

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN EMERGENCIES: CRITICAL FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN





War Child Holland believes no child should be part of war. Ever. Nevertheless, millions of children and young people worldwide grow up in conflict-affected areas. Children and young people's rights to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect, to live a dignified life and be supported in their healthy development are violated on a massive scale.

We empower children and young people to change their own future by protecting them from the effects of war, promoting psychosocial support and stimulating education. We enable them to strengthen their self-confidence and to build positive relationships with their peers, family and wider community. We unleash children's inner strength with our creative and involving approach. We inspire as many people as we can.

War Child Holland is an independent and impartial, international nongovernmental organisation investing in a peaceful future for children affected by armed conflict. Our work is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. An up to date list of countries where we work can be found on our websites: www.warchildholland.org or www.warchild.nl.

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INTRODUCTION

Children bear the brunt of conflict around the world. And Syria is no exception. Children have been targeted and killed in conflict violence, used in combat, abducted, tortured and abused. They have witnessed atrocities, been displaced, lost family members, and been denied access to school. As in many conflict-driven emergency settings, Syria faces a serious shortage in humanitarian assistance.

And just as in many other emergencies, the provision of support for the psychological and social well-being and recovery of children – ‘psychosocial support’ – is being overlooked. This is happening despite confirmed evidence that psychosocial support during emergencies is critical. The testimonies from Syrian children in this report further underline its absolute necessity.

A recent report by the Global Child Protection Working Group⁶, the global level forum for coordination on child protection in humanitarian settings, indicated that 98 percent of Syrian children surveyed reported deterioration in their psychosocial well-being.⁷ Humanitarian agencies are warning of a potential “lost generation”.⁸

Despite the overwhelming need, only 20 percent of the 2 million Syrian refugees have received some kind of psychosocial support and only 118,000 children have been able to continue their education⁹ – a critical factor in the psychosocial well-being – in some way. The number of Syrian children who have received support within the country is unknown. However, considering humanitarian organisations’ lack of access to the population inside Syria, the number is most likely very low.



In conversation with War Child Lebanon, Syrian children clearly identified the key conflict-related factors negatively impacting their psychosocial well-being, both from their experiences in Syria and in their new lives as refugees. When in Syria, they faced conflict-related risks and lack of protection from conflict violence. Both in Syria and as refugees in Lebanon, they lack access to education and recreation and struggle to cope with changes in their parents’ behaviour and support. They now want to feel safe, go to school, play outside and ‘be children’.

SYRIAN CIVIL WAR:

- Conflict began in March 2011
- 9.3 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance¹, including 3 million children².
- 5 million Syrians are displaced within the country³.
- Refugee camps lining Syria’s borders in Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan host 2 million Syrians⁴, 1.1 million are children. 75% of them are under 12 years old⁵.

This report aims to provide Syrian children with a platform to make their voices heard. Their stories highlight the urgent need to address the psychosocial well-being of children affected by the Syrian civil war, and in all emergencies.

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24813902#TWEET945486>

2. Child Protection Working Group. Syria Protection Assessment. 2013.

3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/02/internally-displaced-syria_n_3855563.html?ref=topbar

4. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23937972>

5. *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*. UNHCR. November 2013

6. Syria Child Protection Assessment, 2013. Child Protection Working Group.

7. Articles of the UN CRC on psychosocial support and well-being: 2, 5, 12-17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 29, 31, 39

8. UNHCR, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23937972>

9. *ibid*

GATHERING STORIES

Children have the right to influence decisions affecting them, including those made by humanitarian agencies providing services during emergencies. Child rights-based organisations are better informed and able to fulfil their obligations to protect and provide services to vulnerable children when they can 'see through children's eyes'. This perspective allows them to respond in ways that children themselves have identified as appropriate and effective.

The testimonies informing this report were gathered as part of War Child's programme in Lebanon, using a participatory approach that empowers children to voice their concerns and vulnerabilities in a safe and supportive environment. By sharing their stories, key concerns, and recommendations, these children directly influence the process of designing and shaping War Child's programmatic response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. At the same time, the fact that stories on sensitive issues, such as sexual violence, may still be too sensitive for children to tell, must also be taken into consideration.



