

World Health Organization



Enhancing Mental Health Services and Psychological Support in Conflict- affected and Post-conflict Contexts

-Committee Guide-

Kaira Buzan

-Chairperson-

Lara Tomic

-Chairperson-

Corina Comăneci

-Chairperson-

Table of contents

<i>Introduction to the topic</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Definition of key terms</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Background information</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>- The Geneva Conventions:</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>- The Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030:</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>- The Syrian conflict:</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Main actors</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>- The World Health Organization:</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>- Ukraine:</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>- Palestine:</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Possible solutions</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>8</i>

I. Introduction to the topic

In many post-conflicts settings mental health care is neglected, even though it plays a crucial role in public health. There is no doubt that post-conflict areas remain vulnerable and require extensive assistance for rebuilding. The same applies to the people affected by military conflicts who often endure deeply traumatic experiences that leave lasting scars. High levels of stress and life-altering events can have a significant and often lifelong impact on people's mental health, which in turn affects their social relationships. One in five people living in areas affected by violence and conflict experience significant mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorder, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is therefore also important to apply a differentiated approach, as factors such as gender, age and personality influence the individual's mental health response to conflict. The experiences of conflict and displacement can have a profound impact on the mental health of affected people who are trying to rebuild their lives and communities often after having lost their friends or family and feeling isolated and disconnected from the world.

Recent history has shown that in the wake of conflict mental health and broader aspects of public well-being are often disregarded in favor of combat-oriented initiatives. While the Geneva Convention place civilians under protection during armed conflict, they do not sufficiently address the mental health consequences of war. Psychological trauma such as PTSD, anxiety and depression often emerges in the aftermath and affect both combatants and civilians.

II. Definition of key terms

➤ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

A psychological condition triggered by a traumatic event, characterized by flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the event

➤ Depression:

A mood disorder causing persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities and difficulty functioning

➤ Anxiety:

Excessive worry, fear and nervousness about future events or situations

➤ Bipolar Disorder:

A mental health condition that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy and activity levels

➤ Schizophrenia:

A chronic mental illness that affects a person's ability to think, feel, and behave clearly

➤ **Complex Trauma:**

A type of trauma resulting from prolonged exposure to multiple traumatic events, often associated with interpersonal violence and displacement

➤ **Psychological Distress:** A general term for emotional or mental discomfort, including feelings of anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, and irritability

➤ **Nightmares:** Disturbing and vivid dreams that can disrupt sleep and cause distress

➤ **Insomnia:** Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.

➤ **Hyperarousal:** A state of heightened alertness and reactivity to perceived threats

➤ **Intrusive Thoughts:** Unwanted and distressing thoughts, images, or sensations related to a traumatic event.

➤ **Social Isolation:** Withdrawal from social interactions and relationships

➤ **Substance Abuse:** Use of alcohol or drugs to cope with distress or trauma

➤ **Suicidal Ideation:** Thoughts about ending one's own life

➤ **Aggression:** Behavior intended to harm or injure others

➤ **Emotional Numbness:** A feeling of detachment or lack of emotion

➤ **Psychological First Aid (PFA):**

➤ Initial support provided to individuals experiencing psychological distress in the aftermath of an emergency

➤ **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS):**

A broad term encompassing various activities aimed at promoting mental well-being and addressing psychosocial needs

➤ **Social Capital:**

The resources available to individuals through their social networks and relationships

➤ **Resilience:**

The ability to adapt well in the face of adversity

➤ **Community-based Mental Health Care:**

Mental health services delivered within the community, often involving traditional healers and community support groups

III. **Background information**

Mental health in conflict zones is influenced by multiple variables, including gender, age and cultural background. These factors intensify the challenges faced in post-conflict recovery. Aspects such as gender or age, which pose challenges even in peaceful circumstances, are important factors that need to

be taken into account when assessing the severity of mental damage inflicted on individuals.

There still are countries in the world where attempted suicide is a punishable offense, and it is becoming increasingly obvious that the issue is not only rooted in economic and military dimensions but also in social and political factors that must not be ignored.

While attempts to minimize the psychological impact of conflicts have been made in the past, so far none have provided a complete and efficient solution to address the scarcity and lack of quality of mental health assistance in conflict-affected areas. Some of the efforts undertaken by the UN and other organizations are:

- The Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 attempted to establish a legal framework to regulate armed conflict and promote more humane conduct of warfare in the context of modern society. Particularly important are the clauses which place all medical personnel under protection from all attacks and harm, guarantee the flow of vital resources to hospitals and medical establishments and guarantee the safety of prisoners of war, strictly forbidding any forms of extreme interrogation, such as waterboarding, which can cause lasting psychological harm. These guidelines have set a historical precedent by placing limits on acts of war and terror under international law.

- The Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030

This plan, to which all 194 member states of WHO adhered, was a unanimous commitment to the improvement of mental health care and the transformation of how mental health is treated in society. However, progress has been slow. A WHO report showed that an average only 3% of government health budgets worldwide is spent on mental health and even in developed countries more than half of individuals with depression do not receive treatment. Organizations and experts continue to call for action, and this plan remains a symbol of humanity's united effort to provide better care for everyone.

