

Psychosocial Support Program in Gaza Strip Report

"Resilient Narratives Surviving and perserving amidst pain in Gaza"



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Introduction:

The 7th of October was the beginning of the war on Gaza Strip, in which people lived a tragic life from that date, as intense bombing and clashes broke out without warning, forcing many citizens and families to flee to shelter centers in different Gaza Strip governorates. The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are suffering from one of the most difficult experiences that any human being can go through, as they found themselves trapped between the intensity of the bombing, targeting homes, and the urgent need for safe places. The IDPs are living in a sudden situation of chaos, tension, psychological anxiety and stress that increased the level of psychological tension among them, which is also accompanied by the difficulty of providing basic needs such as food, water, clothing, shelter, electricity and medical care. These difficult circumstances were further complicated by the closure of the crossings and the difficulty to deliver humanitarian and medical aid to the afflicted people. Also mentioning the difficult circumstances that children and people with disabilities go through, which was obvious during field visits by psychologists and crises and emergencies specialists,

Children and families are exceptionally frightened as a result of the constant threat and the lack of hope for a ceasefire, which have a consequential impact on the mental health of the community, requiring rapid psychological and social intervention to restore psychological peace and provide first psychological aid to the people. These intervention efforts must be implemented jointly between multiple sectors and partners to alleviate the psychological pressures experienced by people in Gaza Strip.

Teacher Creativity Center (TCC) has conducted a recent study that reveals worrying levels of childhood stress in Gaza Strip, where more than 78% of the children suffer from physical stress, 88% suffer from psychological stress, 75% suffer from social stress, and 85% suffer from emotional stress. The harmful conditions of displacement, difficulty in reaching safe areas, and exposure to traumatic events such as bombing contribute to these high levels of stress. The extended period of war and the lack of flexibility complicate their ability to adapt. The psychological exhaustion of a crowded shelter increases the challenges, affecting access to basic supplies. Emotional stress is basically associated with the loss of a family member as a martyr, as children show symptoms such as nightmares, anxiety, social isolation, loss of interest, and discomfort in life, which can be directly related to the catastrophic loss they experience in the family. Their emotional awareness and ability to understand day-to-day situations are affected, indicating disturbances in expressing and understanding emotions. This highlights the serious psychological challenge that children face in dealing with their feelings, which may lead to psychological disorders in the future, and affect their ability to reintegrate into life, leaving them in a state of losing hope and reducing their ability to visualize a positive future. The results of the study highlight the need for immediate intervention and support to deal with the Mental health of children in conflict areas in Gaza Strip.

Teacher Creativity Center (TCC) took quick and immediate steps to provide psychosocial support and enhance Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills for affected children and families. TCC's response was rapid and effective, with a focus on adapting the available activities and capabilities to ensure achieving the maximum positive impact on the target groups. The rapid response is necessary to deal with the circulation of events and the psychological and social effects of the aggression on Gaza Strip, as activities has to be ready to respond to the needs of children and families, by providing a supportive and safe environment to meet the emerging needs of children and families in light of difficult situations. TCC has a vital and effective role in psychosocial support and social emotional learning to enhance the resilience of the affected community.

The psychological support team of TCC implemented daily activities directed at displaced children and parents in shelters in Gaza Strip. These activities come as part of previous interventions that demonstrated the importance of psychosocial support programs during crises and difficult circumstances. These programs represent an important point in providing psychosocial support to displaced children, as it contribute to:

- Providing safe spaces: Provide a safe and encouraging environment for children where they can express themselves and interact freely.
- Reducing stress and anxiety: Activities help improve children's psychological wellbeing and reduce levels of stress and anxiety caused by difficult life situations.
- Promoting communication and relationships: Encouraging positive communication between children and between them and their parents.
- Psychological Educational preparation and enhancing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills: teaching children skills of managing emotions and healthy social interaction, by integrating SEL skills with basic educational materials.
- Highlighting humanity: Demonstrating the importance of humanitarian values to respect and protect the dignity and rights of survivors.
- Guiding and increasing awareness of parents/caregivers about the importance of supporting the psychosocial health of their family members during difficult situations, and enabling them to provide support and care to their family members, which contributes to improving their quality of life and enhancing their ability to adapt in difficult circumstances.
- Psychological discharge at group and individual levels, to achieve emotional and psychological balance and stability.