THE VOICES OF SYRIAN CHILDREN

Over and over again, children spoke about the **risks and the lack of protection from conflict violence** that they and their families faced. They spoke about their **lack of access to education and recreation**. They told us about the **change in their parent's behaviour and support**. These three issues have clearly emerged as key factors impacting the psychosocial well-being of Syrian children affected by the conflict¹².

As a consequence, children experience feelings of fear, stress, sadness, and hopelessness. They have difficulty concentrating and nightmares. Some have experienced severe behavioural problems, uncontrollable crying, and in rare cases, severe anxiety. This section examines the three factors in more detail, from the perspective of Syrian children themselves.

LACK OF PROTECTION FROM CONFLICT VIOLENCE

Directly affected by violence

Children told us about the fear they experienced when they were in their home communities in Syria: fear of attack, fear of buildings on fire, fear of checkpoints. They remember the death, smoke, violence, and screaming, which made them constantly fearful. They were afraid of being kidnapped or detained. Many children who had lived in areas where fighting was constant told us of their inability to sleep at night.

Displacement

Fleeing from their homes, many families are now living in camps and shelters in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, often in extremely close quarters with many others¹³. They compete with the local populations for resources and jobs, which sometimes stimulates feelings of resentment against the refugees. In these conditions, Syrian children continue to feel unsafe and lack a sense of belonging. They have little privacy and fear physical or sexual abuse. They are often living in areas with poor hygiene and high risk of disease, with limited access to clean water¹⁴.

A lack of everyday routine, access to education and recreation is also a serious problem. Refugee parents are under overwhelming pressure. According to children, their parents' feelings of frustration and helplessness sometimes manifest in physical and emotional abuse.

AHMED, 13 "WHEN I'M ALONE, I IMAGINE THAT MY FRIEND COMES TO ME AND KNOCKS ON THE DOOR."

Everything changed when the war began. "When it [the war] all began and the problems started, my whole life changed. And I changed," Ahmed remembers. "I wasn't scared of anything until one time when I went out with my friends. When we went to sit down, they began to shoot and bomb. I started to run away, but [my friends] stayed, they weren't scared. And my friends asked me: 'How did you get to be so scared? You've become a coward. We don't want any scared friends.' From that moment, they distanced themselves from me. They stopped talking to me because I was a coward."

Ahmed hardly dared to do anything anymore. "Before, if they were going out, [my friends] always asked me to go with them. But from that moment, they did things without telling me. I only had four friends. And one of them is dead. He died when he was walking on the street. He saw a girl lying on the ground. He tried to help her and at that moment he was hit by a mortar. He died immediately."

Now in Lebanon, Ahmed remembers his old life in Syria and the friend he will never see again. "When I'm alone, I imagine that my friend comes and knocks on the door. Then I imagine that he comes to me."

10. http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/stolen_futures

11. The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis. UNHCR. November 2013

12. Syria Child Protection Assessment, 2013. Child Protection Working Group.

13. Stories from Syrian Refugees (UNHCR) October 2013 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>

- Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, more than an estimated 11,000 children have died as a result of the conflict.¹⁰
- A sampling of Palestinian refugees from Syria showed that 94 percent were directly affected by conflict-related violence.
- Lebanon is now home to more than 385,000 Syrian child refugees.¹¹

AHMED AND KARIM “I FEEL LIKE EVERYONE WANTS TO HURT ME AND THAT NO ONE CARES ABOUT ME.”

Ahmed fled his hometown of Hama with his brothers, sister and parents. It had become too dangerous to stay. “We had no time to bring anything with us. We had to leave as quickly as possible,” remembers Ahmed. “The next day my father went back to the house to pick up a few things, clothes and that sort of thing.”

They fled to Ahmed’s aunt’s small apartment in Shatila, the biggest Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut. Everyone who sleeps in the apartment, all twelve of them, sleep on mats on the ground in the living room. Life in Shatila isn’t easy for its residents, and even more difficult for the new arrivals from Syria. The camp is overcrowded and there aren’t many places for children to gather or play. Many of the refugee children from Syria can’t go to school because their papers were left behind in Syria, or because schools that are accessible to them are run in French, a language they don’t speak.

