

INEE Thematic Issue Brief: Psychosocial Well-Being

Definition

Psychosocial Well-Being: The term *psychosocial* underscores the close connection between psychological aspects of our experience (e.g., our thoughts, emotions, and behavior) and our wider social experience (e.g., our relationships, traditions and culture). Mental disorders, which often benefit from clinical treatment, tend to involve severe psychosocial difficulties in managing thoughts and feelings, maintaining relationships, and functioning in expected social roles. However, many psychosocial problems do not require clinical treatment but are rooted in stigmatisation, lost hope, chronic poverty, uprooting, inability to meet basic needs, and inability to fill normal social roles such as that of student/learner.

Well-being is a condition of holistic health in all its dimensions: physical, cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual. Also a process, well-being consists of the full range of what is good for a person: participating in a meaningful social role; feeling happy and hopeful; living according to good values, as locally defined; having positive social relations and a supportive environment; coping with challenges through the use of appropriate life skills; and having security, protection, and access to quality services.

Psychosocial Well-Being as a Thematic Issue

To enable educational access and quality in emergency and early recovery contexts, addressing issues psychosocial well-being is essential. In crises situations, the psychosocial well-being of emergency-affected children, who may suffer not only from losses and exposure to extreme events but also from daily sources of distress such as crowded living conditions and hopelessness, is affected. Without attention to these issues, schools and other educational environments may become highly stressful environments that encourage dropout and poor attendance, undermine the quality of education and dim the prospects for effective learning.

While both clinical support by professionals and holistic community-based approaches are necessary for the creation of a multi-layered system of comprehensive supports during emergencies, education has an important role in psychosocial support through nonclinical approaches. In this manner, schools, learning environments, educators and other education personnel can play important roles in enabling children's well-being and healthy development through conducting education in a manner that is participatory, supportive, child- and youth-friendly, and free of humiliation, abuse and other protection issues. To achieve these outcomes, it is vital that an appropriate conceptualisation of teachers' roles in promoting psychosocial well-being of children is developed and that teachers and other educational staff receive support in order to perform their tasks well under difficult conditions.

Addressing Psychosocial Well-being in the INEE Minimum Standards

Psychosocial well-being is mainstreamed throughout the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook in a manner that is consistent with the *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*. Examples of how the psychosocial well-being is mainstreamed throughout the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook include the following:

- **Foundational Standards** highlight that risk analyses must consider the threats to cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social well-being, and stresses the effective coordination and transparent information sharing with psychosocial support actors in order to ensure synergies among sectors during all phases of emergency response.
- **Access and Learning Environment Domain** emphasizes that learning environments are safe and secure and promote the protection of the psychosocial well-being of learners, teachers and other education personnel. This domain includes a focus on the overall importance and organisation of psychosocial support, making clear that teachers provide psychosocial support not by counseling but by using child-centered teaching methodology, treating learners with dignity, and making referrals for learners who have been strongly affected and need specialised support. The importance of education in a holistic manner and creating supportive learning environments is also highlighted.
- **Teaching and Learning Domain** helps guide actors in choosing quality, relevant, and equitable curricula to address the psychosocial well-being of teachers and learners.
- **Teachers and Other Education Personnel Domain** identifies specific training to cope with the psychosocial needs of the target population. Teachers also need to be cautious of not taking on responsibilities that are detrimental to their own psychosocial wellbeing.
- **Education Policy Domain** emphasises that planning and implementation of education activities must be integrated with other sectors, applying standards and guidelines in those areas. For psychosocial well-being, it is therefore necessary to consult the *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*.

Additional Guidance

The broad definition of psychosocial well-being given above is consistent with the *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings* (referred to hereafter as the IASC Guidelines), one of the major accomplishments in the psychosocial field over the past five years. The IASC Guidelines depart from polarised understandings that divided earlier psychosocial work into two separate areas: clinical support by professionals and holistic, community-based support. At field level, work in these two approaches were often segregated, with little or no coordination, and educators often wondered which approach they should take. The IASC Guidelines establish that both approaches are necessary for the creation of a multi-layered system of comprehensive supports. The Guidelines also indicate that education has an important role in psychosocial support but through nonclinical approaches.

The publication can be found by visiting:
<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/products>