Psychosocial Support for Students in Gaza

8 آذار 2024
8 April 2024
Webinar Objectives

- Understanding the past and current psychosocial challenges for the children in the Gaza strip
- NRC will then present their Effective Strategies for offering Psychosocial Support in the Gaza strip
- Q&A Session
Agenda & List Of Our Panelists

Opening Remarks by Dima Nustas

Brief on the Learning on the Margins report by Fabio Mancini & Dr. Ritesh Shah

Presentation on School-based psychosocial support for students in Gaza – A research-informed framework for providing support and identifying needs in the aftermath of the 2023 war by Camilla Lodi & Gerlinde Harb (recorded video)

NRC’s PSS Education in Emergency Intervention: Reflections from the Response by Daria Wadsworth & Asad Ashour
Psychosocial Support in Education in Emergencies & the Better Learning Programme in Gaza

8 APRIL 2024

Dr. Ritesh Shah
University of Auckland

In Partnership with Norwegian Refugee Council and support of EU’s Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO)
Trends in children’s well-being

**2019**

- More than 4 out of 5 felt safe at home (81.5%)
- 4 out of 5 children felt positive about the future (80.5%)
- More than 7 out of 10 could concentrate on their schoolwork (76.4%)
- Nearly 5 out of 10 could calm themselves down when angry or scared (47%)

**2022**

- Less than 1 out of 5 children felt safe at home (12.5%)
- Less than 1 out of 5 children were positive about the future (17.4%)
- Less than 1 in 10 could concentrate on their schoolwork (5.8%)
- Less than 1 out of 10 could calm themselves down when angry or scared (6.5%)
What happened in Gaza during the pandemic?

- **Food insecurity/unemployment/worsening economic context**
  - Our families could not go out of the house to work in the fields or daily construction. Neither could others access transportation to go out and collect the salaries for their jobs. Many of our families had to ration food and plan what we were going to eat for a whole month. Some of us took to growing food in our garden to support ourselves, and others of us relied on the assistance provided by the government during this time. We could see our parents were very stressed and we tried to help them best we could.

- **Challenges of learning online and fears of learning loss**
  - We had to try to continue learning, but most of us did not have enough devices to learn on, and then we had no way to charge these or access the internet with the frequent electricity cuts. Despite our teachers trying to stay connected to us through WhatsApp and Messenger, we still couldn’t understand many of the lessons we were supposed to learn... we grew more and more worried that we would be penalised for not being able to effectively engage online and lose marks.

- **Domestic violence and loss of connection to peers**
  - Many parents were feeling a lot of stress and worry about their financial situation and health, and they were directing their anxieties and anger on children.
The process of returning to school....

• Relief and joy, but also a different experience of learning
  • When we returned to school we felt hope again, a sense that our lives were returning to normal. At first, we were quite afraid of catching the coronavirus when we returned, but the school provided us with protective hygiene kits which made us feel safe. Returning to school gave us freedom from being trapped at home, even if we only returned to school three days a week. For some of us, three days a week was more than enough to go to school, but it also meant that the curriculum was condensed, and we lost opportunities for sports and recreation activities in the school.

• ....only to be disrupted again by the escalation
  • During the escalation we felt helpless to support others affected. Many of us questioned the future. We felt unprotected, particularly when children were being attacked, and wondered who was taking care for us. We could die any time and any moment. We didn’t feel safe anywhere
  • All our dreams for the future disappeared overnight, and many of us had to flee from our homes as the missiles flew around us. We had to leave behind all the beautiful clothes and foods we had prepared for Eid. Our parents tried to comfort us by telling us stories, hugging us, encouraging us to pray. They tried to make us feel safe even though we were very afraid.

• ...And now?
  • “...we returned to school with a heavy heart because we remember all the losses, we have experienced over the past years both because of the escalation and COVID-19. These times have become a permanent memory in our minds, and it affects our concentration and capacity to learn until today.”
Palliative or transformative solutions?

Acute crisis

“Normalcy”

Psychosocial recovery

We remain afraid of the future and not trusting it will bring any more hope.

It feels sometimes like the entire world has forgotten about us and left us to fight our struggles alone.
Aim of the brief

1. Share research-based knowledge on possible and natural reactions and needs that can be anticipated—both for groups and individuals.

2. Provide a research-based framework for planning and implementing school-based psychosocial support in Gaza: actions and realistic goals for students aged 6 to 16.

3. Support frontline workers, dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed; provide a basic framework for self-care.
Feeling *overwhelmed* is a natural response to the violence that has occurred in Gaza over the last five months.

- How do we set realistic educational goals and how do we create an environment of significance and hope?
- How do we help children returning to learning when their basic needs are not being met?

It's essential to recognise that all individuals, both children and adults, have been exposed to potentially traumatic events and have experienced loss. Children have become more vulnerable when their parents have been affected. The nature of traumatic events amplifies the risk of experiencing post-traumatic reactions.

