Health care and training

Transforming mental health services in the occupied Palestinian territory

EC Partners

Ministry of Health

World Health Organisation

Facts and Figures

- Project budget: €3.4 million
- Duration: 2008-2010

"We have created the first and only association for families of persons with mental illnesses in the West Bank. They now have a place where they can get together and receive guidance on how to deal with various forms of mental illness. The families no longer feel alone, and this has a positive impact on the patients as well."

Adnan Dagher, Executive Director, Mental Health Families and Friends Society

Context

Effective delivery of mental healthcare services requires that professionals, ranging from doctors and nurses to psychologists and social workers, work together to deliver a variety of services at the community, health centre and hospital level. Such integrated services are not currently available due to the limited capacity of the national health system, compounded by the social stigma attached to mental illness. As a result, only a small number of sufferers receive the services they need.

Objective

- Support the Ministry of Health in streamlining the provision of mental healthcare services across the board and establishing a clear legal and regulatory framework for mental health policy and services.

- Provide training and education for current and future mental health professionals.

- Develop understanding and support for people with mental illnesses within local communities and the population at large.

Impact

- Mental health unit within the Ministry of Health created.

- Three postgraduate courses on mental health launched in higher education institutions in the West Bank and Gaza.

- Patient and family associations registered as NGOs.

- Over 113 mental health professionals trained and training manual produced.

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Taghreed Khader Ahmad Abu Sherifa, volunteer at the Mental Health Centre

"As a volunteer for the family association created thanks to funding by the European Union, I come to the mental health centre three days a week. Although a great number of people in Palestine have a mentally ill relative, they often cannot identify the illness. We explain to them how to address it and where to receive adequate treatment, as well as assistance by social workers.

We also organise outings and social activities that the patients appreciate very much. It makes them feel well cared for. We want them to integrate into society and to get rid of the stigma attached to mental disorders.

The impact of this project is immense. Now people are not ashamed of having a mentally ill person in their family, and the patients themselves have made considerable progress."

Taghreed Khader Ahmad Abu Sherifa, a volunteer at the Ramallah Mental Health Centre, chats with a patient before she meets with a doctor