Ahmed sometimes meets his new friends on a near-by makeshift football field. Like Ahmed, Karim also lives in Shatila refugee camp. He lives with his family of six in a small, dark, damp basement apartment for which they pay 200 dollars a month. “We had two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom in Syria,” says Karim. “I don’t like it here. In Syria it was much better. I had a computer.”

Karim doesn’t like being on the street either. “I feel like everyone wants to hurt me and that no one cares about me.” Like Ahmed, Karim is struggling to deal with the loss of his home and friends. “When I feel sad I want to be alone and not talk to anyone, and I don’t want anyone to talk to me. That’s when I feel sad because my friends aren’t here. I think about my friends in Damascus that I left behind when I came here. I don’t have anyone here,” he says.

LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND RECREATION

Education

Education is an essential aspect of the healthy development of children. They learn to socialise, to develop skills and to enjoy respite from the stress of their daily lives. Many children in Syria cannot go to school because they have been destroyed. Many displaced children, such as those in Lebanon, cannot go to school because schools in their host communities do not have enough space, because instruction is given in a language they do not understand, because their registration documents were left behind in Syria, or because they have to work.

- An estimated 2,445-3,873 schools have been destroyed¹⁵ (numbers until the end of 2012), or an average of 222-430 schools per month.¹⁶
- The combined effects of the conflict have jeopardised the education of 2.5 million children.¹⁷

Recreation and play

The lack of spaces and means for play causes children to become more isolated and tense, and is associated with an increase in the level of violence among children affected by the conflict. Syrian children are aware and concerned with the denial of their right to childhood, which for them is symbolised through their lack of opportunities for play and recreation both when they were in Syria and now as refugees. Play offers a means for distraction, to let out energy and express and share feelings. Children said that they were not able to play because the camps and host communities lacked safe places, because adults wouldn’t allow them to play out of fear, and because they need to work.

“WE CAN MAKE UP FOR LOSING A YEAR OF STUDYING, BUT WE CAN’T MAKE UP

FOR YEARS OF LOST CHILDHOOD BECAUSE WE COULDN’T PLAY.” - ZEENAB, 11

14. <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/syria/>

15. http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrw_safe_no_more.pdf#page=, page 3.

16. Save the Children; p.7 http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Attacks_on_Education_0.pdf

Changes in parental behaviour and support

Refugee parents struggle to support their families and keep them safe. They often do not feel comfortable giving their children the time and space to play. Boys often have more space to play than girls, as parents are more reluctant to send their daughters to play outside. At the same time, many boys, and also some girls, tell us that they don't have time to play as they have to be working to support their families in their new lives as refugees.



MARYAM, 12 “THERE WERE A COUPLE OF GIRLS THAT LOOKED AT ME AND ASKED, ‘ARE YOU NEW?’”

“It was the third day of Ramadan. We were waiting for my brother. He was at work. He usually went by bike but that day his bike was broken so he had to walk. There was bombing so my mother and I were worried.” When her brother returned home, Maryam, 12, her two sisters, 15 and 16, her brother, 13, and her mother fled. Their first attempt was unsuccessful and they returned home. But then bombs destroyed their building and they fled again. They made it to Lebanon.

Their apartment outside Beirut is small, nothing like their house in Syria. “We had a furnished house, I had my own bed where I slept by myself, without anyone else around. I had my own stuff there, my clothes,” remembers Maryam.

Maryam's mother hasn't been able to find work. Luckily Maryam's sister was able to find a job in a clothing store, although at 16 years old, she should be in school. But without her job, they wouldn't be able to pay the rent. Maryam isn't really sure where her father is. “I love my father and I miss him,” she says. I haven't seen him in a long time, since before the war.

