

Serious risk of mental health crisis in Yemen, say experts

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Yemenis face serious mental health risks, but the issue is being neglected, says a new study released today by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, Columbia Law School's Human Rights Clinic. The groups announced the start of a groundbreaking new joint project to research and improve mental health in Yemen.

"Given both the extreme and chronic stressors Yemenis are continuing to face, there is serious cause for concern of a nationwide [mental health](#) crisis," said Dr. Lindsay Stark, associate professor of Population and Family Health at the Mailman School of Public Health and director of the CPC (Child Protection in Crisis) Learning Network. "The scale of need may appear daunting, but our proposed study has the potential to inform evidence-based responses that are intended to contribute to larger peace and reconstruction processes in Yemen."

In the briefing paper, *The Impact of War on Mental Health in Yemen: A Neglected Crisis*, the groups reveal how serious the risk to mental health is in Yemen. Yet, [mental health services](#) in Yemen are few, and there is little research on the effects of the war on the mental health of the population. The briefing paper also analyzes the long-term costs of failing to respond. Unaddressed [poor mental health](#) has well-known adverse consequences, including on physical health, family cohesion, education, participation in the workforce, and peace and reconciliation efforts.

"During the past three years of armed conflict, Yemenis have been continuously exposed to serious harm and trauma, including air strikes, threats and attacks from armed groups, forced disappearances, torture, a cholera epidemic, and food and job insecurity," 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."

"Despite the likely massive immediate and long-term mental health implications of the current conflict in Yemen, the issue has largely been neglected by both domestic authorities and the international community," said Professor Sarah Knuckey, the director of the Human Rights Clinic. "This new project seeks to advance the right to mental health in Yemen through interdisciplinary research and human rights advocacy."

The ongoing war in Yemen has spurred the world's largest food security emergency and the largest cholera epidemic ever recorded. Millions have been sent into abject poverty, the nation's economy has been destroyed, and basic public services have evaporated. Over a million public servants have gone without a salary for more than a year. At least 50,000 civilians have been killed or wounded during the conflict, with the belligerent parties committing a litany of war crimes and violations of humanitarian law against the civilian population.

In interviews conducted for the study released today, Yemeni officials and medical experts raised concerns about rising suicide rates, and increases in reports of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The groups intend to carry out a series of studies to better understand the kinds of trauma exposure in Yemen, the effects on the population, as well as local needs and coping strategies, and the links with peace and transitional processes.

"The goal is to improve conditions for those psychologically affected by the conflict, and to help strengthen the norm on the right to mental health domestically, regionally, and internationally," said Daron Tan, LLM '18, a student in the Human Rights Clinic. "By bringing together local and international experts across a range of fields, we can better understand the mental [health](#) challenges and respond more effectively."

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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