceived as a public good worth investing in for sustainable development. Mental health is, notoriously, also an integral component of health, and it is a universal human right, which may be defined as the capacity of thought, emotion, and behavior that enables individuals to cope with the normal stressors of life, to contribute to community and social life, thrive, and nurture and enjoy well-being. Poor mental health may result in mental disorders, which affect a person's thinking, feeling, mood, behavior, and function in daily life, and lead to disruption of social interactions. Mental disorders can cause a variety of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms associated with substantial mental and emotional discomfort, suffering, pain, and functional impairment. Mental health needs are largely unmet. Diagnostic and treatment gaps are ubiquitous but unequally distributed between and within countries, and across socio-economic strata, gender, and age. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this situation and put a spotlight on mental health, particularly in young people.

There is ample evidence on the prevalence rates of psychological distress, such as depressive and anxiety symptoms, also in university students. Before 2020, prevalence studies estimated that in youth aged 25 years or less up to 1 in 5 would have experienced some kind of mental health disorders, psychological distress, or both. Moreover, recent data and models from the global burden of disease studies (GBD) indicate that a third of the overall burden of mental disorders (according, for example, to DALYs) concentrates in the age-group 15 to24 yrs. The latest Swiss Health Survey data are in line with these estimations, and also highlight a higher burden in females than men. Poor mental health, psychological distress and mental health disorders in young people are a major public health topic, also in Switzerland. “Emerging adulthood”, spanning from 18 – 29 years, is considered a vulnerable time period with many transitions and expectations to manage. It is also the period in life of educational attainment, access to job market, and social and family setting. Pre- and post-grad university students, including PhD candidates, belong to this vulnerable age group, and many of their challenges are related to the specific academic expectations and environment. Universities carry a responsibility for providing healthy educational environments. A public health response is needed, whereby policy action and interventions aimed at reducing the burden of poor mental health are rooted in good quality epidemiological data.

**Objective of the work shop:**

- Input/Discussion

* Clarification: what and who are we talking about?
* Systems approach – systems approach to mental health promotion and prevention in academia (two major operations – education and research)
* Evidence based action – which outcomes or exposures are relevant? which methods are applicable in the student & PhD body? which limitations do they entail?

- What are the SSPH+ aims regarding mental health

- What are the next steps

**Participants: all**

**Structure:**

Introduction/ 10 Minutes input, break out groups (20 min. nr. depending on size of participants) and plenary for aims and next steps (20 min.)/ Wrap-up