



29 July 2020 – Prolonged war and conflict in Yemen have resulted in psychological burden and trauma of unprecedented magnitude. Hundreds of thousands of people, including children, have been impacted by adverse mental health stressors due to large-scale insecurity, displacement and food insecurity crisis.

The collapse of the socioeconomic fabric and state institutions, resulting in a lack of social protection and basic public services, including health care, has compounded the situation of the most vulnerable, including people with existing mental health conditions and psychosocial problems.

Already vulnerable Yemenis are faced with COVID-19, threatening further to undermine their resilience, including access to treatment and health care for people with developing or existing mental health conditions.

But in a country where only half of the health facilities are still functioning, the mental health care system suffers from a shortage of funding, low commitment of authorities and scarcity of mental health professionals. Only 45 psychiatrists currently work in the country, of whom 36 are in the capital city Sana'a (one psychiatrist to every 700 000 individuals). The situation is further aggravated by the pervasive social stigma associated with mental health illness.

Al-Amal governmental hospital for psychiatric and neurological diseases in Al Safiah District in Sanaa is one of the few mental health facilities still receiving patients. It employs 172 health workers and 8 volunteers and receives almost 100 patients daily.

“The hospital is still functional, yet it requires substantial rehabilitation. It has not been rehabilitated in a very long time” said Adulmalik Mofadal, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene coordinator at WHO, who is supervising the rehabilitation works.

“Operating conditions at the hospital are hazardous. Inpatient rooms, bathrooms, the water connection system and even the walls, doors and windows need to be repaired,” he added.

Thanks to continued support from the Government of Japan, WHO will rehabilitate the health facility, including ensuring that patients are received with dignity and humanely.

“It’s all about giving better and more dignified living conditions to patients suffering from mental health conditions. It is also about making the hospital more friendly and raising awareness about the stigma mental health patients still face nowadays,” said Dr Philip Smith, Deputy Representative at the WHO country office in Yemen.

The Government of Japan supported WHO’s response in Yemen with more than US\$ 11.5 million between 2015 and 2020, including a recent US\$ 3 million contribution to mental health facilities. In addition to the rehabilitation of mental health facilities across the country, this support will ensure capacity-building, strengthening mental health governance and human resources development.

In 2019, WHO and partners were able to provide over 90 000 psychosocial support sessions and more than 14 000 mental health consultations. In addition to supporting 176 health facilities providing mental health and psychosocial support to those in need, including 47 hospitals, 63 health centres and 60 health units.

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