

Suicide prevention and response: Sharing knowledge and applying it in humanitarian settings

An initiative of GIZ (regional project “Psychosocial Support for Syrian/Iraqi Refugees and IDP”) and Intervention¹ (the Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas)

Background

Suicide prevention represents a significant global challenge, with close to 800,000 deaths every year, 79% of which occur in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2018)². The levels of profound despair that can lead someone to forming the intention to take their own life can rarely be attributed to a single cause. Conflict, migration, limited access to healthcare, economic crises, unemployment, and consequences of global health emergencies such as the current COVID 19 pandemic exacerbate challenges operating on a personal level in relation to conflicts with partners and families, or individual sources of stress.

Many Middle Eastern countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine, are attempting to cope with decades of protracted crises, re-erupting wars and economic hardships. The resultant ‘lethal hopelessness’ in the region has translated to rising rates of suicide and self-harm. However, as the act of suicide is highly stigmatized – condemned in some cases by religious authorities and criminalized in several countries – the quality of available data remains poor and targeted prevention is rare. There is also a lack of capacity development for health providers, gatekeeper trainings and awareness raising among communities. Against this highly challenging backdrop, stakeholders such as governmental bodies, (I)NGOs and MHPSS actors and a diverse array of local and international initiatives are developing a number of services for individuals in acute crisis.

Documenting suicide prevention and response in humanitarian settings

GIZ’s regional project “Psychosocial Support for Syrian/Iraqi Refugees and IDP” and Intervention (the Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas) are working together in an initiative to document suicide prevention efforts in humanitarian settings. We are seeking to devote a special section of Intervention in September next year (2021) to this topic, accompanied by webinars for practitioners. We want to particularly highlight interventions from the Middle East but will include contributions from other regions. We aim to share relevant good practices and lessons learned with practitioners and policymakers and others and identify emerging perspectives regarding suicide prevention and response. Intervention will put out a call for papers for the special section later this year.

With further funding, we could reach many more actors, and give people with lived experience a voice. Therefore, we are seeking partners in funding this initiative (for 2020-2021) and invite agencies interested to support to contact us. This will enhance possibilities for translations, webinars and more articles - and to link with agencies or networks active in suicide prevention. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Intervention Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas is a peer reviewed scientific journal, providing a forum for professionals working in conflict affected areas and in the aftermath of natural disasters, and for those working with refugees from these regions.

INTERVENTION


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¹ <http://www.interventionjournal.org/>

² World Health Organization (2018). Global Health Estimates 2016: Deaths by cause, age, sex, by country and by region, 2000-2016. World Health Organization, Geneva.