



## World Vision International Jerusalem – West Bank – Gaza Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for Children Affected by Violences in Jenin and Nablus Learning Report

### World Vision's Emergency Response

- ▶ 12,500 children supported
- ▶ US\$ 80,000 funded by World Vision
- ▶ All schools (486) in the directorates of Jenin, Qabatya, Nablus and South Nablus supported
- ▶ 61 school councillors, 49 Community Health Workers and 19 community facilitators trained
- ▶ Implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Civil Defence

### Context of the Response

Since April 2022, the Israeli Forces have carried out almost daily military operations in the West Bank, particularly in the Nablus and Jenin governorates. These operations have resulted in a significant increase in Palestinian deaths, with 154 fatalities in the West Bank in 2022, including 36 children, making it the deadliest year in the West Bank since the early 2000s.

As a result of these military operations, a substantial number of children from the Jenin and Nablus areas were directly exposed to violence, including physical attacks or verbal abuse, or being caught in the crossfire. They have also experienced indirect effects of these operations, such as a constant feeling of insecurity, forced displacement, loss of family members or friends, and disruption of their daily routines.

The impact of these experiences on the mental health of children can be significant. Children who are exposed to violence, trauma, and displacement are at risk of developing a range of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychological disorders. The severe and prolonged stress caused by violence can also have a detrimental effect on their brain development at a young age, leading to long-term consequences such as

disrupted development and learning. This can increase the risk of physical health problems, including diabetes, heart disorders, and mental health conditions, in later life.

The lack of access to mental health services and resources further exacerbates the situation. There are few Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) providers in the West Bank, and they are disproportionately distributed in urban areas, with rural areas mostly underserved. As a result, many children do not receive the support they need to cope with the psychological consequences of this violence.

To address these needs, World Vision has implemented emergency response programming since September 2022. The first phase of this response, targeting the most affected areas in Jenin and Nablus governorates, was finalized in March 2023. This Learning Report presents the achievements and learnings from this first phase. The second phase of World Vision's response, initiated in February 2023, will see a scale up of the mental health and psychosocial support activities to 163 villages in eight governorates, targeting 17,000 children. It will continue until September 2023.

# Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The first objective of World Vision's response was to increase access to MHPSS for children and their caregivers in villages and schools that had reported incidents or had been directly affected by military operations.

The response prioritized:

- Four villages in the Jenin Governorate
- Eight villages in South Nablus
- Four schools near the Jenin refugee camps.

In addition, the response also targeted all 486 schools in the directorates of Jenin, Qabatyia, Nablus, and South Nablus.



To provide this support, World Vision worked at three different levels:

## Through the Education System (in schools and kindergartens)

A total of 61 school counsellors in the four directorates received refresher training on Psychological First Aid (PFA), and 40 PFA kits were distributed to the psychosocial support teams. Through this component:

- 1,200 children in five schools where incidents had been reported received PFA support.
- 5,800 children in 20 schools participated in recreational activities.

## Through the Community

A total of 19 community facilitators were trained on PFA and How to Release Stress For Children (HEART). Through this component:

- 2,700 children participated in eight MHPSS sessions in 12 villages.
- 680 children received support from their mothers (225) who had been trained during Positive Parenting sessions.

## Through the Health System

A total of 49 Community Health Workers (CHWs) were trained on PFA. They provided support to mothers either in health clinics or during home visits.

## Incorporating a PSS component in Positive Parenting Programming

Through the Positive Parenting model, World Vision supports and empowers groups of mothers to cultivate a positive and nurturing environment for children, fostering their social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. This is achieved through training sessions that focus on various parenting techniques, including positive discipline, effective communication, and emotion management. For this response, the participants received an additional training on methods to assist their children in coping with and releasing stress.







## The Psychological First Aid Approach

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-based approach that provides immediate support and care to individuals who have experienced traumatic events, natural disasters, or other crisis situations. PFA aims to provide practical assistance and emotional support to help individuals cope with the immediate aftermath of a crisis and prevent long-term psychological distress. This approach involves addressing emotional and psychological needs through active listening, empathy, and helping individuals identify and use their own coping strategies. In PFA interventions, people affected by emergencies are linked and referred to other services, whether they are basic or advanced mental health services.

## Strengthening Emergency Preparedness in Schools

The second objective of the emergency response project was to enhance emergency preparedness in schools that had reported incidents. World Vision supported 17 schools, which are attended by 4,430 children in Jenin and Nablus, to activate their emergency preparedness plans.

Under this objective, World Vision's response achieved the following:

- Emergency plans were developed or updated in all 17 schools.
- Simulations were conducted in all of the schools.
- New emergency teams were formed in 9 schools.
- 32 members of the emergency teams received training.



## Learnings and Recommendations

### Growing Needs for MHPSS as Violence Escalates

The level of violence in the West Bank has continued to escalate in 2023. As of May 15, 2023, 117 Palestinians (including 19 children) from the West Bank had been killed, which is twice the number over the same period in 2022. Frequent military operations are taking place in Jenin and Nablus, and now also in Jericho and other cities of the West Bank that were not affected in 2022. Many of these operations are taking place during the daytime, while a significant number of students are not attending school due to a teacher strike, which increases the exposure of children to violence. Consequently, there is a growing need for mental health and psychosocial support services to address the psychological consequences of the ongoing violence.



