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Bảo vệ Trẻ em và Tương lai
A Snapshot

UNICEF'S APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH
DURING COVID-19
IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Resources on mental health and COVID-19

- United Nations Children's Fund, 'COVID-19 and youth mental health', Voices of Youth, 2020, accessible at <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/covid-19-and-youth-mental-health>
- United Nations Children's Fund, 'How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus (COVID-19): 6 strategies for teens facing a new (temporary) normal', August 2020, accessible at <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teenagers-can-protect-their-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19>
- United Nations Children's Fund, 'How to protect your family's mental health in the face of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)', 2020, accessible at <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-protect-your-familys-mental-health-face-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>
- United Nations Children's Fund, 'Supporting your child's mental health as they return to school during COVID-19', August 2020, accessible at <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return>
- #CopingWithCOVID The Well-being of LGBTIQ Adolescents and Youth during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Asia and the Pacific, accessible at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ct93mF3g3YOyiRFd4DC0aGH3lznMmsXx/view>
- Asia Pacific Inter-Agency Task Team on Young Key Populations, 'COVID-19 related resources for young key populations and young people living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific', 2020, accessible at <https://www.ykptaskteam.org/>
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, 'Basic Psychosocial Skills: A guide for COVID-19 Responders', IASC, May 2020, accessible at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-05/Basic%20Psychosocial%20Skills-%20A%20Guide%20for%20COVID-19%20Responders.pdf>
- United Nations Youth Envoy, '#CopingWithCOVID: A webinar series on young people and mental health', 2020, accessible at <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2020/04/copingwithcovid-a-webinar-series-on-young-people-and-mental-health/>
- World Health Organization, 'Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak', WHO, Geneva, 2020, accessible at https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2
- World Health Organization, 'Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak', WHO, Geneva, March 2020, accessible at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/mental-health-and-psychosocial-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>
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A Snapshot

UNICEF'S APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19 IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Consolidated by EAPRO Health/HIV with Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) and Child Protection sections, in collaboration with Country Office sections - ADAP, Child Protection, Education, Gender and Health/HIV - and EAPRO Education and Gender sections



Introduction

Mental health is one of the most neglected areas of public health and well-being. Globally the ratio of mental health professionals in the population is <1:10,000¹ although the needs are significant, including for under-18s.

Before COVID-19, it was estimated that 10–20 per cent of children and adolescents worldwide experienced mental health challenges, with half of the mental health conditions beginning by age 14. One in four children were living with a parent who had a mental health condition. Adolescents' mental health and well-being, growing incidences of self-harm, and high suicide rates are of increasing concern in East Asia and the Pacific. The percentage of adolescents aged 13–17 that attempted suicide ranges from 4 per cent in Indonesia (2015) to 34 per cent in Solomon Islands (2011).² Gender is a critical determinant of mental illness.

¹ World Health Organization, Mental Health Atlas, WHO, Geneva, 2014. pp 34. https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/mental_health_atlas_2014/en/

² Data on noncommunicable diseases were gathered by the World Health Organization through the Global School-based Student Health Survey which asked young people about their experiences in the previous 12 months.

Rigid gender norms can negatively impact the mental health of girls and boys. Across the region, deaths by suicide are more common for adolescent boys than girls in all countries except Myanmar where rates are similar. With limited services and professionals and a stigma surrounding mental health issues, most children and adolescents suffer in silence.

The pandemic has worsened existing uncertainties and distress. Containment measures and school closures have isolated children and adolescents from their social networks. Self-isolation can result in anxiety and sleep problems among adolescents, including because of increased screen time, irregular eating habits and reduced physical activity.³ Specific stressors linked to quarantine, fear for one's own health and infecting others, isolation and boredom, financial loss and stigma can lead to negative and long-lasting psychological effects, such as post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion and anger.⁴

The negative mental health impact of COVID-19 may also be worse for young people with existing psychological disorders, especially those whose treatment may have been disrupted as a result of the pandemic.^{5,6} The impact of COVID-19 may be further exacerbated among children and adolescents with disabilities, who may not be able to maintain physical distancing or access basic services or therapy. And children and adolescents with learning or cognitive disabilities may not be able to fully understand the situation brought about by COVID-19, or effectively use available virtual channels for communication and to access remote support. Marginalized and high-risk groups, such as migrant and displaced children, also struggled to access services that were available.

