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NEWS



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Community counsellors ease psychological trauma for Afghan civilians

Mr. Abdul Khaliq, 27, is from Laghman province. He is the sole provider for his family. One morning last June, Mr. Khaliq's house was hit by an errant rocket-propelled grenade, the result of a nearby engagement between the Taliban and Afghan National Security Forces.

The blast killed Mr. Khaliq's young niece and he suffered serious injuries. His hands had to be surgically removed, leaving him a double amputee. The severity of Abdul's injuries and his inability to work resulted in tremendous stress. "Without my hands, I was feeling helpless and different than others. The stares and comments from people were adding to my worries. I was always seeking the support of my family to perform routine activities. I couldn't plan for any business because of my vulnerable situation. I thought I may start begging and my children will have to leave school to start working. I was frustrated mentally and had no idea what to do."



An ACAP III beneficiary receives psychosocial counselling in Charqala, Afghanistan. UN Photo/Assad

Treatment for the psychological trauma experienced by Mr. Khaliq, and so many others in Afghanistan, remains uncommon. Not only are these specialized services inadequate to reach the large number of victims requiring assistance, but there also exists a stigma associated with psychological treatment preventing many from getting the help they need.

A main component of the Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP III), a USAID-funded project implemented by UNMAS, includes psychosocial counselling services that have reached over 9,000 civilian victims of conflict and their families since early 2016. ACAP III identifies victims of conflict, informs them about available services, including the importance of psychosocial counselling, and then deploys a local ACAP III trained counsellor to the privacy of a victim's home. The ACAP III psychosocial counsellors provide assessments of victims and therapy for as long as the victim requires, either personally or through a referral to local agencies. The Afghan men and women that provide these services are recent graduates in an extremely important and critical field. They travel to dangerous parts of Afghanistan to meet with victims of conflict who may initially be resistant to seeking psychosocial counselling.

Following his sessions with a counsellor, Mr. Khaliq began to rebuild his confidence. "ACAP III provided me assistance when I was in need...After receiving counselling, I realized that although I lost my hands I am lucky to be alive. I am still capable of giving a father's love to my children and I can look after my family."

Psychosocial counselling is part of a holistic approach to assistance that ACAP III takes, providing victims with the support they need mentally, physically and economically to recover from conflict-related violence. In the case of Mr. Khaliq, psychosocial counselling was combined with a relief package, employment training and prosthetic hands.

In line with ACAP III priorities, UNMAS has focused on increasing delivery of services to female beneficiaries. As of February 2017, the ACAP III provided psychosocial services to over 4,500 females, a significant portion of the caseload of the 10,000 beneficiaries to date.

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