

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Frequently invisible and often neglected, mental disorders pose a major public health challenge. They affect one in four people during their lifetime globally and are the leading cause of disability around the world. By 2030, they are projected to carry global public health costs of \$6 trillion annually.

International Medical Corps is one of the few global emergency-response organizations with the capacity to address the immediate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs of those struck by disaster and assist persons with preexisting mental health disorders. We are an acknowledged leader in responding to MHPSS needs in emergencies, known for the quality of our needs assessments, training programs and services.

As a leader in our field, we have helped develop both global guidelines and national policies for improving mental health and well-being among those affected by crisis. Many of our programs focus on children and adolescents caught up in both natural disasters and armed conflict.



INTEGRATED MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

We are significantly contributing to closing a critical gap between the shortage of available mental health services and the growing number of individuals in urgent need of care. We work with local, regional and national governments, as well as relevant agencies, at the forefront of integrating mental health into general healthcare, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). We help develop guidelines, and build the skills of physicians, nurses and community workers who serve on the frontlines of humanitarian emergencies, teaching them how to recognize—and better understand and treat—mental disorders. We also help provide social and recreational activities that build social connections and help affected populations access needed services. Examples of this include the following programs:

ETHIOPIA

In 2012 International Medical Corps established integrated comprehensive clinical MHPSS services with the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA) health clinics in five camps in Dolo Ado for Somali refugees, and in four camps in Gambella for South Sudanese refugees, providing access to community-based MHPSS for refugees and other vulnerable persons. We continue to provide training and on-the-job supervision to ARRA health staff, using the WHO mhGAP Intervention Guidelines. International Medical Corps senior mental health officers (one in each ARRA clinic) provide on-the-job training as well as consultations for more specialized treatment of mental disorders. Our psychosocial support officers provide mental health case management, as well as counseling and psychological interventions for those with severe and complex problems.

LEBANON

International Medical Corps has been a leader in mental health programming since beginning work in Lebanon during the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict in 2006. We continue to support the National Mental Health Program within Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health guidelines and policies. The initiative has helped build stronger mental health services throughout Lebanon—for example, by integrating mental health into primary healthcare, ensuring access to quality mental health care within the existing healthcare structure.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Widespread exposure to violence in the country's northeastern prefecture of Haute-Kotto increased mental health needs. International Medical Corps launched a training program in this region that reached 58 of 135 total healthcare staff in targeted facilities. Those who completed the four-day course demonstrated a significant increase in both general and clinical competence levels of primary health care staff caring for those living with mental disorders.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN CRISIS AREAS

International Medical Corps makes quality psychosocial support and mental health care a priority for children and adolescents whose lives have been disrupted by events that so often accompany humanitarian crises. We offer community-based programs for youth, providing psychosocial support and offering training on key skills for coping with difficult situations. We promote social connections and learning through recreational and educational activities, and foster overall well-being, protection and healthy development. Our programs include:

CHILD-AND ADOLESCENT-FRIENDLY SPACES

These spaces provide a safe and structured environment in which trained staff conduct age-specific group and individual activities, including arts and crafts, games, sports, calligraphy and music. In this setting, we also are able to identify vulnerable children in need for additional support services. We engage parents or caregivers through key messaging, parenting workshops and participation in community-based activities.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

These programs engage vulnerable youth ages 12 to 18—including those who are refugees, internally displaced or from the local host community—with the goal of promoting well-being, empowerment, protection and resilience. Youth are invited to join a series of sessions to discuss issues they face and identify positive coping strategies. The programs also include completion of a youth-led project to improve spaces or facilities in their community.



RESPONSE TO PROTRACTED ARMED CONFLICT

SYRIA

To help Syrians cope with the emotional toll of the 21st century's deadliest conflict, International Medical Corps offers comprehensive and integrated MHPSS services and activities. Our Recreational Activity Center in a Damascus suburb offers a wide range of activities to provide psychosocial support to children and families, including programs shaped specifically for youth and a rehabilitation program for children with developmental delays and disorders.

In countries bordering Syria, including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, where millions of Syrians have taken shelter from the violence of war, our mental health teams have provided ongoing staff training, both theoretical and practical, on issues that include child protection, gender-based violence management and referrals.

SOUTH SUDAN

There is only one registered psychiatrist for the entire country of South Sudan, while mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse are growing issues among those subjected to years of armed conflict. International Medical Corps provides mental health and psychosocial support services to those in need in three conflict-affected states: Upper Nile, Jonglei and Central Equatoria. We also participate in national mental health networks and working groups to build the capacity of other organizations, helping them to use best practices and global guidelines and to respond to the growing demand for mental health services.



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Since its inception more than 34 years ago, International Medical Corps' mission has been consistent: ease the suffering of those affected by war, natural disaster and disease by delivering vital healthcare services and focusing on training that provides the skills and tools required to foster self-reliance. This approach of helping people to help themselves is critical to returning devastated populations to self-reliance.

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