

## **Psychosocial support for war affected victims' program**

### **Family code: P-G044**

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A family that consists of a father (E.H. 56yrs), a mother (S.H. 55yrs), three daughters; (FA.H 33yrs), (N.H. 30yrs), (A.H 24yrs), and four sons; (S.H 28yrs), (M.H 20yrs), (FR.H 35yrs) a martyr, (FD.H 26yrs) a martyr.

The family lives at Alshejaya area, a border area that suffered a lot throughout the wars on the Gaza strip, this area often suffer many Israeli invasions, attacks, and massacres, however, the war of 2014 was the most terrible tragedy and trauma on this family, in which they have suffered severe damage during the war, in addition to the terrible economic situation they live in, the father is old and unable to work, and the mother is a housewife. The family depend on small contributions provided by their married sons.

The family suffered many repeated traumas during the past wars and invasions, which were getting worse war after war, this made the family live under pressure, nervousness, and continuous tiredness, especially that they live in a border area that suffered too many massacres and displacement and random bombing during the wars of 2008, 2012, and 2014.

The worst trauma that the family had suffered from was during the war of 2014 on the Gaza strip, it was like a knockdown to the family because they didn't expect it would be severe like that. At the beginning of the war, the area was targeted with violent brutal attacks which forced the family to leave their house to a much safer place, the family had to escape during the late night fearing the extreme bombing by air force rockets and random shells by tanks near the area. They have turned the area to a burning flame while the screams of women, children and men filled the place due to the horror and cruelty of what was happening.

The mother said: “we started running and left everything behind us, we only wanted to be safe, it was like hell, everybody running and screaming, unbelievable bombing and people thrown on the ground, we have never expected things would get this bad”. The family’s trauma got even worse when their house was bombed, and one of their children was severely injured in his head, and other two sons were dead on the spot, this made the family live in anxiety and fear of losing their third son.

The mother said: “I can’t understand all of the things that happened and how it happened like this, in a second all of my life turned upside down, suddenly I found myself without a house standing in the middle of the rabble, smoke, and fire, not only that, but also losing two of my sons, I called people liars that those weren’t my sons, and my sons are still alive”.

The sum of events that the family has suffered during the war of 2014, represented in losing to sons, the injury of a third son, the destruction of their house and being displaced and unsecured, had a negative effect on the family, especially the mother (S.H), she suffered a group of psychological symptoms such as; inability to forget the traumatizing event, fear of remembering the traumatic event, difficulty of sleep, pain in the hands, avoid talking about the trauma, avoiding suspicious objects, memory issues, unwillingness to live, depressions and pessimism, fear of the future, guilt, fear of reoccurrence of the traumatic event, inability to enjoy things, fear of being alone, mood swings, lack of safety and security, anger and concentration issues, fear of loud sounds, inability to maintain normal daily tasks, trust issues, and avoiding social occasions.

All of these symptoms led her to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. The mother said: “since the past three years, I don’t go out or visit anyone, I live in absolute isolation, sadness took over my house and face, I can’t let go of my sons, they were my life, angels walking on the ground, I weep on them a lot”.

A psychologist from Palestine Trauma Centre among the psychosocial support project, funded by Muslim Aid-UK visited the family to deliver psychosocial support sessions in order to help the family get through that hard phase of their lives, and to help them heal from all the psychological and behavioral problems that they have

suffered from, especially the mother, who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The psychologist focused on the mother as she was the most affected family member by the traumatic events in order to help her talk about her traumas. The sessions started with introduction, building trust, and applying the pre-assessment, many activities were delivered such as; the threads ball, the hopes and fears activity which helps the family in gaining the skills of dealing with their fears and support their hopes, psych educational session with the mother to educate her on the nature of her psychological symptoms, and active listening and partitioning of negative feelings' session. In addition, the mother received a training on relaxation to relief the intensity of her stresses, many group activities were delivered to the whole family (the ball activity, the pressing fist activity, mountain pose activity, and the silent storytelling activity (who are you?) that help others understand their selves, and the safe place activity that creates a safe environment through imagination). The family were trained on some yoga activities (the mountain activity) which provide them with some skills that could alleviate the intensity of their psychological pressures. These activities added joy and happiness to all of the family members.

The psychological intervention with the family had positive effects on all family members, especially the mother. The family reached psychological compatibility, they realized the importance of supporting each other, and their belief in fate grew stronger which reflected positively on the whole family.

As for the mother, she became better psychologically, her psychological symptoms decreased, she became more able to forget the traumatizing events, she sleeps better, she became able to talk about her trauma, she accepted the events that she was avoiding, her focusing and memory became stronger, she can stay alone, she controlled her mood swings, she became able of maintaining her normal tasks, she became more trusting of others, and she started to participate in social occasions after an absence that lasted three years.

**She said:** "I go out and visit people now, I became a mother for my children after being buried alive for losing my two sons".

The mother reached a state of stability and psychological calmness which reflected positively on the whole family, and made them feel familial stability.

Finally, the mother gave her many thanks for the services she received from PTC, and she hoped that these psychological services could reach all the Palestinian families that suffered and still suffer the ordeals of siege and wars.

### **Report writer**

**Hadeel Budair**