The pandemic revealed the stark realities of the significant gaps in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services for children and families needing help and the barriers preventing vulnerable groups from accessing services.

However, the pandemic brought the issues of mental health into the open, highlighting that trauma and stress impact everyone. Chipping away taboos that have prevented people from speaking out and seeking help is enabling a much bigger conversation on meeting the mental health needs of populations, including children and adolescents.

3 Cuevas-Parra, P & Stephano, M. (2020). World vision report- Children's voices in the time of COVID-19: continued child activism in the child of personal challenges

4 Cuevas-Parra, P. (2015) Children advocating for children's rights: A study from the children's council in Lebanon. Beirut: World Vision Lebanon. Available from: <http://www.wvi.org/child-participation/publication/children-advocating-theirchildren%E2%80%99s-rights> [Accessed 13 July 2020]

5 The LH. The syndemic threat of food insecurity and HIV. *Lancet HIV*. 2020;7: e75.

6 El-Hage W, Hingray C, Lemogne C, et al. Les professionnels de santé face à la pandémie de la maladie à coronavirus (COVID-19): quels risques pour leur santé mentale ? [Health professionals facing the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic: What are the mental health risks?] [published online ahead of print, 2020 Apr 22]. *Encephale*. 2020; S0013-7006(20)30076-2. doi: 10.1016/j.encep.2020.04.008



Collective effort is now essential to respond to an exacerbated mental health crisis and take the opportunity to strengthen and accelerate investment in mental health systems beyond COVID-19.

MHPSS is a priority area for the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO). As a cross cutting issue for health/HIV, child protection, early childhood development and education, adolescent development and participation, gender, and disability, an emphasis has been placed on systems strengthening and a longer-term investment in MHPSS to ensure availability, quality and access to a multi-tiered system to meet the needs of children and adolescents, as well as parents and caregivers.

This brief presents a snapshot of the multisectoral and adaptive approaches of UNICEF across East Asia and the Pacific to MHPSS during the COVID-19 response, that were undertaken in collaboration with government, civil society, development partners and young people's networks.

**Mental health services are an essential part
of all government responses to COVID-19.
They must be expanded and fully funded.**

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 21 May 2020



East Asia and the Pacific Region

Reaching children and parents with supportive messaging and guidance during COVID-19

Across the region, MHPSS messages adapted to COVID-19 challenges reached over 50 million children, adolescents, parents, caregivers, frontline staff and others. The [*My Hero is You*](#) storybook promotes MHPSS for children, parents and caregivers. To promote disability inclusion, there is a child with disabilities among the main characters. Eight country offices in the region were supported to translate the storybook into 18 languages, including ethnic minority languages in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

In addition to regional and country offices designed MHPSS messages, [*the Parenting for Lifelong Health Parenting Tips*](#) were translated into 14 languages by 12 country offices and disseminated through social media, television, radio, posters and community loudspeakers.





Integration of mental health and child protection into the Return to School agenda

[The Framework for Reopening Schools](#), developed by five United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, calls on governments to pay specific attention to MHPSS in plans to reopen schools and in the long-term recovery. Governments are encouraged to increase the provision of MHPSS in their reopening plans to address stigma/discrimination and support children and their families in coping with the pandemic. They are encouraged to conduct a risk assessment for teachers and other staff (considering age, chronic conditions and other risk factors) before school resumes. In the long term, UNICEF encourages governments to review and strengthen referral systems, particularly for severe cases, and ensure care providers are aware of other services, including referral to services for gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services. The Framework includes tips for helping children deal with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Complementing the global framework and recognizing that the return to school would be the first time some vulnerable children were reunited with trusted friends and adults since before lockdown measures were put in place and that children could struggle to cope with returning to school, UNICEF EAPRO

developed a package of materials to integrate both child protection and MHPSS into the Return to School agenda. The package includes [an advocacy brief](#) on the integration of child protection in the return to school, [tips for teachers and school management](#) on child protection and MHPSS, [messages for children and adolescents](#), and [a referral pathway](#) between schools and child protection authorities and other services. UNICEF country offices can adapt and contextualize these documents, as the Cambodia Country Office has already done in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport's Education during the development of the Response Plan to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disability inclusion in the context of COVID-19

All COVID-19 related action must consider the intersections of gender, age, ability and other factors to effectively and efficiently remove barriers that may arise during response and recovery. UNICEF EAPRO developed a package of [guidance to promote disability inclusion](#) in the context of COVID-19, including a minimum care package for children with disabilities, guidance for frontline responders and a guidance note on ensuring an inclusive return to school for children with disabilities.

