

Mental Health in Yemen: A Neglected Crisis



COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

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 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY | MAILMAN SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

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Three topics to discuss today:

1. Why do we think there is a serious risk of mental health crisis in Yemen?
2. If we don't address mental health now, what is likely to happen long term?
3. Recommendations to improve mental health in Yemen

1. We think there is likely a neglected crisis because: (a)

Yemenis have daily exposure to very serious stress and trauma:

- Airstrikes, armed attacks, detention, torture
- Loss of livelihood
- Food insecurity
- Cholera epidemic

1. We think there is likely a neglected crisis because: (b)

Despite exposure, Yemenis have little access to support:

- More than half of Yemen's medical facilities are non-functional or only partially functional
- 40 psychiatrists for the whole country
- Mental health not integrated into primary health care
- No government policy for health
- Few humanitarian organizations do mental health support

2. If we don't address mental health, longterm consequences:

- Widespread depression and post traumatic stress disorder among the Yemeni population
- Increased suicide rates (research suggests 40% increase suicide rate in Sana'a since war started)
- Serious impacts on children (our research suggests 80% of children in Sana'a have PTSD symptoms)
- High rates of depression and PTSD can lead to:
 - Breakdown of families, domestic violence
 - Substance abuse
 - Dropping out of school, work
 - Poor physical health
 - PTSD can make people more violent, less supportive of peace processes

What can be done?

We recommend:

- The Government of Yemen should integrate mental health in its national planning, create a national mental health policy, and ensure sufficient budget is allocated to mental health services.
- The Government of Yemen, with support from UN agencies, donor governments, and non-governmental organizations, should promote access to psychosocial support, including by training more mental health service providers.
- The Government of Yemen should immediately make all efforts to reduce the burden of the conflict on Yemenis, including by paying public sector salaries to all areas in Yemen, by reopening Sana'a Airport, by lifting unnecessary import restrictions.
- Parties to the conflict, the UN Special Envoy, and the international community should ensure that mental health is taken into account during peace and transitional justice processes.



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