Introduction

Migration and displacement due to conflict or natural disasters require major adaptations as people cross interpersonal, cultural, socio-economic and geographic boundaries. This movement, whether planned or not, requires the individual to redefine roles and values within themselves, their family and within their community and society. This can be a major upheaval and a source of stress for the individual, family and communities involved. Providing psychosocial assistance and mental health care to migrants and displaced persons may reduce psychosocial vulnerabilities and enhance coping abilities.

IOM’s Mental Health and Psychosocial Approach

While specific psychosocial and mental health programmes may be required, general humanitarian assistance is also provided in a psychosocially conscious manner throughout every step of the migration process. Activities are designed to promote psychosocial wellbeing, support the smooth re-definition of social, professional, family and interpersonal roles and prevent long term individual mental health issues and social unrest.

To achieve this, IOM uses the following guiding principles in its approach to psychosocial support and mental health care:

**Flexibility** - Projects and programmes are adapted to specific target populations, cultures and situations.

**Assessment** - Needs assessments are carried out, where possible, before designing support programmes

**Community based** - Programmes are always community based when possible. This means programmes work with and through the community and are designed to strengthen existing networks and empower the community ensuring sustainability.

Mental Health

Mental Health is defined as: "a state of well being, in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." (WHO, 2002)

Good mental health does not refer only to the absence of mental disorders but more widely to the capacity of individuals to actively contribute to their communities’ life. In wars, conflicts and major disasters the latter breaks down. The resulting stresses are not to be considered "normal stresses of life", and community mobilization becomes as important as individual care in providing psychosocial responses in these situations.

Psychosocial

The term psychosocial pertains to "the influence of social factors on an individuals mind and behaviour, and to the interrelation of behavioural and social factors, and more widely to the interrelation between the mind and society." (OED, 1997)

Psychosocial activities therefore look at the interconnectedness of social (collective) issues, individual (personal) states and the cultural frameworks influencing these connections.
IOM Mental Health and Psychosocial Activities

The following activities make up IOM’s comprehensive psychosocial response in most emergency situations.

- Participatory psychosocial needs assessment.
- Mapping of existing psychosocial services and coordination of interdisciplinary services amongst partners.
- Ensuring mental health and psychosocial considerations are mainstreamed when providing all forms of humanitarian assistance.
- Training general humanitarian workers in psychosocial and ‘Do Not Harm’ approaches
- Providing psychosocial trainings for community leaders and members.
- Establishment of a multidisciplinary mobile team, able to provide/facilitate activities. Each team is comprised of a psychologist, social worker, artist and educator.
- Providing psychosocial first aid (PFA) and training partners and frontline workers in PFA.
- Promoting beneficiaries access to transparent and accessible information on how to access basic services.
- Supporting communities in re-establishing community life and rituals, including grieving rituals.
- Organizing community activities including recreational, sporting, artistic and cultural programmes, group discussions, support groups and forum theatres on indentified problems.
- Provide individual and group counselling
- Training counselling professionals in transcultural, systemic and emergency approaches.
- Specialized psychosocial care for people with pre-existing mental disorders, those living in institutions and people in acute distress through referral, wherever possible, or direct provision of essential services.

More information can be obtained from the IOM Migration Health Division (MHD)
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