The regional office offered capacity-building on disability-inclusive COVID-19 response through webinars, including on gender-based violence. Communication messages and services linked to COVID-19 must be accessible for people with disabilities, along with MHPSS.

Young Key Populations – survey results

UNICEF collaborated with the Interagency Task Team on Young Key Populations in Asia and the Pacific to develop a rapid response survey to reveal the impact of the pandemic on young people aged 18–29 who are at higher risk for HIV and youth living with HIV in the region. Almost 50 per cent of the respondents were young men who have sex with men, 10 per cent were drug users, 10 per cent were transgender, 6 per cent were sex workers, 5 per cent were migrants, and 51 per cent were living with HIV.

Respondents from Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand reported elevated anxiety, with approximately 70 per cent citing concerns for individual and family members' health, loss of income and feelings of isolation. Respondents reported significant disruption and delays to essential mental health services due to COVID-19. Youth who need mental health services experienced delays or disruption in access to mental health medications (34 per cent) and psychosocial support (47 per cent).

Coping with COVID-19 – LGBTIQ youth

UNICEF EAPRO reached out to youth networks and youth-led organizations to understand how young people have been coping with the impact of COVID-19. Youth Voices Count, a regional organization working with LGBTIQ youth, collaborated with UNICEF EAPRO to conduct a webinar for LGBTIQ youth across the

Asia-Pacific region and survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental and sexual health, civil and political life, and socioeconomic status.

The feedback from young LGBTIQ groups suggested that mitigating measures put in place during COVID-19 affected them adversely. They have been significantly impacted by decreased job opportunities, health care provision and livelihood development, in addition to the stigma they face in the community. Drawing on those results and key informant interviews, case studies and other sources, the #CopingWithCovid discussion paper documented the challenges of LGBTIQ youth and interventions led by youth organizations to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Although governments offered social security schemes, including financial aid, to help people cope with the economic impact of COVID-19, LGBTIQ youth across the region reported being excluded because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

Ending discrimination and stigma against migrant workers and their children

Containment measures, notably border closures and movement restrictions, have had a significant impact on migrants and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. Loss of income has led to insecurity, increased risks of violence and rising debts for this already vulnerable group, including families for whom remittances are a critical income source. Recognizing the heightened vulnerability of migrant workers and their children during COVID-19, UNICEF EAPRO, UNODC, IOM, UN Women and ILO released a [joint op-ed](#) urging the end of discrimination and stigma. Similar efforts were made at the country level.



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Cambodia

Support to parents and caregivers

557,410 people, including

167,486
children

reached with positive
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COVID-19 prevention
messaging

300

social services and
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received training on
psychosocial first aid from
TPO and UNICEF

To continue supporting parents and caregivers while complying with measures to contain the pandemic, UNICEF Cambodia employed a tiered strategy. Existing community-based positive parenting groups were replaced with home visits. In partnership with Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), a non-governmental organization (NGO) with expertise on MHPSS, UNICEF supported hotlines staffed by trained counsellors who provided MHPSS to 480 children, parents, caregivers and frontline workers. For those severely impacted by COVID-19, clinical psychiatric treatment was provided through in-person support and tele-services. The MHPSS community-based campaign reached 62,258 caregivers and 39,482 children in five provinces through adapted positive parenting groups, loudspeakers and targeted home visits by trained community facilitators through an NGO implementing partner. A further 100,351 caregivers, social workers and children were reached via remote MHPSS services through hotlines and social media platforms.



MHPSS awareness-raising materials were developed, with messages targeting parents and caregivers for self-care and as providers of primary MHPSS to children and adolescents. The [leaflets](#) included hotline numbers for specialized counselling and mental health services.