- The Syrian conflict

The Syrian civil war was devastating both within the country and internationally, yet it shows how effective implementation of mental health services can transform a crisis into an opportunity for development. Long periods of fighting can seriously affect a person's mind and civil wars present no shortage of such pressures.. Many Syrian civilians are experiencing a mild form of mental disorder, such as depression or anxiety and an alarmingly high number of them even experience severe symptoms of PTSD and psychosis as a result of the war surrounding them. Following a ceasefire in 2019, however, the WHO was allowed to intervene. Training personnel, offering support to facilities around the country and helping establish national programs has managed to alleviate the

situation significantly and substantially improve the conditions in which citizens suffering from mental health issues were treated.

IV. Main actors

➤ The World Health Organization

WHO, as an international actor, stands at the forefront of humanity's response to mental health issues. Having repeatedly acknowledged the severity of stress-related disorders, going as far as calling stress itself "the epidemic of the 21st century", the organization has managed to draw attention to the issue and divert more resources to the cause. Their efforts include repeatedly publishing reports showing statistics about mental health, continuously advocating for progressive approaches regarding treatment, the MH GAP

Program (Mental Health Gap Action Program) and the year-long campaign of "Depression, let's talk". However, as the resolutions enacted by this organ are not legally-binding, any solution offered needs to be an appeal to the goodwill of nations and this becomes a heavy impediment in the fight against social stigmas against mental health related issues and poor treatment quality. This lack of authority becomes even more obvious in war-torn areas as the focus there usually is merely political and military, as the economy and civil society are suffering.

➤ Ukraine

Having inherited the Soviet approach to mental health related issues, characterized by severe stigma and limited access to quality care, Ukraine was already struggling with a mental health crisis before the war erupted. Following the 2022 invasion, suicide rates have risen to double those in the European Union, while PTSD and depression have surged due to constant exposure to the horrors of modern warfare and the trauma of families being torn apart. The refugee crisis that resulted from this war has further contributed to the deterioration of the general population's mental health. Said refugees may face discrimination by certain groups within the host country and endure incredibly harsh, sometimes inhumane, living conditions. While the situation has improved over time, the suffering remains very vivid in the minds of the Ukrainian people. As the war continues, it is crucial to develop strategies to counter the effects of combat-related PTSD.

➤ Palestine

The conflict in Gaza has led to immense psychological distress among civilians. Overcrowded refugee camps, restricted medical access and ongoing violence increase mental health challenges. International agencies have struggled to gain sustained access for mental health support.

V. Possible solutions

Transparency is of utmost importance. The flow of information is what allows the international community to mount quick and comprehensive responses to any emerging crisis and impeding it can lead to devastating consequences. Ensuring that all sides follow the Geneva Conventions and other treaties banning cruel weapons is key to reducing the psychological stress on civilians in war zones.

Equally important is the creation of new legislation regarding mental health institutes, placing them in a similar or the same status as medical facilities, the targeting of which is considered a war crime of the highest severity.

The delegates must also consider the strengthening of international cooperation on this issue. Globalization and the age of the internet has brought our people together, but some cultures throughout the world still view mental health issues as taboo and are slower to provide adequate treatment. Unity among nations is what is needed to combat the lasting effects of severe mental disorders caused by different factors. Constructing infrastructure, providing training to medical personnel and funding nationwide programs to support community-based mental health institutes are some of the steps that need to be taken.

Of course, the issue of de facto authority remains as pressing as ever, continually posing a challenge to the United Nations. Navigating this fact and the increasingly unstable international stage will be a significant challenge to overcome in the resolution of the issue at hand.

Having stated all of the above, it is imperative that the topic is tackled responsibly and comprehensively. It is unnatural that humans are forced to live every day in fear of being murdered by an unseen enemy. Modern warfare has come forth with an unfathomable prospect: having distance influence the effect of murder. "From afar you cannot hear them scream and you can deny their humanity". It is our duty, as representatives of humanity, to ensure that the memory of howling mortar shells in the break of dawn becomes easier to bear, if it cannot be entirely eradicated.

VI. **Bibliography**

- [WHO highlights urgent need to transform mental health and mental health care](#)
- [9789240031029-eng.pdf](#)
- ["Depression: let's talk" says WHO, as depression tops list of causes of ill health](#)
- <https://www.emro.who.int/world-health-days/world-health-day-2017/depression-lets-talk.html>
- [One-in-five suffers mental health condition in conflict zones, new UN figures reveal | UN News](#)
- [Mental health conditions in conflict situations are much more widespread than we thought](#)
- [Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of Syrians affected by armed conflict - PMC](#)
- [WHO EMRO | Mental health | Priority areas | Syria site](#)
- [The battle for mental well-being in Ukraine: mental health crisis and economic aspects of mental health services in wartime | International Journal of Mental Health Systems | Full Text](#)
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13033-016-0046-x>
- <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-05/UNDP-Integrating-Mental-Health-and-Psychosocial-Support-into-Peacebuilding-Summary-Report-V2.pdf>
- https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA77/A77_ACONF11-en.pdf
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10566-023-09741-0>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13623699.2022.2156232>