*UNICEF estimates that almost all of Gaza’s 1.2 million children need mental health and psychosocial support.*
Trauma and Grief

Gerlinde Harb, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist, Private Practice
Research Psychologist, Philadelphia VA Medical Center
• War: Survival
• Basic needs
• Preparing schools: Supporting frontliners personnel and teachers
• Back to school: A gradual approach
• Towards a regular school routine
• Long-term follow up (minimum of two-years)
Delivering PSS and referral pathways

The Better Learning Programme (BLP) is NRC's flagship classroom-based psychosocial support intervention to enhance the wellbeing and learning outcomes of children and youth affected by displacement.
Selfcare for teachers and frontliners

Teachers, counsellors/helpers, & frontline operators have also been exposed to severe trauma and loss.

- Remind teachers about their mission and purpose.
- Provide psychoeducation on normal responses to trauma and loss.
- Encourage peer-to-peer support.
- Encourage routine and structure.
- Provide resources and limit demands.
NRC’s PSS EIE INTERVENTION Reflections from the Response

NRC is delivering MHPSS and structured recreational sessions in line with **Phase 1** of the Education Sector Emergency Response Plan.

Within the first month, we have reached over **2,000 girls and boys** with a minimum of two sessions per week across **seven displacement sites**.

NRC will also establish **Parent's Clubs** in each site to strengthen service delivery and act as platforms for PSS for adults and ICLA service delivery for families.
Phase 1: Emergency MHPSS
• MHPSS and recreational sessions using sector pooled resources.
• Rapid emergency trainings for session facilitators and regular learning circles.
• Engagement with parents and caregivers.
• Sensitisation and relief activities in supported sites.

Phase 2: Full EiE Response
• Continued MHPSS and recreational sessions.
• Learning in non-formal settings.
• Expanded emergency teacher trainings.
• Educational materials for teachers and learners.
• Safe temporary learning spaces.
• Continued engagement with parents and caregivers.
Gaza remains an extremely challenging context in which to deliver humanitarian services.

- **Humanitarian access** to and within Gaza remains severely limited, hindering capacity of staff to access sites.
- **Supply chains and high costs** limit provision of education materials.
- **Safety and security** of children, instructors, families, and implementing staff remains a daily concern.
- **Contextual volatility** complicates plans for scale-up and expansion.
12 years old boy - Yebna Displacement Site:

"I was rushing to complete my duties assigned by my father and family for securing food and water in order to participate in NRC's sessions where I could see and connect with my peers. Now that I have new friends and some free time, I can draw things and practice the exercises I learned even after the sessions, which gives me the feeling of returning to school."

14-year-old girl - Dair Yaseen Displacement Site:

"I lost my beloved doll during the war, along with everything we had in our home when we fled. Since leaving our home, these activities have led me to fly like a butterfly, transporting me away from the horrors I've witnessed. Engaging in these activities has brought me a sense of calm and reinforced my love for my mother and other family members. They have also given me hope that we can survive."
Male Facilitator- Yebna Displacement Site:
"In the initial stages, we were worried about parents' responses, and whether they would help, support, and accept us. Moving from one tent to another, explaining what NRC would do, we listened to a huge number of stories. Parents collectively confirmed the urgent need of bringing children back to normalcy, citing education as vital for survival, as well as a hope for children's security and safety. Your arrival brought safety to all of us."

Female parent:
I am overjoyed and excited for my children because they enjoy recreational/PSS activities restoring their sense of safety. Children returned from the sessions and practiced the activities with me and their brothers and sisters. I have a boy and a girl participating in the activities, and they are both very happy that they are finally in the same place and doing the same exercises. It's been incredibly rewarding for both of them."
Site management- Yebna Displacement Site:
Children demonstrate a strong commitment to these structured activities even without incentives nor gifts because they help children to form new friendships. These activities also have a direct positive impact on the displacement site, where children previously lacked direction, and there was a high level of violence among them. Children are becoming more committed to these activities which reduce violence and strengthen their commitment to educational activities.

Informal displacement Site- Kuwait- Industrial site:
The activities provided are essential for calming and relaxing children. The initial phase of not caring for children on the site has shifted to engaging them in recreational/PSS activities. Our site is made of four blocks, and we want NRC to reach out to children to the entire block rather than just two. The delivered activities spread a sense of stability and unity among children.
Thank you for listening

- Sign up to NRC’s BLP newsletter: https://mailchi.mp/nrc/subscribe
- For more information about NRC’s Right to Wellbeing 2025 initiative, please visit: RightToWellbeing.org
- For enquiries, please contact Camilla Lodi - camilla.lodi@nrc.no
Thanks for joining

For more information:

- Visit INEE website
- Review and explore the collection of sources that focus on key topics, for example:
  - Child protection
  - MHPSS and SEL
  - Inclusive Education
  - Accelerated Education
  - Early Childhood Development
  - Conflict Sensitive Education
- INEE Help Desk
- INEE Community of Practice