

# Global conflict situations, poverty lead to rise in mental health crises

Alex Johnson  
9 July 2019

Last month, the World Health Organization (WHO) released an article detailing the prevalence of mental health distress and psychological suffering among people in conflict situations, such as in war-torn countries or regions with high levels of civilian violence. It found the prevalence of mental disorders in conflict zones to be higher than previously thought.

The WHO published their new estimates in the British medical journal the *Lancet*. It sought to update its previous estimates, which were over a decade old and did not reflect modern data-gathering procedures.

The WHO derived its estimates through a systematic review and meta-analysis of journal articles on the topic between 2000 and 2017 in PubMed and other scholarly databases and supplemented this with data from the “grey literature,” such as government reports, conference proceedings and dissertations.

The study found that one in five people in conflict situations suffer from mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. Nearly 9 percent of these individuals had mental disorders that were moderate or severe.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs estimates that nearly 132 million people around the world will need humanitarian assistance in 2019. Moreover, 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced by conflict in 2017, an increase above the 59.5 million displaced in 2014.

According to the UN’s 2018 Syria Arab Republic Humanitarian Response Plan, one in five Syrians were at risk for developing moderate mental health problems, while one in three were at risk of developing severe or acute problems.

In Israel, the war crimes committed by the Israel Defense Forces have also led to widespread manifestations of psychological trauma. Following the

last major military assault on the Gaza Strip in 2014, the WHO found that 20 percent of Gaza’s population developed mental health problems. A study conducted by Palestinian psychologist Abdelaziz Thabet in 2017 discovered that nearly a third of Gaza’s population suffered from some degree of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Psychological disorders also go hand in hand with poverty. This can be seen in Latin America, the most unequal region in the world, where residents have very limited access to health care. Five percent of the adult population suffers from depression there, according to another WHO study.

“There is a clear relationship between standard of living and common mental disorders,” said Paulo Rossi Menezes, a professor of medicine at the University of Sao Paulo, in an article published by the World Bank in 2015.

However, less than 2 percent of the governments’ healthcare budgets are dedicated to mental health, according to the WHO.

Similarly, few resources are allocated to mental health services in other poverty-afflicted regions, such as in parts of Africa.

In Kenya, one of the more economically stable countries on the continent, health experts found that approximately one-fourth of the Kenyan population, some 11 million people, suffer from mental disorders. Despite the large population, only 80 psychiatrists and 30 clinical psychologists operate in the country. According to the WHO, the country spends only about 0.05 percent of its health budget on mental health, while 70 percent of its mental health facilities are concentrated in the capital, Nairobi.

In Nigeria, less than 10 percent of the population has access to a psychiatrist (there are only 130 in the entire

country) or health worker. The WHO estimates that 40 to 60 million Nigerians suffer from mental health issues out of a total population of 174 million.

Although the WHO's *Lancet* study identifies some of the countries experiencing major conflict-induced humanitarian crises—such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen—it fails to note that it is US imperialism and its allies that bear principal responsibility for these crises.

The US has launched numerous wars in the Middle East and North Africa since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Millions have been displaced by US military interventions and aerial bombardments, starting with the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1992 and continuing with the wars launched against Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, all the way up to the recent violent confrontations in Somalia, Libya, Syria and Yemen. These wars have laid waste to entire societies, led to the deaths of millions and have created the greatest refugee crisis since World War II.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**