



A social media campaign on mental health, led by the Sharek Youth Forum, aims to draw attention to the issues young Palestinians face and the challenges of growing up in the occupied Palestinian territory.

10 October 2018 – WHO, in collaboration with the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the European Union (EU) and the Sharek Youth Forum, today launched a campaign to raise awareness about mental health to mark the occasion of World Mental Health Day, which takes place on 10 October every year. The campaign focuses on young people and mental health in a changing world.

Young Palestinians are leading two campaigns to draw attention to the issues they face and the challenges of growing up in the occupied Palestinian territory. They want to begin a conversation in the West Bank and Gaza about what young people can do to grow up healthy and resilient in the face of social difficulties.

The first campaign is a social media campaign, led by the Sharek Youth Forum in Ramallah in the West Bank, which began on World Mental Health Day with the hashtag #How\_is\_your\_Mental\_Health? Several short videos and posters are to be uploaded on Facebook carrying messages from adolescents and experts on mental well-being and healthy lifestyles. The same hashtag will be used in social media activities in Gaza, where a similar awareness-raising campaign will be launched.

WHO and the Palestinian Ministry of Health have also planned a workshop in the coming weeks for the Student Parliament, which represents 34 schools from across the West Bank. The workshop aims to assist these students in developing activities to carry out in schools to raise awareness on mental health and how to protect mental health in the face of everyday challenges. A counselor at each school will oversee the student events and activities. In Gaza, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of health will provide 200 students with awareness-raising sessions on mental health.

Adolescents are defined by WHO as young people between the ages of 10 and 19 years. For many, this period of transition from childhood to adulthood can be a confusing and difficult time, and so understanding mental health and how to protect mental well-being is crucial.

Dr Gerald Rockenschaub, WHO Representative in the occupied Palestinian territory, stated: “Half of all mental health disorders in adulthood start by age 14, but most cases are undetected and untreated. Teaching adolescents methods to cope with psychological stresses can improve mental health for young people at this critical stage of development. Interventions aim to teach young people a range of skills, including how to handle peer pressure, deal with difficult emotions, resolve conflicts, build bridges with friends and family, develop self-confidence, safeguard themselves from high pressure marketing strategies – including those by the tobacco and alcohol industry – as well as to cope with other stresses like academic competition.”

WHO defines mental health as “not merely the absence of mental illness, but as a state of well-being in which all individuals can realize their individual potential, cope with day-to-day stress, and work productively and usefully in a way that contributes to their local communities.” WHO in the occupied Palestinian territory leads a project called Building Palestinian resilience: improving psychosocial and mental health responses to emergency situations. The project, funded by the EU, carries out activities to promote mental well-being, as well as addressing significant gaps in the development of mental health services – including gaps related to mental health service provision in emergency response – in the occupied Palestinian territory.

**For further information, please contact:**

Rajiah Abu Sway

WHO, Jerusalem office

Tel: 00972547179037

email: [abuswayr@who.int](mailto:abuswayr@who.int)

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