

AFGHANISTAN IS A COUNTRY THAT HAS SEEN THREE DECADES OF WAR AND CONTINUOUS INSECURITY. IN THIS PERIOD ALL AFGHANS WERE DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. ANOTHER SOURCE OF PROBLEMS IS THE TRANSITION FROM A TRADITIONAL SOCIETY THAT VALUES HONOUR AND RESPECT TO A MODERN SOCIETY INFLUENCED BY MEDIA AND GLOBAL DIGITALIZATION. IN MY OPINION, THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL COUNSELLING FORMS A VITAL AND IMPORTANT APPROACH TO THE PRESENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN. BEING INVOLVED IN THE PRESENT PROJECT WAS INTERESTING, MOTIVATING, MEANINGFUL AND AT THE SAME TIME CHALLENGING.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

Conducting trainings for psycho-social counsellors introduced me to many individuals in vastly differing life situations who were faced by a wide range of challenges. I became more and more motivated to work in this particular line of my profession because I realized that the trainings do not just allow us to make a living but present an opportunity for self-experience and to change unpleasant aspects of our lives as well as our behaviour.

When we conducted the first round of psycho-social counsellor exams in Kabul, almost all of the trainees said that in their homes they used violence against family members including their children; but after three months of training and self-experience the counsellors started to notice changes in their own behaviour and became more tolerant and understanding parents. Furthermore, makes to individual lives, families and

entire communities. We also received a lot of feedback from medical doctors and nurses who attended the mental health training by IPSO. I remember one of the medical doctors working in a clinic in Kunduz saying: "I have attended many trainings but this is the first one that makes you feel like a real human in the process, which I do enjoy very much!" Afterwards, he worked really closely with our psycho-social counsellors and they treated a lot of cases successfully.

Providing counsel to clients by training psycho-social counsellors working in health facilities of the northern provinces was a great opportunity for those, including myself, who wanted to contribute to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan because we could help:

- » Many people who could not cope with ongoing difficulties and conflicts within their families
- » Many young men who were suffering from the consequences of unemployment
- » Many mothers who were so desperate that they started to beat their children, who present the future of Afghanistan
- » Many returnees from Pakistan or Iran who had lost their motivation for life when facing huge difficulties in their home country
- » Many women suffering from shameful experiences which they did not dare to share with anybody else
- » Many people who wanted to attempt, or had attempted suicide because they did not see any other way out of overwhelming life situations
- » Fathers who felt ambivalent about marrying their daughters or sons by force

One of our psycho-social counsellors said something that was very important and meaningful to me: „I counselled many clients, and at the beginning of most sessions I thought that counselling couldn't help the clients to solve their problems. But after twenty minutes I changed my mind as we discovered a source of hope and love in their lives. Behind those depressed and anxious faces I discovered many very courageous personalities ready to face the challenges in their lives and to learn from their experiences in order to confront the reality of the present and to recover the beauty of life. The counselling process helped them to discover these aspects, and they were able to bravely take care of their lives".

This shows that although mental health and psycho-social counselling formally are part of the health sector, they are more than that: they are a cross-cutting issue!

Finally, I would like to say that ignoring mental health in Afghanistan is ignoring or not caring about peace and the future of Afghanistan. Therefore, I would like to express my appreciation for the German Government, which truly understood the situation in Afghanistan and supported the Afghan people and the government by implementing mental health projects. To me it is very evident that Afghanistan will never become peaceful if people do not receive help to overcome their painful personal experiences during times of war and conflict. **Fareshita Queedes** . **Projectmanager**



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