

Success Story: Case Study

Date of Report: 18/6/2017

Code: GF17.p304 (A- KH)

The family (A-Kh) consists of 9 members; a father, a mother, 4 sons, and 3 daughters.

The father (S. 53yrs) is a cartilage patient, the mother (A. 44yrs), a daughter (R. 27yrs), a son (A. 26yrs), a son (M. 24yrs), a daughter (Sh. 22yrs), a son (S. 18yrs), a daughter (S. 11yrs), and a son (M. 9yrs).

The family lives in the eastern part of Gaza city, near the borderline of the Gaza strip. This border area was subject to ugly massacres that were merciful neither to trees, stones, nor humans during the last war on the Gaza strip in 2014. This family was similar to all other Palestinian families during the war of 2014 on Gaza. War, bombardment, destruction, and remains of martyrs everywhere.

During the early days of the war of 2014 on the Gaza strip, the mother (S) lived very near to a mosque, which was threatened by the enemy to be bombed. This forced the family to run away to escape from death and lived with the mother's relatives. Weeks went by and the mosque wasn't bombed, so the mother agreed to go back home after persistent pressure by the oldest daughter as the mosque wasn't bombed. The mother agreed without knowing that she went back to her destined fate. The first night the family came back to the house was extremely horrifying, a bloody night that turned the family's house into rubble after bombing the nearest mosque. The mother says: "I was sitting with my husband and children in the furthest room considering it could be the safest, suddenly, shells and rockets hit the mosque, I couldn't see anything with all the dust, I cried out loud with horror in my heart, where am I? where are my children?? But no one answered. This was when I was certain that we are all going to die, so I started saying the Shahada and calling for my husband and children to say it with me if they are alive". The mother continued speaking while crying so hard : "that was the worst night in our lives, I only woke up later at the hospital, thank God I didn't lose anyone". This crushed their dreams and turned it into a sea of pain, no words could ever describe the suffering of this family.

That was not the only trauma that the family had, two years after the war, the siege and shortages in medical supplies caused many humanitarian disasters for the patients in the Gaza strip. The family faced a great tragedy with the illness of their daughter (Sh), and due to the shortages of medical supplies and the lack of proper medications, her case deteriorated and she entered clinical death at the ICU for a month. Despite all the appeals that the family made through the media and the red cross, no one answered, this have put the family through their toughest situations, the mother rebelled like a lion to try saving her daughter's life, and she asked for the help of everyone she knew from family, friends, and neighbours to borrow the required money for her daughter's expensive treatment at the Israeli hospitals. The mother was weeping and said: "at first, they didn't tell me about my daughter's illness, but when I found out, I went to the hospital to find my daughter a lying body. I started screaming and calling for her; answer me baby, it's me your mother. Then the doctor came and told me to say goodbye to my daughter for it could be my last chance, there was no hope of curing her, and then I passed out", words were barely coming out of her mouth with all the tears, she continued : "I have endured so much and begged people for help, just to save my precious daughter".

That weren't the end of their suffering, the third trauma awakened all the previous pains that were oppressed within, the mother's best friend (R) died in an accident, that friend who have always supported the mother, she lost her companion and supporter, it was the straw that broke her back again, she said: "I lost my supporter, I miss her so much, my heart is still clung to her, missing her made me lose the taste of like, I don't want to talk to anyone at home or anywhere else".

These are the conditions in Gaza strip, which was brutally shredded during the war of 2014, along with an extreme siege in the air, on the ground, and in the sea. The siege along with the repeated wars remain the main cause for the social, economic, and psychological crisis in the Gaza strip.

This family is similar to hundreds and thousands of families living in the Gaza strip, who are suffering from tragic living conditions due to; the lack of electricity, siege for more than eight years, living at harbouring centres, and the inability of the father to work due to his cartilage illness. The family is struggling through suffocating economic conditions, they are unable to provide a medical mattress for the father (S. 53yrs). In addition, the family is suffering from a shortage of basic needs due to their extremely low income, and the accumulation of debts.

The family therapy project's team, funded by INTERPAL-UK, (Psychiatric, psychologist, social worker, and activator) visited the family to provide them with therapy and psychosocial support. The team noticed that the family still lives beside the rubble of their house, though one year has passed since the last war. But due to the extremely slow reconstruction of houses in Gaza, the family continues to live through all kinds of suffering day and night. This increases their anger and pain, especially in the winter and its cruel cold weather. The team applied an assessment for the family, they found out that the mother (A. 44yrs) was suffering from a group of psychological and physical symptoms including (intrusive ideas represented in recalling the traumatic events, difficulty to forget the traumatic scenes from the war, anxiety and insomnia, nightmares, shortness of breath, headache, continuous crying, limbs and back pain, insecurity, and general fatigue with inability to perform daily tasks). The mother was diagnosed to be the most suffering member from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The family received 12 therapeutic and psychosocial educational sessions to overcome the traumas and sufferings that they have been through during the last war on the Gaza Strip. The sessions varied between group and individual sessions during the period (28/02/2017-30/05/2017). The work team delivered sessions to identify the family tree and familial relations, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses sources for the family. A session was particularly delivered to provide education to the family about ways of dealing with continuing psychological pressures. Safe place sessions were also delivered to develop a source of hope for the family to overcome their psychological sufferings.

Individual intervention was also provided with some of the family members, especially the mother and the children. They were taught to use some skills and techniques to alleviate the intensity of their symptoms and psychological sufferings. The team used exposure technique (A cognitive-Behavioral therapy technique), focusing therapy (active listening and negative feelings partitioning), psychological resilience exercise (Green and dry branch) to reinforce the family's resilience and overcome their continued sufferings, and Mind-Body therapy (Safe place exercise) to help the mother (A. 44yrs) in sensing a safe and comfortable place within her inner or surrounding world after the destruction of her house, which resembled safety and stability for the family. This aimed to help them reach a state of psychological compatibility.

Top results of working with the family for four months:

- The family therapy intervention had a great positive effect on the family in reinforcing their resilience and helping them to form a positive look at life after the pain of the traumas that they have lived through, and the mother became more able to understand her family and share their burdens and issues. she said: “After receiving many therapeutic sessions, I feel like a strong woman, and I am more capable of taking care of my children who still need it. I participate with my children in a happy and joyful atmosphere with some of the activities that we have learned during the sessions, such as the safe place exercise”.
- The family became able to rebuild positive familial relations with their relatives, as the family made some visitations after a long period of stopping, the mother said : “we make familial visitations now with our relatives, and we share good times with each other”.
- The mother became more capable of exercising her normal life routine, especially after getting over some of her psychical symptoms, she says: “I feel strong and comfortable now that my physical pain such as stomach ache and headache is gone. This helped me in vitally doing my housework”.
- The mother’s anxiety is gone, and she is able to sleep normally now.
- Finally, the mother thanked Palestine trauma centre for their intervention and helping in reinforcing the family’s resilience, and she hoped that the family therapy project’s services could reach all the affected families during the last war on the Gaza strip.

The work team will follow-up with the family once every month, and with a field visitation every month for three months.

Report writer: Samar Awad, Family Therapy Project. Funded by: INTERPAL-London