Positive parenting tips

Positive parenting tips, MHPSS and COVID-19 prevention messaging reached a total of 557,410 people, including 167,486 children, through social media platforms and community loudspeakers. TPO developed [short videos](#) to support the social media campaign to raise awareness on impacts on mental health and how to cope with such concerns.

MHPSS training for medical practitioners

MHPSS has been integrated into training for medical practitioners as part of a larger effort to strengthen the health sector response to violence against children. Frontline and social services workers were trained on MHPSS for children and families in the communities in the context of COVID-19.

Assistance to returning migrants and their families

UNICEF Cambodia strengthened the partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation with the aim to:

- Expand case management training plus mental health support to social affairs officials
- Expand the number of social workers at checkpoints along the border with Thailand to enable them to identify children returning alone or accompanied and at risk of violence and abuse, as well as to identify if they require mental health support.

In collaboration with TPO, training on psychosocial first aid was provided to 300 social services and frontline workers (including staff working in quarantine centers). The training equipped them with basic skills to identify mental distress in children and adults, provide basis counselling and/or refer them to providers of specialized mental health support.

Mental health included in social impact study on COVID-19

Inclusive COVID-19 support services and social protection schemes for young key populations and youth living with HIV are needed, along with non-stigmatizing care and non-punitive measures for youth to access essential services. UNICEF Cambodia included mental health in the adolescent module of its social impact study on COVID-19. Questions related to mental health concerns were also included in the COVID-19 education sector needs assessment to learn about mental health concerns that children and adolescents faced.



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China

Through UNICEF supported programmes/ intervention in China, close to 42 million children, parents and primary caregivers received community-based MHPSS.

Responding to adolescents' mental health needs

UNICEF China supported a national online survey on adolescent mental health in February,¹ which indicated around 85 per cent of adolescents aged 11–18 had stayed indoors for more than two weeks after the lockdown strategy initiated. Around 34 per cent reported feeling scared in the previous two weeks and were worried about the outbreak or being infected.

In response to survey findings, UNICEF China worked with the largest youth organization in the country, the China Youth League (CYL), as well as one of the largest technology companies, Kuaishou, to provide [mental health tips](#) and [information](#) to 12 million adolescents. An indoor exercise challenge for youth in lockdown reached 11 million page views

with 4,600 short videos on indoor exercises uploaded by adolescents. On the CYL platform, four episodes of the podcast '[Listening to the young minds](#)', covering anti-bullying, anti-stigma, anxiety and other themes related to mental health in the COVID-19 context, reached more than 320,000 adolescents.

Two months after the outbreak was contained, a repeat survey in May² found more adolescents were going outside. Still, anxieties lingered as 53 per cent reported staying indoors and barely leaving home in the previous two weeks. Fewer adolescents reported being scared or anxious about COVID-19 compared to February. Notably, 11 per cent of adolescents expressed a need for mental health counselling services.

Promoting mental health through schools and child-friendly spaces

China's [back to school campaign](#) focused on children's mental health and used short videos, printed posters and social media platforms to prevent stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19. It encourages children not to tease or discriminate against children who are ill, come from areas with high prevalence of COVID-19 or who had recovered from the disease. Printed posters were distributed to all schools in China. Importantly, the campaign's written, spoken and pictorial elements were inclusive of children with disabilities.

1 China Social Work Education Association & UNICEF China. A survey on the current situation and needs of Chinese adolescents during COVID-19 in China. February 2020. There were 2,023 samples from nine provinces: Beijing, Chongqing, Guangdong, Henan, Hebei, Jiangxi, Shandong, Shanxin and Xinjiang.

2 China Social Work Education Association & UNICEF China. A survey on the current situation and needs of Chinese adolescents after COVID-19 in China. May 2020. There were 2,637 samples from 11 provinces, i.e.: Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Henan, Hubei, Inner Mongolia, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Shandong, Sichuan and Zhejiang.

Under the UNICEF project on life-skills, 11 vocational schools set up psychological hotlines for students, and 12 vocational schools developed and issued psychological protection guidelines on emotional counseling techniques and methods. Each project school has provided in-person and online training on emotional and crisis management in an epidemic situation, and on alleviating negative emotions caused by long-term closures. Through working together with the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), over 50 online webinars on adolescent-related psychosocial issues have reached an audience of millions.

