

16 October 2014 – The World Health Organization ran a workshop for 30 mental health workers in Gaza this week, to assist them in responding to the changed situation and heightened needs after the recent conflict.

Through presentations, role-plays and group work, the workshop covered post-conflict mental health needs, assessment techniques and long-term strategy.

Presenter Mark van Ommeren, a mental health expert from WHO Geneva, emphasized that as well as needing to treat patients with mental health problems caused by the conflict (such as post traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety), there are also Gazans with pre-existing mental health conditions who continue to need treatment.

He also covered appropriate assessment techniques, and how to determine if assessments are even necessary. “This is not the first crisis faced by Gazans, and on the basis of previous assessments from previous crises there is enough information to know that mental health problems are common and need to be addressed” van Ommeren said.

The workshop encouraged participants to use the crisis as an opportunity to build back better. Because the emergency has drawn so much attention from politicians and donors, it has created “unparalleled opportunities to build better mental health systems for all Gazans in need,” van Ommeren said. “This is important because mental health is crucial to the overall well-being, functioning, and resilience of individuals and Palestinian society recovering from war.”

Participant Kate Bean from Danish Church Aid – an nongovernmental organization providing emergency psychosocial programmes for children and mothers in some of the areas hardest hit by the conflict – said the workshop was a useful opportunity to meet and connect with other mental health workers in Gaza.

“All Gazan staff have been extremely busy responding to the needs of the community and this was a reminder of how important coordination, collaboration and the sharing of resources is,” Bean said.

Related link

[WHO Mental health programme](#)

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Saturday 17th of May 2025 10:29:27 AM