Maryam hasn't been to school since she came to Lebanon. But she does participate in a catch-up education programme for refugee children three days per week. She was nervous the first time she went, but she quickly made some new friends. “There were a couple of girls that looked at me and asked, ‘are you new?’ They didn't talk that much to me, but we became friends in no time. We study together and play together. We do activities together.”

SALMA, 10 “I COULD ONLY GO ON THE BALCONY FROM TIME TO TIME.”

“Near my house, the situation was very difficult. There was shooting all the time, I heard lots and lots of explosions and I saw destroyed houses,” says Salma. She now lives in the Palestinian refugee camp, Ain Al Hilweh, with her brother, sister and parents. “I also have a big sister – she has small children – but we can’t get a hold of her. I don’t know where she is.”

Salma remembers the fighting very clearly. “There were times that there was a lot of shelling around our house. We always wanted to leave. But now that we left we miss home so much.” She explains that her family had to leave in a rush: “I was not able to take anything. I have some really nice toys at home. My cousins used to come and play with us all the time.”

In Damascus she had to stay indoors for weeks. “I could only go on the balcony from time to time. Here I can at least visit neighbours. But in this camp there is some shooting from time to time as well. It is a bit scary but nothing compared to Syria. At night, I can sleep straight away. But sometimes I wake up screaming because of scary nightmares. I see those dead bodies in my neighbourhood again. And I dream about the smell, it was a very strong smell,” she says.

Salma has no idea how long she hasn’t been to school. “Maybe a few months. I’d really love to go back to school but the problem seems to be that my school papers are now in Syria and so I can’t start here.” The informal educational and recreational activities she attends are her only outings. “Every day I learn interesting new things and it makes me happy. I see a lot of other Syrian Palestinians here. They are nice but they are not my friends. I lost touch with all my friends and most of my family members,” she says.

GROUP OF MOTHERS “I’D LIKE THEM TO GO TO SCHOOL BUT OUR PRIORITY IS TO GET THE BASICS SORTED OUT.”

A group of neighbours from the Tadamon area of Damascus fled together to the Palestinian refugee camp Ain al Hilweh. “We heard there were nice people here,” one woman said. When no one offered them a place to stay they rented a small room. “Our husbands have no work and no savings. We have to pay the rent and manage to get food. Compared to Syria, Lebanon is very expensive. We haven’t eaten anything else but rice and yoghurt since we arrived. Only the security situation is better here.”

“We were about to be shelled when we left,” a mother of six explains. “I worry so much about the children. They have nightmares and it is cold. They cannot sleep, they are still terrified. Sometimes they tell me about their nightmares and I hug them. There are times my eldest daughter faints.”

Children spend their days helping their parents. They can’t go to school and most are looking for a job to make some money. “I’d like them to go to school but our priority is to get the basics sorted out. We have no mattresses and no blankets. We only have one set of summer clothes. It is getting very cold now.”

“Obviously this whole situation affected my children a lot. My ten year old son used to be the best in his class. I am so unhappy that he has been out of school for over a year now. I can see how much he changed; he used to be very happy. Now he’s quiet and he doesn’t say much. It is really hard to see this change in his psychology. Most nights he wakes up screaming. My dream is that he can study one day.”

Many boys above the age of 14 perceive themselves to be grownup with the adult responsibilities to work, protect, and provide for their families. They do not believe that they have the right to play anymore.

A group of 16 year old boys is sitting in the corner, listening to their mothers. They worked for a month in construction but now they can’t find jobs. “I haven’t been to school for over a year. Maybe I better forget about it and so I try and get a job. In the meantime I sit at home all day. We have no electricity and I can’t watch television. I want to go back to Syria. I have only one shirt, and so I don’t even want to go outside. It is too embarrassing for me to show up in the same old shirt all the time.”



PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT IS HIGH, PRIORITY IS LOW

In addition to the importance given to psychosocial support by children themselves, a growing body of evidence attests to the necessity of protecting and supporting the well-being of children in conflict settings^{18,18,20}. Even in the absence of direct exposure to the brutality and loss of war, the breakdown of stability can trigger emotional distress in children and young people, resulting in feelings of profound fear, panic attacks and other forms of anxiety, disobedience, nightmares and regressive behaviour such as bedwetting. It can also have serious long-term effects on the mental health of children, manifested in social isolation, self-harm, aggression and depression.²¹

Such long-term effects can impact an entire generation of young people, and threaten the sustainability of peace and development in areas recovering from conflict.²² According to the Child Protection Working Group's Syria Child Protection Assessment published in September 2013, the main behaviour changes experienced by Syrian children include:

*"Unusual crying/screaming, disruption in sleep patterns, sadness, bedwetting and unwillingness to go to school. Boys are more likely to display aggressive behaviour including the desire to join armed forces and armed groups. Girls are reported to show more self-harm and fear. Caregivers tend to limit children's mobility outside of home and are not always able to provide attention to children's needs. Their main sources of stress are the deteriorated security and also access to basic needs (food, electricity, water, and livelihoods), children's safety and access to healthcare. Main factors contributing to deterioration are change in behaviour of caregivers, lack of access to education and recreation."*²³



17. 'Emergency mental health and psycho-social support' The Johns Hopkins and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

18. 'Emergency mental health and psycho-social support' The Johns Hopkins and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. See http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-refugee-and-disaster-response/publications_tools/publications/_CRDR_ICRC_Public_Health_Guide_Book/Chapter_5_Emergency_Mental_Health_and_Psychosocial_support.pdf

19. Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC) http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf

High impact

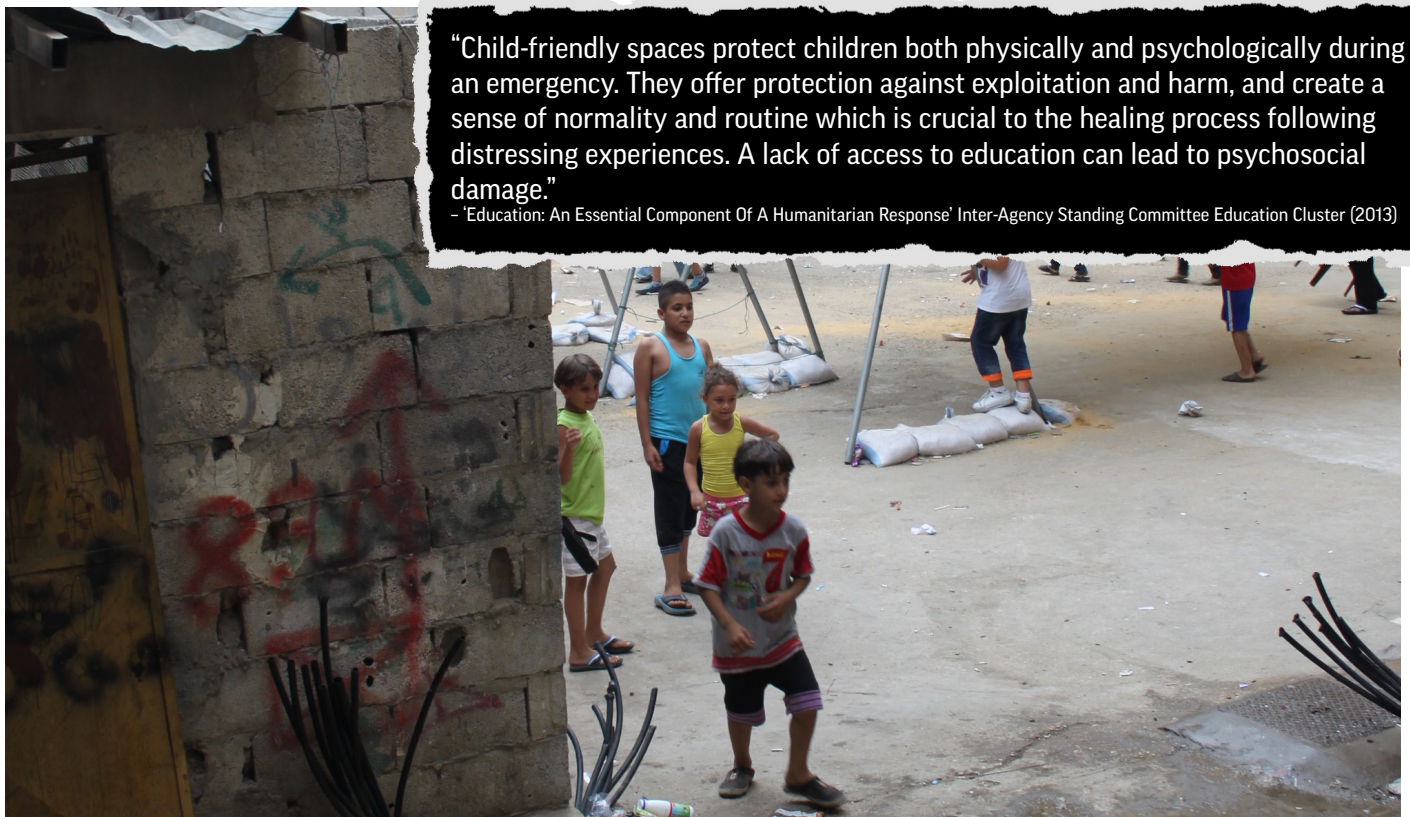
Yet, the resilience of children must not be underestimated. Child protection and psychosocial support interventions aim to provide children with the skills to prevent and minimise the harmful consequences of violent conflict and development into competent, engaged and productive adults.²⁴

