

# YEMEN RESPONSE: MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

UPDATE: JANUARY - SEPTEMBER 2020

## World Mental Health Day, 10th October 2020

Humanitarian crises often produce psychological suffering and trauma, which threaten the health and well-being of affected people, and erode global efforts for peacebuilding and recovery.

Mental health remains one of the most neglected areas of public health.



This year's theme of World Mental Health Day

### • Mental Health for All, Greater Investment, Greater Access •

is more relevant than ever to humanitarian emergencies and conflict settings as access to quality and affordable mental health care is **diminishing as the COVID-19** pandemic disrupts health services around the world.

In Yemen, an estimated **one in five people** suffer from mental health disorders, according to a 2017 study conducted by the Family Counselling and Development Foundation. This number is likely to have increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly six years of conflict.

However, **mental healthcare remains scarce in Yemen**. Mental illness is stigmatized, and the proportion of psychiatrists per population is insufficient. Some of the few existing mental health services have even closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The call for 'Greater Investment and Greater Access' for mental health this year is most timely and opportune for Yemen as humanitarian actors tackle the **reduction of funding and challenges imposed by COVID-19** that are hampering the scaling up of quality and specialized services for mental health.

Under these extraordinary circumstances, **UNFPA and its partners** have strived to ensure the continuity of care, access and quality of services.

**UNFPA joins the global community** on World Mental Health Day, calling for **urgent action** and greater investment in mental health in Yemen and around world.

<sup>1</sup> Joint release by the World Health Organization, United for Global Mental Health and the World Federation for Mental Health, 27 August 2020, News release, Geneva

### Specialized mental health and psychosocial support services

In response to the increasing demand for mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNFPA scaled up the number of professional counsellors, who are available to provide emergency services through 18 toll-free tele-counselling hotlines, established to assist those seeking mental health support and provide information on COVID-19 prevention.

The services remained active, while compliant with COVID-19 global prevention guidelines and best practices. For the period January to August 2020:



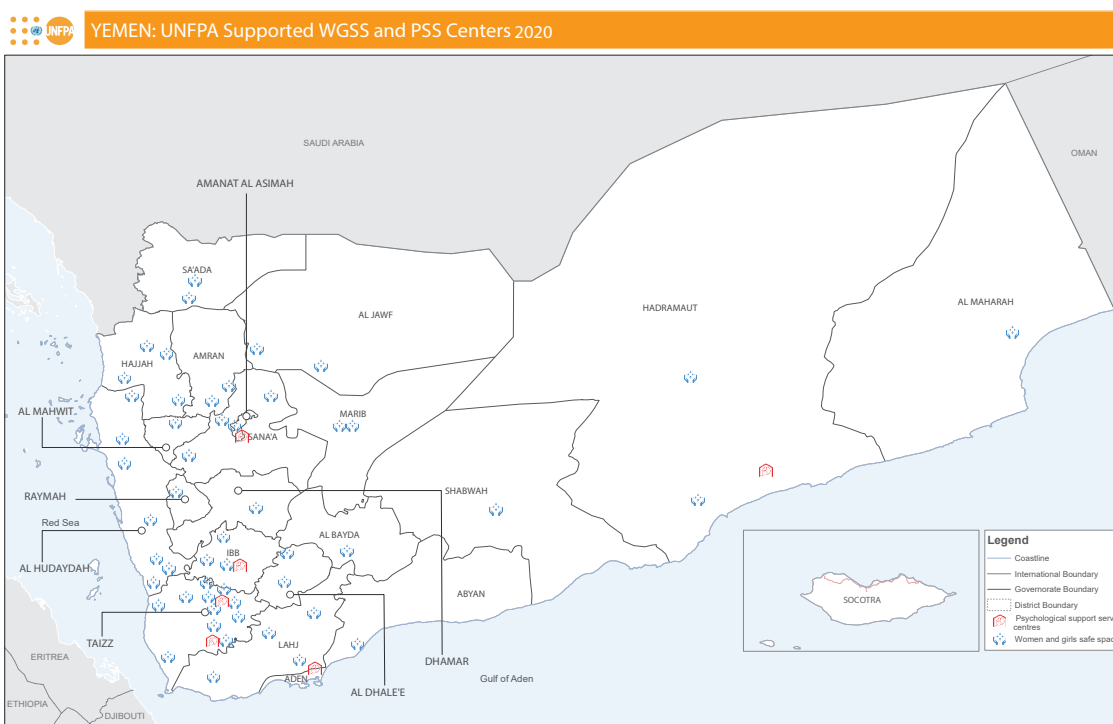
### Psychosocial services for women and girls