UNICEF China, with the National Working Committee on Children and Women and the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is supporting 126 child-friendly spaces in 16 counties/cities/districts and five provincial technical support hubs (TSHs) in Chongqing, Guangxi, Hunan, Shaanxi and Sichuan. The TSHs share information online and support staff at the child-friendly spaces to provide information and services to parents/caregivers and children on COVID-19 prevention, parenting, early child development activities, psychosocial support and child protection.

Messages developed by UNICEF and TSH experts have reached more than 117,000 children and caregivers. A multidisciplinary national expert team was established in February to provide technical guidance and psychosocial support to the staff of TSHs and the provincial working committees on children and women through WeChat. MHPSS related messages sent via WeChat groups and online meetings reached some 700 staff of working committees, TSH coordinators and experts, staff and volunteers at child-friendly spaces in five provinces.

Parenting messages and psychosocial support

To supplement the Ministry of Education e-learning programme, UNICEF China published weekly activity-based [parenting messages and tips](#) supporting children's psychosocial needs through WeChat, Weibo and Xinhua platforms, achieving over 3.4 million views. The office also translated the psychosocial guide developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies to support teachers' facilitation of students' psychosocial well-being.

UNICEF China supported the China Philanthropy Research Institute at Beijing Normal University to develop seven online learning modules. It includes one on emotional health and coping with stress (common emotional responses; how to respond to negative emotion; psychosocial support resources), 20 implementation guides, including guidance on public education about child suicide for Barefoot Social Workers (community-based para-social workers). As of August, 410,000 children and caregivers benefitted from psychosocial support delivered by Barefoot Social Workers. It was provided to 120 villages in six provinces (Henan, Hubei, Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan and Xinjiang) and in non-project sites where the implementation guides were rolled out (Miyun County of Beijing; and Anhui, Gansu, Guangdong, Guangxi, Jiangxi and Jilin provinces).

Finally, UNICEF China is working with the Ministry of Civil Affairs to provide psychosocial support and counselling services to children and families in two communities severely affected by COVID-19 in Wuhan through social work agencies in partnership with other specialized service providers.



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Indonesia

Mental health tips and awareness messages reached some 392,414 individuals via traditional and social media channels, webinars and other events organized by UNICEF Indonesia in partnership with government and NGO partners. UNICEF supported programmes have reached 1,090,695 people (364,438 children; 726,257 adults, youth and caregivers) directly alongside indirect support through messages on MHPSS across a range of platforms, including TikTok.

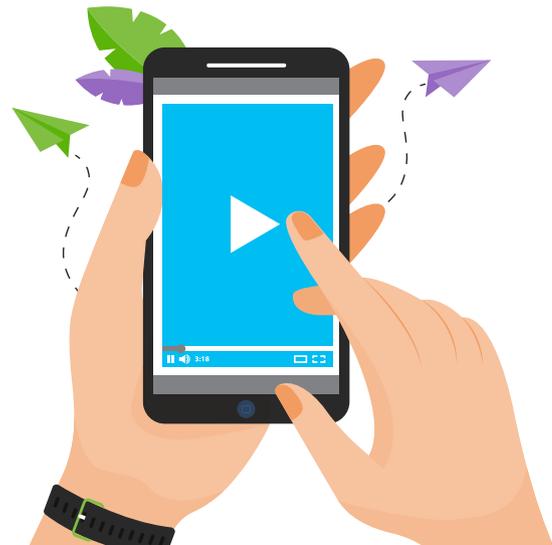
A series of biweekly online mental health sessions for young people by young people was launched in August 2020 with the Center of Indonesian Medical Students Activities (CIMSA). The sessions, called Ruang Peduli Kesehatan Mental (Space for Mental Health Concerns) or Ruang PEKA (“SENSITIVE space”) provide psychosocial support and practical knowledge to sustain mental well-being during COVID-19. More than 2,000 people attended the first two online sessions (link to [session 1](#) and [session 2](#)), which were live-streamed and open to the public. The sessions were modelled on a similar session conducted in May 2020 with 50 adolescents, which was followed by the development of information, education and communication materials on MHPSS with the engagement of young people including youth with disabilities.

