



15 October 2015 -- In a room in downtown Amman a group of Syrian refugee women congregate to take part in a mutual support groups discussion led by WHO health partner, Caritas. These women, many of them friends, openly speak about their troubles, their joys and their aspirations, sharing stories about their old lives in Syria and insights into their new ones in Jordan. Some of these women suffer from mental illnesses. Others are here simply for the support.

This group activity is one of a number of psychosocial support services Caritas provides free-of-charge to refugees in Amman. Many of the attendants come together at least twice a week to participate in awareness sessions on mental health conditions, sexual and gender-based violence, and human rights, and to take part in group therapy.

This particular activity involves the women addressing three major questions and sharing their responses with the group: 1) *'Who am I?'*; 2) *'What did I do yesterday?'*; and 3) *'What do I want from tomorrow?'*

. The task is designed to encourage introspection and reflection and places emphasis on the future and developing solutions and personal goals.

Open discussion through support groups helps participants understand their own thoughts and feelings. It helps them to come to terms with and accept their past, and encourages positivity and optimism to help them rebuild their lives," says Loures Khoury, Caritas psychologist. "The women speak as loudly or quietly as they want, and they can voice whatever they want during the sessions. We provide them with a platform to express themselves and a supportive and nurturing environment in which to do so," she adds.

Caritas not only supports these women's psychosocial needs, it also caters to those of their

children. In an adjacent 'child-friendly space' strewn with crayons, toys and handicraft materials, seven children sit quietly, captivated by a puppet show.

"This performance is about acceptance – the theme is that everyone is different and possesses something special, and we should search for those traits and talents in other people," says Khoury. "We run all kinds of activities for children here, aimed at helping them cope with what they've experienced, and their day-to-day problems," she adds.

As the conflict in Syria rages on, many Syrian refugees are spending their fourth year in Jordan. While some may suffer from anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of having witnessed atrocities and considerable hardship, a more commonplace problem among Caritas' patients seems to be adjusting to a new way of life.

"The majority of patients we see exhibit symptoms of adjustment disorder. Many refugees find it very difficult adapting to their new living situation," Khoury says. "Support networks such as ours therefore, are vital in helping people to manage. Expressing one's feelings is just as important as medication," she adds.

Caritas operates three centres in Amman for Syrian refugees and one for Iraqi refugees. WHO supports the NGO through the provision of technical guidance and advice, training, and mental health tools.

World Mental Health Day is observed on 10 October every year, with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues around the world and mobilizing efforts in support of mental health.

The Day provides an opportunity for all stakeholders working on mental health issues to talk about their work, and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for people worldwide.

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