In 2020, women and girls safely accessed quality, survivor-centered psychosocial support services focused on healing, empowerment and recovery through UNFPA multi-sectorial services and safe spaces.

Despite COVID-19 related challenges, the women and girls' safe spaces and safe shelters remained operational and continued to assist those internally displaced, host communities and refugee communities, across 14 governorates with psycho-social support and other critical services.

### Key interventions at safe spaces and safe shelters:

- Culturally appropriate counselling that provides information and emotional support, including psychological first aid
- Group-based psychosocial support sessions with women and girls
- Education, livelihood and other social or economic reintegration interventions
- Life-skills and positive coping mechanism for women and girls
- Case management for coordinated individualized service delivery and assistance



In 2020, between January and August:



## Psychosocial support through mobile teams and outreach activities

In 2020, more than 100,000 people have been forced to flee – mostly due to fighting and insecurity<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, COVID-19 has emerged as a new cause of internal displacement across the country.

Thousands of internally displaced Yemenis still live in internally displaced settlements or within host communities. Precarious living conditions, economic crisis and multiple layers of protracted hardship put people's well-being and coping mechanisms further at risk.

In order to improve mental health and psychosocial well-being of the most vulnerable persons and reduce the ways in which they experience pain, distress or hardship, UNFPA supports a network of mobile teams reaching out to displaced communities across the country and providing multi-sectorial services, including:



## Deployment of an International MHPSS Specialist

An International MHPSS Specialist was deployed in August 2020 to assist the Yemen Country Office in providing technical support to MHPSS interventions across the country.

The International MHPSS Specialist will support UNFPA partners to ensure implemented programmes are multilayered, integrated and compliant with the IASC Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings and The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming.

The Specialist will also focus on strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of MHPSS interventions in order to improve quality and evidence-based programming.

## Funding Requirements

UNFPA requires US\$ 9 million for its women's protection programme till the end of the year. If funding is not received by October 2020, specialized services in 17 safe spaces and four specialized psychological centers in Ibb, Taizz and Hadramout Governorates will be shutdown. This would mean 350,000 people will no longer have access to specialized services, while 40,000 highly vulnerable people will no longer have access to psychological care. This will immediately and significantly increase the probability that vulnerable people will be at extreme risk of intimidation and life-threatening violence and may be forced into illicit activities to survive. People currently receiving medication as part of their psychological care will be at extreme risk of negative, harmful practices.

<sup>2</sup> Joint release by the World Health Organization, United for Glob IOM website, Internal Displacement in Yemen Exceeds 100,000 in 2020 with COVID-19 an Emerging New Cause, 21/07/2020 al Mental Health and the World Federation for Mental Health, 27 August 2020, News release, Geneva



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**SANA'A, Yemen** – Years of war, poverty and gender-based violence have taken a serious toll on the mental health of many women and girls in Yemen. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic hardships have only aggravated their situation.

Marwa\* has experienced these stresses first-hand.

After her parents divorced, when she was only 9 years old, Marwa took over caring for her younger siblings. On top of this burden, her unstable father began to abuse her, beating her severely and refusing to allow her to attend school. Recently, he forced her to marry an older man. She is only 16.

“Marwa called our family counselling hotline in a miserable condition only two weeks after her wedding,” described Ishraq, a psychologist at a UNFPA-supported mental health call centre in Sana’a, the capital.

See more: <https://www.unfpa.org/news/against-odds-delivering-mental-health-support-yemen>

