



Community Mental Health Programme

UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) was established in 2005 to assist Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip who had lost their ability to cope with the deteriorating conditions, characterised by high levels of violence and economic decline. With a particular focus on children and youth, CMHP helps to mitigate the psychological impact resulting from the prevailing violence, economic hardship and isolation of the Gaza refugee population.



Approach

Through 189 specially recruited and trained counsellors based in schools, health centres, social service centres and community based organisations, CMHP encourages the development of constructive coping strategies and promotes mental well-being. The programme also enables the vulnerable refugee population to make a positive contribution to the development of their communities. CMHP provides counselling and mental health support to:

- 7,000 people through individual counselling,
- 25,000 people in group counselling and
- 240,000 people through mental health awareness activities, including all students at UNRWA schools.

The majority of counsellors serve in UNRWA schools to assist refugee students cope with stressful living conditions. In Gaza, the environment invokes a variety of mental health problems, particularly in children. These problems include: lack or absence of motivation in school, fear, sleeplessness and inability to concentrate. The CMHP focuses on promoting the mental health of all students and involving the community and teachers to

address these behavioural issues. Children are given space to express their suffering and receive the support of counsellors as well as peers.

School counsellors use a variety of approaches to help children and their families cope with the stressful environment of the Gaza Strip. These methods include drama techniques, behavioural techniques, simplified cognitive techniques and self-care practices.

Activities

Gaza based research has indicated that a majority of Palestinian children report symptoms of distress. In order to address this distress mental health counsellors are based in schools to provide children with Mental Health Education Classes. In these classes children learn basic life skills, such as appropriate forms of communication, stress coping mechanisms and self-confidence building exercises. These structured exercises and drawing activities endeavour to provide pupils with the necessary tools to live a normal life in abnormal conditions.

Counsellors working in health centres provide psycho-education and assist in managing the treatment of chronically-ill patients through lifestyle modifications. Mothers receive educational sessions on managing stressed children and healthy child-rearing practices. Chronic psychiatric patients who are registered at health centres benefit from family counselling programmes in which caregivers are provided with the necessary knowledge to assist in the recovery process.

Community based counsellors serve in UNRWA affiliated community centres and women's centres, working closely with community based organisations on gender and child protection matters. These counsellors conduct awareness sessions and empower the community with tools to overcome a stressful environment.



About UNRWA

UNRWA provides education, healthcare, relief, social services, micro-credit loans and emergency aid to more than 4.4 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. UNRWA employs more than 28,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees, including 20,000 educational staff and 4,000 health workers.