

Psychosocial Support for Sustainable Peace



A psychosocial counsellor providing counselling to a participant's family during a family intervention

United Nations Interagency Rehabilitation Programme (UNIRP) aims to provide Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLRs) with psychosocial support to enable each individual's resilience to deal with his or her own emotions and problems. Facilitating and creating a friendly environment during the reintegration process and promoting community and family support improve their self-esteem. Studies around the globe indicate that ex-combatants are vulnerable to psychosocial distress, adjustment and reintegration problems. This is particularly true for VMLRs not only because of past traumatic experiences but also because they have lost the social and economic support they have enjoyed during their stay in the cantonment.

Problems Faced

VMLRs experience four broad categories of psychosocial distress: behavioural problems, relationship problems, cognitive problems, and emotional problems. Feelings of depression, anxiety, worry, fear, remorse and low self-esteem characterize the emotional problems experienced by VMLRs. Emotional issues of this kind were more prevalent among men than women VMLRs. The prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is also higher in VMLRs than in the

normal population. High levels of personal and domestic stress, barriers to developing a healthy self confidence in transforming their lives, and community perceptions of former combatants have an immense impact on the well being of former combatants and community members.

Transition to Civilian Life

UNIRP found that more than 30% of VMLRs and their families required some degree of professional psychosocial counselling or support. This support has taken place since the early transition period. Each individual case is handled by counsellors with whom VMLRs have developed personal trust and supportive relationships. Counsellors assist VMLRs to overcome personal and domestic challenges to socioeconomic reintegration.

Social support at family and community level is emphasised through family visits and counselling, including mobilisation of community organisations.

Elements of Support

VMLRs are supported through professional psychosocial trainings, seminars and career counselling; the identification of individual problems and developing strategies to deal with them; sharing information with relevant professionals to establish a district support network; key support and outreach workers; interagency referral service to support and offer trainings; follow up support in homes and workplaces and clinical psychosocial support if required. The provision of professional and context specific psychosocial support to VMLRs and their immediate families has been shown to contribute greatly to their well being and ability to reintegrate.

Follow Up and Monitoring

The capacity of regional and district based staff to follow-up and monitor the needs and progress of VMLRs is crucial. Psychosocial support has been included in all community-level peacebuilding activities and is having an immense impact on the well-being of VMLRs, leading to a change in community perception.



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