

International Neglect Fuels Risk of Mental Health Crisis in Yemen

Experts raise alarm about lack of attention to mental health and call on international community to fund services, programs, and training for urgent psychosocial interventions.

Sana'a and New York, April 18, 2018 – Yemenis face serious mental health risks due to war-related trauma exposure, but the issue is being neglected by both domestic authorities and the international community, warn experts from the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, and Columbia University's Human Rights Clinic and Mailman School of Public Health.

"The armed conflict has sent millions into abject poverty, destroyed the nation's economy, evaporated basic public and health care services, and led to thousands of civilian deaths. Yemenis suffer every day from trauma exposure and extreme stress," said Farea Al-Muslimi, a prominent Yemeni scholar and Chairman of the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. "The impact of the war and humanitarian crisis on the mental health and well-being of Yemenis must no longer be ignored."

The warning was delivered during an international workshop held at the Columbia Global Center in Amman, Jordan on April 5 to discuss the briefing paper, [*The Impact of War on Mental Health in Yemen: A Neglected Crisis*](#). Organized by the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic and the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, the meeting brought together more than 30 diplomats, academics, humanitarian organizations, Yemeni experts, and human rights experts.



"There are many repercussions of poor mental health and well-being on families, social lives, and the community," said Dr. Fawziah Al-Ammar, a Yemeni expert in psychology, and the Mental Health Research Lead for the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. "Unaddressed poor mental health has well-known adverse consequences, including on physical health, rates of domestic violence and substance abuse, education, participation in the workforce, and peace-building and reconciliation efforts. We have to start mitigating the effects now, or the mental health harms will continue for decades."

The panel discussion featured a panel of economics, psychology, political science, and human rights experts. Moderated by Farea al-Muslimi, the presenters included Professor Sarah Knuckey, Director of the Human Rights Clinic at Columbia Law School; Mansour Rageh, Chief Economist of the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies; and Dr. Fawziah Al-Ammar.

The conflict in Yemen has fragmented the country, and resulted in the world's worst humanitarian crisis. More than 22 million people – nearly three-quarters of the Yemeni population – are in desperate need of aid and protection. Airstrikes and armed attacks, forced disappearances, torture, loss of livelihoods, food

insecurity, and the cholera epidemic are some of the many psychological stressors that Yemeni people confront on a daily basis. In Sana'a, suicide rates increased by 40% from 2014 to 2015.



The Sana'a Center and Columbia have partnered to conduct urgently-needed research on the kinds of trauma exposure in Yemen, the effects on the population, as well as local needs and coping strategies. The project will also study how poor mental health may undermine peace efforts, and how mental health considerations can be included in transitional processes.

“More must be done to fund research, services, programs, and training for psychosocial interventions in Yemen,” said Nithya Rhea Rajshekhar, LLM '18, a student in the Human Rights Clinic, who has worked for the last year researching the right to mental health, and the links between mental health and peace processes. “Through our project, we hope to better understand the mental health situation in Yemen, so that we can offer evidence-based recommendations and support peace and reconciliation efforts. These will go toward strengthening the right to mental health in Yemen.”

The **Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (SCSS)** is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production, focusing on Yemen and the surrounding region. Founded in 2014, the Sana'a Center's publications and programs cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

The **Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic** works to advance human rights around the world, and to train the next generation of strategic advocates for social justice. The clinic works in partnership with civil society organizations and communities to carry out human rights investigations, legal and policy analysis, litigation, report-writing, and advocacy.

Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health has been at the forefront of public health research, education, and community collaboration since 1922. The School tackles today's pressing public health issues, translating research into action. Its 'Program on Forced Migration and Health' is one of the world's leading centers on humanitarian research and teaching, and has helped to build a knowledge base that is improving humanitarian action and health during global disasters and conflicts.

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