

Mental Health in Mosul, Iraq

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Background

Between October 2016 and July 2017, Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, was under siege, leading to mass displacement of its population. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provides primary health care and mental health services to displaced Iraqis fleeing the war and currently living in camps in Kurdistan Regional Governorate (KRG). The proportion of children in need of specialized psychological support, as reported by MSF child psychologists, highlighted a high need for mental health services. Furthermore, mental health conditions or diagnoses by psychologists evidenced the presence of cumulative stressors. The aim of this study was to quantify and describe war related stressors, and the prevalence of children in need of psychological support.

Methods

The survey was conducted in Hasan Sham U2 camp in KRG in December 2017 to assess mental health status and stressors. Households were the primary sampling unit, selected randomly from the numbers provided by camp management. All questionnaires were administered in each selected household: the Childhood War and Trauma Questionnaire (CWTQ) among the older child, the SDQ 7-16 and PsyCa 3-6 among all eligible children in household.

Results

In total, 477 children were screened, accounting for almost one third of the children in the camp. Twenty nine percent of 329 children screened using the SDQ (95% Confidence Interval (CI):23.9-33.7) and 70.9% of 148 children screened using the PsyCa3-6 (95% CI: 63.0-77.8) had a positive test result. Of 240 CWTQ administered, 10,0% of the households reported the death of the father and 5.7% the death of a child, with no statistically significant differences between the area of origin ($p>0.2$). Eighty percent of households from West Mosul and 66% of those from other areas ($p<0.001$) had experienced at least one recent violent event.

Conclusion

This study conducted after a mass displacement of the Mosul population supports the notion that displaced population have faced traumatic events before fleeing their region, and that a high proportion of these displaced children were in need of mental health support.

This study conducted among families fleeing a violent context, underscores the importance of including mental health services for children as part of a comprehensive package of support for displaced populations.