Providing opportunities for children to interact socially with their peers and adults and to develop their education and skills are critical aspects of ensuring and promoting children's psychosocial well-being. Psychosocial support activities in a safe environment provide children and young people with a sense of normalcy, enhancing their ability to cope with the situation and fostering their long-term emotional and social wellbeing, which can mitigate long lasting psychological damage.²⁵

Just as protecting children from conflict violence and other risks associated with conflict are essential aspects of ensuring the well-being of children, there is a close relationship between effective and child-focused education and increased psychosocial well-being. Education activities during emergencies provide children with a safe space "to begin the trauma healing process, and to learn skills and values needed for a more peaceful future and better governance at local and national levels."²⁶

Low Priority

Despite the clear evidence that psychosocial activities integrated into child protection and education interventions support and promote the well-being of children in emergencies, there is a severe lack of funding. A survey of donors carried out by the Canadian International Development Agency indicated that not only is child protection badly funded, it is neither understood nor prioritised within emergency responses.²⁷ In addition, in a 2009 report, the Child Protection Working Group noted that: "*child protection activities require skilled expertise that only child protection practitioners can provide and that are not addressed by other protection actors, highlighting the importance of funding child protection interventions.*"²⁸ Funding for education activities is also dismally low. According to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) only 2 percent of humanitarian aid goes to education, despite its proven protective function and long-term contribution to conflict transformation.²⁹



20. Donahue-Colletta, Understanding Cross-Cultural Child Development and Designing Programs For. Children, (PACT), 1992.

21. The Psychosocial Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies - Teacher Training Manual (UNICEF 2009).

22. See 21

23. Syria - Child Protection Assessment' Child Protection Working Group (September 2013) <http://cpwg.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SCPA-FULL-Report-LIGHT.pdf> Learning for a Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries, UNHCR 2001

24. Learning for Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries, UNHCR 2001

25. The Psychosocial Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies - Teacher Training Manual (UNICEF 2009). See: http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/files/resources/UNICEF_Teacher_Training_Manual_-_June_2009.pdf

26. 'Psychosocial Support of Children In Emergencies' (UNICEF 2009).

MUSTAFA, 11

Mustafa came to Lebanon from Hama. “We lived in Damascus until the situation there got so bad we had to flee again. My mum was scared. I had to take care of her. I am the only man in the house. I have five sisters. It is quite a big responsibility for me.”

He clearly remembers the demonstrations near his house. “[They] would come to our area and order all the men to go out on the street. My mother and sisters would stay inside and I had to go out on the street and stand with the men. It was really scary. They would search our house and I was worried for my sisters. Before going into the house they would load their guns. I was so frightened for the girls. Maybe the army would do something to them.”