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UNICEF translated the *My Hero is You* storybook into Bahasa Indonesia and seven local languages in Papua province. UNICEF also advocated and engaged volunteers and other CSOs to create [a video](#) and audio adaptation of the book, that UNICEF publicized, shared and widely reposted to reach a broader audience. *My Hero is You* was launched in a nationwide broadcast, led by the Minister of Women Empowerment and Child Protection.



Lao PDR



UNICEF Lao PDR supported the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Youth's Union in providing counselling services through a hotline and protection centers to 855 women and children in need of help. UNICEF and IOM disseminated parenting and stress management posters to eight quarantine camps, reaching some 3,000 people. Messages on MHPSS and gender-based violence risk mitigation in Lao, Hmong and Khmu language were played in 4,800 villages through community loudspeakers, reaching an estimate of 3.4 million people (approximately 50 per cent of the population). UNICEF Lao PDR and the Ministry of ICT disseminated [television and radio programmes](#) through 18 national broadcast stations in Lao, sign language, Hmong and Khmu language.

The evidence-based and participatory design and nation-wide reach of the Back to School Campaign were globally recognized by UNICEF as inspirational and compelling. Key messages were disseminated through radio, public services announcements, WhatsApp and social media platforms. A rapid

More than
700,000
children

reached with risk communication materials on COVID-19, including messages on parenting and MHPSS

survey was carried out to understand the situation of students, parents and teachers. UNICEF Lao PDR and partners reached more than 700,000 children (51 per cent girls) by providing all public primary schools in the country with printed risk communication materials on COVID-19, including messages on parenting and MHPSS. UNICEF published [a national case study](#), Safely Back to School, to showcase the continuity of learning and safe reopening of schools during COVID-19.

The UNICEF country office is supporting the development of online psychosocial first aid and child protection training modules to improve the capacity of social welfare workforce to respond to MHPSS needs during the pandemic and mitigate child protection risks, including sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF is exploring a new partnership with a Buddhist organization to disseminate messages on MHPSS, conflict resolution and mindfulness.

UNICEF Lao PDR supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) to revise the Primary Health Care (PHC) Policy in line with the Global Declaration of Astana, to promote mental health care as one of the 12 PHC components. UNICEF also supported MoH to develop the implementation plan to strengthen community health and advocate the policy with multisectoral stakeholders. The focus on primary health care includes linkages between community health and the formal health system. In close collaboration with partners, UNICEF is modelling a sustainable approach to community health system strengthening in selected provinces/districts and generating evidence for scaling up.



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Malaysia

Parenting tips for COVID-19

In partnership with the Government, UNICEF Malaysia developed parenting tips for COVID-19 and launched them on social media on 18 May 2020. Plans are in place to send parenting tips to parents through Telegram and WhatsApp. Recently, UNICEF Malaysia shifted the focus of its content from prevention to self-care and psychosocial well-being, and services it supports include helplines to address mental health issues, suicide and domestic violence. This content generated 4.4 million views through various social media channels.

Guidance for social workers and social service practitioners

UNICEF Malaysia developed [ten tips for social workers](#) and social service practitioners to conduct remote case management to protect children when face-to-face engagement with children and their families is constrained due to COVID-19 containing measures. The ten tips were created by Maestral International in collaboration with UNICEF and the Malaysian Association of Social Workers and were disseminated to close to 130,000 people via social media, email and a webinar.



Service provision
increased by

100%

through online and tele-MHPSS for
children and adolescents with
disabilities and their parents

KitaConnect (WeConnect)

In March 2020, UNICEF Malaysia launched a platform called [KitaConnect \(WeConnect\)](#) to listen to and address young people's concern on MHPSS. The platform features [social media influencers](#) and [mental health experts](#) who [create awareness of mental health](#) and [share practical tips](#) for young people. It has engaged more than 270,000 young people in Malaysia to date.