During a reflection meeting, community facilitators agreed that the need for MHPSS in the targeted areas has been increasing. In February, World Vision initiated the second phase of its response, expanding to new geographic areas (163 villages in 8 governorates) and adapting the approach based on the learnings below.

Beyond this, a more systematic and coordinated response from all relevant stakeholders would be required with the support of international donors.

## Advantages and Challenges of Providing MHPSS Through Schools

Providing mental health support to children through the education system offers multiple advantages:

- **Accessibility:** Schools provide a unique opportunity to reach a large number of children and provide support in a familiar and accessible environment.
- **Reduced stigma:** Stigma and shame surrounding mental health are significant barriers in the West Bank. Providing mental health support in schools helps to normalize MHPSS and promote a more positive attitude towards mental health.
- **Sustainability:** Trained teachers can recognize signs of trauma and provide mental health support beyond the response, ensuring continuity of care.



However, there have been several challenges that have complicated the provision of MHPSS support through schools, including:

- A teacher strike that started in February 2023, which prevented the training of education staff or the provision of MHPSS to students as schools have been closed.
- The Ministry of Education has put most of the programs implemented in schools by civil society organizations (CSOs) on hold since January 2023 to review their plans and the materials they use.

To address these challenges, the second phase of World Vision's response will have a stronger community component. A significant part of the response will be carried out through World Vision's children clubs (Makani), which are currently active in 150 villages across 8 governorates, with an attendance of 17,000 children. In addition, resuming access for CSOs to schools to provide MHPSS is urgently needed due to the numerous benefits of this approach.

## Providing MHPSS to Children Through Their Caregivers

A previous study conducted by World Vision on MHPSS in the West Bank demonstrated that caregivers play a crucial role in helping their children cope with stress and trauma for multiple reasons:

- **Accessibility:** Limited availability of MHPSS services and stigma create significant barriers for children to access services.
- **Confidentiality and trust:** Children feel more comfortable sharing their feelings and experiences with their parents, whom they trust, rather than with a stranger.
- **Sustainability:** Like education staff, caregivers can continue to monitor the mental health of their children and support them beyond the duration of the response.

However, parents are often poorly equipped to provide this support. They lack knowledge about mental health and are often themselves stressed and affected by mental health issues. World Vision's approach, which involves working through Community Health Workers and Positive Parenting groups, equips caregivers with basic tools to provide support to their children while also addressing their own mental health needs, benefiting the well-being of the entire family. This approach also contributes to improved parenting skills and a better understanding of the child's mental health needs.

## Strengthening the Quality and Effectivity of the Support

A review of our response and a reflection workshop with the facilitators has allowed us to identify the following learnings that will be used in the next phase of the response:

- **Multiple sessions:** In the villages most affected by violence, 1,200 children went through eight consecutive MHPSS sessions in small groups. The facilitators noted that this approach gave the participants enough time to feel comfortable and open up about painful events with the group. They also observed progress even with the most affected children. This approach will be used in the next phase of the response.
- **The use of art in MHPSS has proven to be effective.** For many children, it can be challenging to express their thoughts and feelings due to fear of stigma or difficulty verbalizing inner feelings. Community Facilitators agree that using art has been effective in addressing these two barriers.



## Improving Capacity Building

The first phase of World Vision's response was designed and implemented as a short-term emergency measure. However, as the need for MHPSS remains high, a longer-term response is necessary. Based on the learnings from phase I, there are ways to improve capacity building for a longer-term MHPSS project, including:



- **Conducting a needs assessment before capacity building:** In phase I, a refresher on PFA was provided to all school counsellors in Jenin, Qabatiya, Nablus, and South Nablus directorates without a prior needs assessment. Conducting a needs assessment before capacity building would help to focus the training on the areas where it is most needed. This would also allow for grouping the recipients by levels and tailoring the curriculum to meet the specific needs of different groups, ultimately leading to more effective and efficient capacity building outcomes.
- **Providing advance training:** In addition to the PFA refresher, some teachers and community facilitators expressed the need for more advanced training to support the most affected children in the long term.
- **Coaching:** A longer-term response should include a coaching component to provide individualized support and guidance to the teachers, community health workers, and volunteers. This will improve their capacity while also contributing to increasing the quality of support provided. It will be especially important if more advanced training is provided.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. World Vision started to work in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in 1975. Since then, World Vision has worked to nurture Palestinian children, improve their resilience and bring them hope. Combining development, relief and advocacy

programmes, World Vision ensures that children, especially the most vulnerable, are protected in their families and communities, and that they develop the skills and resilience they need for healthy lives. With 91 dedicated staff and a total annual budget of \$11 million for 2023, World Vision JWG has developed one of the largest community-based presence of any organisation operating in the West Bank. In 2021, our programmes benefited directly more than 233,000 people, including 169,000 children in 150 villages in the West Bank.

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