The psychosocial support program has demonstrated its importance in providing psychosocial support services during crises and difficult circumstances, and reflects the commitment of TCC team to meet the psychosocial needs of displaced children and contributing to improve their quality of life during this difficult period.

The implemented activities aimed to achieve several main objectives as follows:

- Reducing fear and stress by providing various activities such as movement games and emotional release. Providing a safe and comfortable environment that helps children get rid of the stress and psychological anxiety that result from the difficult situations they witnessed.
- Creating a feeling of safety and reassurance by implementing activities directed with enhancing self-confidence and providing a supportive environment, the activities enabled children to feel safe and psychologically comfortable.
- Developing social emotional skills by developing self-awareness and self-management skills as part of the activities that contribute to enhancing the ability to interact socially and understand emotions better.
- Enhancing communication and interaction between children and parents, the activities were directed to encourage positive communication and interaction between children and parents that contributes to building positive relationships and mutual understanding.
- Enhancing the ability to express feelings through activities such as drawing and creative games, children were encouraged to express their feelings in a positive and healthy way.

In general, these activities aim to provide intensive psychosocial support to children and families, which contributes to improving their psychological and social conditions and enhancing their ability to adapt to the difficult circumstances they are experiencing.

Rapid Response:

- Organizing volunteer emergency teams and training: An emergency team was formed by TCC's experts, volunteers, and teachers in psychological counseling and social emotional learning services providers.
- Needs assessment: A rapid assessment was conducted of the needs of children and families affected by the aggression.
- Designing and implementing activities and modifying activities to match the capabilities: A variety of activities and programs were designed and implemented to support children and families on a psychological and emotional level.
- The use of maximum available resources: TCC's available resources, such as human resources and training programs, were utilized to ensure the provision of high-quality services.
- Focus on effective activities: The team focused on implementing activities that have proven effective in supporting children and families in emergency situations.



Targeted Areas:

TCC targeted 109 shelters for IDPs, with 244 events/activities, through its psychological counseling, entertainment, and SEL services that were provided in Deir Albalah, Khanyounis, and Rafah, with a target group of 80,543 beneficiaries.

The events/activities number includes the implementation of 164 events and activities designated for 55,512 children (23,477 males and 32,035 females) to maintain their psychological and emotional balance and compensate for learning loss. It also includes the implementation of 80 educational workshops for 22,008 parents/caregivers about psychological support and SEL. And more than 10,827 injured children and children with disabilities also benefited from psychological discharge and entertainment activities. Also, 1,802 children directly benefited from the SEL Project (psychological educational preparation program), in addition to transferring knowledge and volunteering to 92 teachers from the targeted shelters.

Activities and Events:

The interventions implemented by TCC in shelters relied on psychosocial support activities, SEL, psychological first aid, and individual and group counseling sessions:

Individual and group counseling sessions were provided for children and parents suffering from psychological trauma. Support groups: were organized for children and parents to share their experiences and receive support from each other. Awareness activities: organized about mental health and ways to deal with psychological trauma. Educational programs for children: were implemented for children on SEL skills, such as anger management and empathy. Workshops for parents: were organized for parents on how to support their children emotionally and socially.

Training teachers, facilitators and volunteers on SEL skills

First Training:

Training of 3 teachers (subject of Arabic, Math and English), supervisor and facilitator on SEL skills and Psychological discharge. The training includes providing SEL skills through entertainment and psychosocial support, clarifying the mechanisms for implementing the Arabic language, math, and English language through employing SEL skills, clarification of the program and psychological support through working with children.

Second Training:

28 (teachers, volunteers and specialists) were provided with 6 days training (3 days for Khanyounis team, 3 days for Rafah team) with a total of 24 training hours on SEL skills, and volunteers capacity building in the psychological health field. The goal of the training was to provide psychological protection skills and support children through SEL skills, by enhancing self-awareness, self-management and improving good communication.

The program depends on Child Safeguarding Standards and the child rights program, and seeks to contribute to improving the psychological and educational preparation of children, especially in light of the psychological and educational challenges they face. An important part of the training was about psychological education and guidance for parents and caregivers. This aims to increase awareness about the importance of psychological health and SEL for children's development, that includes providing information and guidance to parents on how to support their children emotionally and psychologically, and promoting effective communication between parents and their children in light of psychological and educational challenges, based on SEL skills training guide and the project's protocols.

