



## Mental health

### mhGAP Training creates more support for vulnerable people in Syria

Youssef\*, a 38-year-old civil engineer, husband and father of three, suffered a traumatic loss in 2012. His house in Homs was destroyed in the humanitarian emergency, forcing the family to flee to Damascus. During the journey, two of his younger brothers died. Youssef has not been employed since then. He has been living in a shelter with support from a local charity.



Mental health professionals at a training session -Lattakia/Syria September 2014  
WHO-Syria

Eight months ago, his family noticed that he was losing weight. He felt tired too often and found it difficult to concentrate. He lost interest in all activities that he liked, and was finding it difficult to sleep at night. He was no longer motivated to look for a job to support his family. Youssef felt hopeless and he thought his life was no longer worth living. He shared this with the shelter doctor.

Thankfully, the doctor knew enough about the management of common mental disorders. He had recently received training from the WHO Country Office in Syria on how to assess and manage common mental health conditions during emergencies using the mhGAP Intervention Guide. He diagnosed Youssef as suffering from depression and treated him accordingly.

Since 2013, to respond to the increasing need for mental health care and psychosocial support in the country, the WHO Office in Syria trained more than 500 non-specialist health-care professionals using WHO's mhGAP Intervention Guide for treating people with mental, neurological and substance use disorders in non-specialized health settings. They now deliver support to people with mental disorders in some of the most affected Governorates in Syria such as Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Sweda'a, Aleppo, Hassaka, Hama, Tartus and Lattakia.

In 2014, an international team of WHO experts trained 36 psychologists from various geographical locations on psychotherapeutic interventions on the management of most vulnerable populations using cognitive behavioural therapy, family therapy and counselling skills.

Eight mental health professionals trained by WHO now supervise primary health-care providers at their community working sites. WHO provides essential psychotropic medications to the Ministry of Health, local NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Youssef is now recovering from his depression. His concentration levels, mood and sleep have also improved. He is now motivated and able to support himself and his family to cope with these difficult times.

(\*Some personal details of the patient have been changed to protect his identity.)