

Nearly 24 million children living in war zones need mental health help



New York, September 12 (RHC)-- Nearly 24 million children living in armed conflict zones will be in an urgent need of mental health assistance, according to a report published by the Save the Children Fund.

“420 million children, nearly one-fifth of children worldwide, are living in a conflict zone, and 142 million in high-intensity conflict-zones,” the organization said, adding that “nearly one fifth of people living in and displaced by wars will need mental health support, with an additional five percent likely to experience a severe mental health disorder.”

According to experts, children exposed to wars situations are at a very high risk of mental and psychological disorders. “Boys and girls in conflicts see their family and friends die and their homes and schools bombed. They are denied necessities and can be separated from those that care for them. If they experience mental health issues and distress, this is a completely normal reaction to extreme, abnormal circumstances,” Save the Children Global Campaigns, Advocacy and Communications Director, Kitty Arie, explained.

The experts warned that not only the tragic memories of events underwent by the children or the loss of their families can have negative impacts on their mental health, but also the delay in diagnosing and treating these mental health problems.

“When children experience strong, frequent or prolonged adversity without adequate caregiver support this can have serious and enduring negative consequences on cognitive development and emotional regulation, potentially resulting in a life-long impact on a child’s mental and physical health,” the report added.

The report gives the example of Wafa and her sister Shadia respectively aged four and two who were badly injured in an airstrike in the Yemeni city of Hodeidah last year. Their parents died and the two girls who have difficulty sleeping may never fully recover and may carry physical and mental scars for the rest of their lives affecting their wellbeing.

This example is one among millions of others of children deeply traumatized by conflicts and in need of urgent mental health assistance. The consequences on children may, in turn, lead to negative impacts on their community and their country.

The organization also showed that the 10 worst conflict-affected countries for children are located in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South-Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. While the gravest violations children face are killing and maiming, recruitment and abuse, sexual violence, abduction, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

Children suffer in a conflict in different ways to adults as they are physically weaker and because their physical, mental, and psycho-social development are at stake. The harm done to them in armed conflict is not only often more severe than that done to adults but has longer-lasting implications and their societies, the report warned.

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