Third Training:

2-days training with a total of 14 hours were provided to 10 volunteers in the psychological health field, which was supervised by TCC, and During the training, the results of the study of stress in its four dimensions (البدني, physical, social, emotional) were presented, as through the study, the most common psychological symptoms among displaced children in shelters were identified, and the best mechanisms and tools for evaluating psychological symptoms for children and initial psychological aid were presented.

Volunteers were provided with training on individual and group intervention methods, family counseling, narrative therapy, art therapy, psychodrama therapy and other intervention methods, and discussions about the effective intervention in reducing the possibility of developing serious psychological symptoms. Also, volunteers were trained on bridging the psychological and information gap about the most common psychological symptoms and on intervention techniques to reduce psychological trauma for children, and how to help (800) IDPs continue to maintain their social, psychological, and physical lives and well-being in light of the psychological and physical effects. In addition, they were trained on how to provide parents and caregivers with internationally recognized mechanisms applied to reduce psychological and social symptoms. The most effective techniques were identified according to the results of psychological cases resulting from the war and conflict on children (Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)- individual art therapy - psychodrama - music - Safe Space Imagery - Guidance through playing - Logotherapy - Relaxation - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

Children's Activities and Events:

The interventions focused on psychological first aid through providing psychosocial support skills. These interventions aimed to provide a safe space that helps children express their thoughts and feelings, reducing stress and anxiety, encouraging positive communication between children and parents, providing safe spaces for learning based on SEL skills that help in managing emotions and social interaction, in addition to learning literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.



The interventions included the following activities:

1. Recreational activities and psychological discharge: The groups played a supportive role in enhancing communication between children, and creating an interactive environment through which children and their caregivers can find a healthy way that helps them in emotional discharge through sports matches, arts, movement games, group games, and cartoon shows.



2. Group psychological counseling

3. SEL initiatives and remedial classes

(psychological and educational preparation):

Emotion management and self-control skills, which are derived from the SEL methodology that TCC adopts. Self-awareness skills reflect the ability to understand our feelings and thinking and recognize our values and goals, while self-management skills include the ability to control stress and deal with challenges effectively, which plays a vital role in enhancing mental health. These skills help enable children to understand their feelings, deal with them in a healthy manner, and improve social interaction. In addition to the role of these skills in improving the ability to adapt to changes better, implementing educational preparation on teaching literacy skills for the subjects of Arabic, English, and math.



4. **Injured children and children with disabilities (CwDs):** Psychosocial support and SEL activities were implemented for CwDs, in addition to the integration of CwD in the other events and activities.



Parents/Caregivers Activities and Events:

The interventions focused on two main aspects:

1. **Psychological support education** includes explaining some methods and tools for the parents that help them deal with their feelings and thoughts, in addition to the mechanisms for dealing with their children.
2. **Group psychological support sessions** focused on psychological discharge of feelings and thoughts to achieve balance and emotional stability, which contributes to supporting their psychosocial health, improving its quality, enhancing the ability to adapt during difficult situations, and enabling them to provide care for themselves and others. This activities varied between group drawing, story telling, and interactive movement activities.



Study of Promoting children rights in education and social and emotional well-being in Gaza

TCC conducted this study funded by UNESCO, which aims to promote the children's rights in Gaza of education and social and emotional well-being in light of the serious psychological and social impacts of the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip. This response mainly targets 800 children between the ages of 7 years and 12 years and their families, from 8 different shelters in Rafah and Khanyounis (southern governorates). The response of this study will be: 1) Strengthen volunteers' capabilities and knowledge to effectively reduce the possibility of children suffer from serious psychological symptoms; 2) Bridging the information gap regarding the most common psychological and social symptoms among children in light of the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the most effective intervention tools and techniques capable of reducing them. 3) Assist 800 displaced children in Gaza to restore and maintain their normal psychosocial and physical well-being in light of the psychosocial and physical impacts of the conflict and 4) Increase the knowledge and capabilities of caregivers in the Gaza Strip in applying mechanisms to reduce the psychosocial symptoms that their children are experiencing as a result of the conflict.



Psychosocial interventions project for children and their families in Gaza as a humanitarian response for the aggression on the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023

This two-month project targeted 8 shelters in the Deir Albalah at Middle Area in Gaza Strip, with a target group of 800 boys and girls between 7 and 12 years old, who were displaced to shelters (UNRWA schools). The project aims to improve the psychological state of children and enhance their ability to adapt in light of the difficult circumstances they are going through, and to contribute to supporting them in light of the series of psychological traumas that they are still facing and under its effect.



