

Mental Health & Psychosocial Support for Youth

Why is the mental health of youth important?

Youth, especially adolescence, is a critical phase of human development, defined as a time of significant change, when individuals transition from childhood and dependence on their families to a newly developed sense of independence, and explore their identity and engagement in society. The mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of youth is an essential determinant of their healthy development and future wellbeing as an adult. This is an especially important consideration for populations affected by conflict and displacement. Ongoing stressors, as a result of breakdown in family, community, or social structures, can negatively impact the emotional, social and cognitive development of adolescents and their ability to develop their own identities and roles in their families and communities. Youth are often a neglected group in humanitarian programming; therefore, there is an urgent need for action.

KEY FACTS

- At 1.2 billion, the global cohort of youth today is the largest generation in human history.
- Nearly half (45%) of the global burden of disease for young people is attributable to mental disorders.
- Approximately half of lifetime mental disorders, including depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety-related disorders, impulse-control disorders, and substance-control disorders, begin by age 14.
- Across all countries, suicide has surpassed maternal mortality as the top cause of death for adolescent girls, and is now the third leading cause of death for adolescent boys.

KEY BARRIERS

- Health providers who feel less well-trained to work with youth
- Social stigma related to youth seeking services for sensitive issues, such as sexual and reproductive health or mental health
- Dependence on parents or caregivers to afford and access health services
- Having to pay for services out-of-pocket, if they lack coverage or if coverage is not available

Our approach to mental health & psychosocial support

Many of International Medical Corps' beneficiaries have either been exposed or are at risk of being exposed to conflict, displacement, and social adversities, such as violence, early marriage, family separation, and child labor. Community-based programs for youth at International Medical Corps aim to provide psychosocial support and key life skills for coping with difficult situations, promote social connections and learning through recreational and educational activities, and foster overall wellbeing, protection, and healthy development. Programming is provided in a safe and accessible space, and facilitated by trained staff who are also able to identify and refer youth and their family members who may be in need of more specialized services. International Medical Corps' best practices for community-based safe spaces for youth include cross-sector collaboration between child protection and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) teams, to ensure programming integrates key MHPSS and protection components. International Medical Corps' Adolescent Health Taskforce works to develop and address multi-sectoral, integrated adolescent programming, with a focus on integrating mental health and psychosocial support, gender based violence, sexual & reproductive health, nutrition and gender into current International Medical Corps programs.



practices to enable and expedite systemic, sustainable change. Under the Makani approach, youth have the opportunity to be linked with local experts to develop innovative solutions to the challenges they perceive to be affecting their

communities. As part of the 2016 UNICEF-Makani grant, International Medical Corps has helped build the psychosocial support capacity of more than 400 individuals from other Makani partners. In addition, youth are connected to specialized services to address needs relating to education, child protection, gender based violence and mental health. As of 2015, there were 128 centers led by a variety of partners in Jordan, implementing the Makani approach.

Child and Adolescent Friendly Spaces

International Medical Corps' Child and Adolescent Friendly Spaces (CFS) promote the protection and psychosocial well-being of children. These spaces provide a safe and structured environment in which trained animators facilitate age-specific group and individual activities with the goal of supporting child development, skills building, artistic expression, and physical exercise. Activities include arts and crafts, games, sports, calligraphy and music/singing. Vulnerable children are also identified and offered additional support by connecting them to child protection, education, mental health and psychosocial support services. Parents/care-providers and the wider community are also engaged through key messaging and awareness-raising workshops, participation in community-based activities, and trainings of service providers.

Makani - My Space

Makani, a UNICEF-developed initiative, is a comprehensive approach to providing child protection, psychosocial support and education services for vulnerable children in community-based settings. International Medical Corps in Jordan is a key implementing partner of Makani. Makani supports the engagement of local networks of partners to facilitate collaborative thinking, social cohesion and best

Youth Empowerment Program

International Medical Corps' evidence-based Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) engages vulnerable displaced youth ages 12-18, including those from the host community, in an effort to promote well-being, empowerment, protection and resiliency of youth, and enhance confidence and asset development as well as social and community cohesion. Youth are invited to join a series of YEP sessions to discuss issues they are facing and identify positive coping strategies. The life skills oriented curriculum uses discussion group sessions and skill-building activities. The culmination of YEP is a community service project. Youth are encouraged to collaboratively complete one community service project which they feel is feasible and will make a positive impact on their community. Since 2010, IMC has implemented YEP in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, and Ukraine.

Highlights of youth programs



Syria

International Medical Corps' projects for youth in Syria, like those provided through the Recreational Activity Center (RAC) in Jaramana, offer youth the opportunity to play and also aim to build key life skills, involve families and community leaders, strengthen social support networks and make important contributions to community-building in Syria. Within the RAC, a Child Friendly Space has been set up to provide a safe space for children 6-12 years, to engage in structured play and educational activities, and receive psychosocial support and protection through trained community volunteers, with links to other services as needed. International Medical Corps has also utilized existing spaces to implement YEP for vulnerable adolescents in Syria. Using a 16-week curriculum, cohorts of adolescents, 13-18 years, meet at supported clinics, community centers and shelters to receive training on life skills and communication and engage in constructive dialogue regarding social responsibility and cultural awareness. Additionally, vocational training activities for youth and vulnerable groups, including gender based violence survivors in Damascus and Tartous, promotes self-reliance. Vocational courses include sewing, English language courses, computer training, and hairdressing, among others.



Jordan

In 2010, IMC implemented the first YEP for vulnerable Jordanian youth and Iraqi refugee youth living in Jordan through a 12-week training and participation in community-based restoration projects. A recent program review from three years of this program showed that after completing YEP, participants demonstrated significant improvements in social skills, relationship with parents, community connectedness, and significant reductions in depressive mood, anxiety, and negative feelings.





Turkey

International Medical Corps' supports a program that emphasizes participation of children and youth, two groups which are significantly impacted by the conflict and often facing highly increased risks of protection violations. The program provides recreational and psychosocial support activities for children from ages 4 to 14 through the CFS project and for youth from ages 15 to 18 through YEP. It also engages the parents and larger community in strengthening the child environment through joint activities with schools and community centers, regular community engagement activities, capacity-building of service providers on child protection in emergencies, and key messaging on child protection in partnership with the communities. Complementary to this, our programs provide specialized mental health care and psychosocial support for children and adolescents with mild to severe mental health and psychosocial concerns. Our integrated approach includes psycho-education and group activity sessions for parents and caregivers, linking with child protection and gender-based violence teams to ensure holistic support for children and adolescents with multiple needs and concerns.



Ukraine

Conflict in Ukraine has resulted in chronic stress and increased vulnerability of the population, warranting activities and interventions to promote resilience and psychosocial well-being among youth. YEP has been adapted to the Ukrainian context by International Medical Corps and has focused on promoting the life skills, self-confidence and ability to cope of youth, despite living in an unstable, conflict-affected environment. Between October and December of 2016, youth completed five community service projects as part of YEP programs. As a result of YEP, children showed improved test scores and parents reported to staff that they observed changes in their children's behavior, including improved mood and positive communication with parents and peers. Additionally, a 16-week "Healthy Habits for Happy Children" curriculum was developed, for children ages 4 to 12, which includes sand play, art, dance, and puzzles mixed with relaxation activities, such as guided imagery and breathing exercises. International Medical Corps supports youth programming in 12 villages within Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine through mobile teams. Mariupol Youth Union, a partner of International Medical Corps, is implementing this programming in the city of Mariupol and surrounding areas.

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