“We are [many] in the place where we stay here in Lebanon,” he says and laughs. “With thirty people we stay in three rooms. It is really crowded and I heard more family members want to come from Syria and stay with us. But I miss my cousin. We used to play in our nice garden, there is a fountain in the middle. No one can live outside their country. I really want to go home. My house is in the oldest alley of Hama. It is really beautiful there. It is a special old Arabic house.”

PRIORITISE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN EMERGENCIES

Supporting the psychosocial well-being of Syrian children is critical. They want safe places to learn and play, ‘to be children’, and to continue their normal family lives.

What children are saying further emphasises the recommendations from expert organisations, including War Child:

Expand specialist child protection programming inside Syria and refugee communities: Wherever possible build on and strengthen existing child protection systems, **such as addressing causes of stress for children through activities that seek to restore normality (for example, access to school and community-based psychosocial activities)** and training personnel to detect and support children experiencing psychosocial distress.

Abide by established principles: All actors, including UN and INGO leadership, must be aware of and adhere to the basic principles of effective mental health and psychosocial support programming as stated in the Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.³⁰

Meet long-term needs: In addition, the donor community must provide **more flexible, longer-term funding** for integrated programming that works to support the psychosocial well-being of children in conflict situations. This would allow for comprehensive programmes that address children’s psychosocial well-being in the long-term, both during conflict and in the post-conflict or recovery phase.

Finally, and above all, all parties involved in conflict should adhere to the long established principles of international humanitarian law and to refrain from targeting civilians, especially children, and to engage in diplomatic negotiations for peaceful resolution.

27. Child Protection Systems in Emergencies: A Discussion Paper’ Save the Children (2010) http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Child_Protection_Systems_low_res_1.pdf

28. ‘Too Little, Too Late: Child protection funding in emergencies’ Global Protection Cluster: Child Protection (2009) <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/4382.pdf>

29. <http://www.ineesite.org/en/education-fragility/conflict-sensitive-education#What>

30. http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf

WAR CHILD: SUPPORTING SYRIAN CHILDREN

As violence in Syria continues, the number of refugees in Lebanon is expected to exceed 1 million by the end of 2013. War Child supports Syrian children, their families and the communities hosting them throughout Lebanon, filling a critical service gap in strengthening the psychosocial well-being of refugee and vulnerable children. Together with local partners, we provide regular, structured catch-up education, psychosocial, and recreation activities in safe spaces. We work with parents, teachers and communities to ensure a safe and supportive environment for children.

In safe spaces, children can participate in age- and gender-appropriate psychosocial support activities through War Child's DEALs interventions: I DEAL (11-15 year olds), BIG DEAL (16-20 year olds), and SHE DEAL (girls). Children also participate in structured recreational and extra-curricular activities such as sports and outings, where they can interact with their peers, express themselves and have fun.

By giving children a daily routine and providing a sense of stability and normalcy, education plays an important role in children's psychosocial well-being and development. Syrian children who struggle with the Lebanese curriculum because of foreign language requirements can attend remedial classes. At the same time, an Accelerated Learning Programme supports out-of-school children to re-enter mainstream education.

Open house events and clear information on enrolment stimulate children's interest in returning to school and help motivate families to enrol their children. In addition, children participating in the programme take part in structured creative activities designed to help them cope with their emotions and experiences.

Workshops on child protection and supporting children affected by armed conflict are also held for parents and guardians. Staff members of local organisations receive training on psychosocial support methodologies and child protection practices, including identification, support and referral. Staff members at participating schools and social centres also receive training in child protection and on facilitating structured recreational activities. Schools receive support to ensure children have access to clean water supplies, sanitation facilities and play equipment.



HANA, 12

I didn't want to go [to the centre] in the beginning, especially that most of the children were from the camp, and I was the only one they didn't know. But still, I was attracted to that place, especially because the teachers are very nice. They enrolled me at school and I started attending it. I felt safest in the centre of Building a Safer Community for Children project. I loved that place, and I loved the school too. I still don't like the house and I can't wait till I return home, but I'm not constantly crying anymore. The best thing in Lebanon is the children centres."