The work team was formed of 10 specialists in the field of psychology and psychosocial support, and many preparatory meetings were held with them from 15th to 23rd Jan. 2024, in addition to implementing a one-day introductory workshop by TCC's follow-up team, in addition to consulting a psychologist, presenting the most common psychological symptoms in light of the ongoing circumstances, the best mechanisms and tools for evaluating psychological symptoms in children, psychological first aid, psychological debriefing, and treatment techniques and methods such as individual psychotherapy, group therapy, family therapy, narrative therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, play therapy. And psychodrama. This included agreeing on the mechanism and methodology of work, developing intervention plans, and the nature of activities with children in shelter centers.

The teacher sought the help of a psychological consultant and reviewed the most common psychological symptoms under the ongoing circumstances, the best mechanisms and tools for evaluating psychological symptoms in children, psychological first aid, psychological debriefing, and treatment techniques and methods such as individual psychotherapy, group therapy, family therapy, narrative therapy, Cognitive behavioral therapy play therapy. and psychodrama. This included agreeing on the mechanism and methodology of work, developing intervention plans, and the type of activities with children in shelters.

The team was divided into two groups to work in parallel in the 8 shelters at Deir Albalah, for an average of 4 days in each shelter, some volunteers joined shelters to support the team in completing the work, as the work took place at Deir Albalah Services Club which is working as a shelter, and the school shelters of Rufaidah Secondary School for Girls and Al-Aishiya Primary School for

Girls, the shelter of Al-Durra Club Stadium, the shelter of Al-Nakhil camp no.1, Al-Nakheel Camp no. 2, Al-Nakheel Camp no. 3, and the shelter of Al-Bukhari Camp, with approximately 898 children between 7 to 12 years old, including 424 females, 474 males, with an average of 100 children in each shelter, and the implementation of many discharge activities with the children and the implementation of group psychotherapy sessions by dividing the children into groups of (20 to 25) children in each group, and carrying out play activities with them as drama, role-playing, and drawing, in addition to implementing individual sessions with 40 child, at a rate of 140 individual sessions, who showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and had difficulty communicating and integrating with the surrounding environment as a result of the difficult circumstances they were exposed to during the period of displacement. In addition to implementing workshops with the families of the targeted children, target number of 638 women, that aims to increase their knowledge and capabilities in the internationally recognized mechanisms applied to reduce psychosocial symptoms and how to manage the psychological stresses that their children suffer from as a result of the aggression.

Other Activities:

TCC provided humanitarian aid to the targeted shelters, providing food aid, clothing, stationery, and sports equipment, aiming to alleviate the burden on families affected by the current conditions and providing a suitable environment for recovery and rebuilding lives.

- Children's toys were distributed to approximately 15,400 children.
- Winter clothes were distributed to 1,030 children.
- Health kits were distributed to 453 families.
- Food parcels were distributed to 363 families as part of food aid.
- 87 shelter centers were provided with the necessary stationery and tools to implement events and activities.
- Food supplies for children were distributed to 7,200 children



Plans being implemented after 11th Feb. 2024

Promote children rights in education and social and emotional well-being in Gaza Project (funded by UNESCO):

This response is targeting 800 children between 7 and 12 years old and their families, from 8 different shelters centers in the cities of Rafah and Khan Yunis (southern governorates). This response will work to: 1) Strengthen volunteers' capabilities and knowledge to effectively reduce the possibility of children suffer from serious psychological symptoms; 2) Bridging the information gap regarding the most common psychological and social symptoms among children in light of the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the most effective intervention tools and techniques capable of reducing them. 3) Assist 800 displaced children in Gaza to restore and maintain their normal psychosocial and physical well-being in light of the psychosocial and physical impacts of the conflict and 4) Increase the knowledge and capabilities of caregivers in the Gaza Strip in applying mechanisms to reduce the psychosocial symptoms that their children are experiencing as a result of the conflict.

Gaza Crisis Project (funded by Save the Children)

Through this project TCC will work in 20 schools in Khanyounis and Rafah. The project aims to meet the immediate needs of those affected and to support and rehabilitate them. The project targets 1,420 parents/caregivers and children by providing winter and hygiene packages for children, women and men, in addition to psychosocial support and social emotional learning services. Individual and group sessions will be implemented for the target group through the effort of 20 mental health specialists and workers who will be trained before starting work.