

Need for solidarity among health professionals in conflict areas

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I had the pleasure of being part of this workshop and a co-facilitator with my colleague and friend Aamir Jafarey, the author of this reflective article full of emotion (1).

When I was asked by Dr Niveen Abu-Rmeileh to meet and conduct this workshop on "Ethical issues in conducting research in conflict zones", I did not hesitate, knowing that I would learn more from this experience than I could teach. I thank Dr. Niveen for her commitment and for this great opportunity.

During the two days of the workshop, I had the opportunity to discuss with our colleagues coming from the West Bank, the Occupied Territories and the Gaza Strip about the difficulties they are living with on a daily basis, under the severe and chronic conditions of a siege. Many studies have reported that the residents experience physical and psychological insecurity linked to frequent military attacks, lack of jobs, a failing economic situation, and the lack of hope of a better life. The majority of residents feel unhappy and unsatisfied with their lives.

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After this interesting event and my return to my country, Lebanon, which is close to the Palestinian Territories, I had the same reflections as my colleague Aamir concerning the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, and in other countries hosting Palestinian refugees since 1948.

Palestinians in Lebanon have been perpetual refugees for 70 years; they continue to face social and economic exclusion that hinders their ability to improve their living conditions. And the more recent Syrian civil war has caused shocks that threaten to destabilise their already fragile livelihoods. Over a million and a half Syrian refugees and 42,000 Palestinians refugees from Syria have fled to Lebanon (2), adding pressure to an already weak infrastructure and the labour market. The United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) the main provider of health, education, and relief services to Palestinian refugees is under exceptional strain. Pressures on UNRWA services come at a time when the organisation is operating under a severe shortfall in funding.

I would like finally to assert the need for solidarity between health professionals in the neighbouring countries of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and to identify mechanisms for predicting the impact of professional advocacy based on the commitment to international justice.

References

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