Online and tele-MHPSS for children and adolescents with disabilities

In partnership with the National Early Childhood Intervention Council, UNICEF has provided online and tele-MHPSS for children and adolescents with disabilities and their parents, resulting in a 100 per cent increase in service provision since mid-March 2020 when restrictions on movement were enacted. The partnership supported community-based psychosocial support for 971 people, including 488 children (132 girls, 356 boys) and 483 parents (388 mothers, 95 fathers). A total of 3,509 online and tele-MHPSS sessions have been provided in



the past five months (3,115 individual sessions, 394 group sessions). Services for children with disabilities (provided by Early Intervention Centres) were categorized as “non-essential” and face-to-face service provision ceased. Training on the use of digital platforms significantly improved the ability of Early Intervention Centres to provide services within limits set by the Government.

Capacity-building of school counsellors

UNICEF Malaysia is partnering with the Ministry of Education and the International Association of Counseling Malaysia (PERKAMA International) to build the capacity of school counsellors to provide MHPSS support to children, parents and teachers.

Impact of COVID-19 on mental health

In partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF Malaysia conducted a study on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable children and families. Children faced numerous challenges, including increased mental health problems, when restrictions on movement required them to stay home and learn online. Two of every three heads of households reported emotional distress due to the lockdown, including 80 per cent of female heads of households. In partnership with Universiti Malaya Cares, UNICEF Malaysia will conduct a study on the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of marginalized and vulnerable children and adolescents (aged 5–19). The partnership will identify stakeholders who provide MHPSS for this group of children and adolescents and the gaps and needs in the provision of service to them.



Mongolia

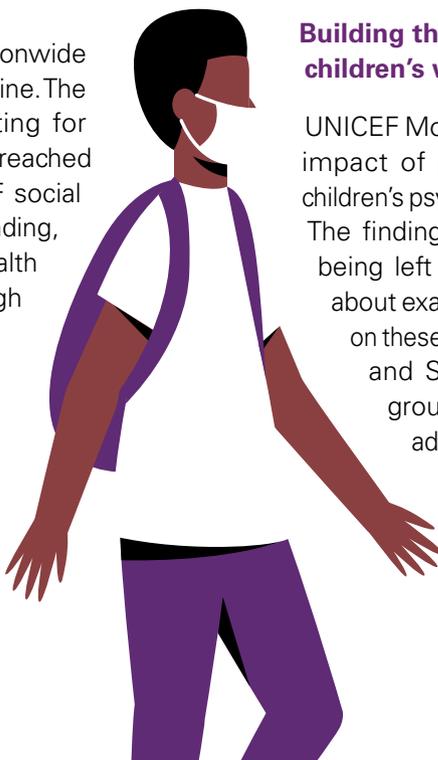
Support for parents, teenagers and children

UNICEF Mongolia worked with VMLY&R company and the Institute of Applied Psychology to provide mental health advice for teenagers during the COVID-19 restrictions. A social media campaign with a [series of 11 videos](#) and eight posters generated 340,000 views from May through July 2020.

MHPSS has been delivered nationwide through remote means, mainly online. The Parenting Tips from the Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative package reached 431,000 people through UNICEF social media platforms. With UNICEF funding, the National Centre for Mental Health reached 359,340 parents through various media platforms.

Campaigns to raise awareness

In line with the national anti-domestic violence campaign, “Love Doesn’t Hurt”, mental health resources were developed for women,



Social media campaign
with a series of **11 videos**
and eight posters generated

340,000

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from May through July 2020

men, adolescents and children affected by COVID-19. A community awareness campaign, “You are not alone”, was implemented to support psychosocial well-being and safety of children.

Building the knowledge base: children’s well-being

UNICEF Mongolia conducted a study on the impact of prolonged school closure on children’s psychological and mental well-being. The findings highlighted children’s fear of being left behind in learning and anxiety about exams when school reopens. Based on these findings, the Ministry of Education and Science established a working group and is organizing a two-month advocacy campaign on psychosocial support for children, including targeted messages for teachers to deliver.

Myanmar

MHPSS toll-free helplines launched

UNICEF Myanmar launched two MHPSS helplines since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first provides direct support for children, adolescents and caregivers while the second is a dedicated helpline targeting frontline workers of the COVID-19 response to provide emotional and psychosocial support. Recently a toll-free number has been secured for the hotlines. UNICEF Myanmar has collaborated with the Department of Health to provide training for social workers and implementing partners on psychosocial support for children in isolation, sexual and gender-based violence response and self-care.

2 MHPSS toll-free helplines

launched to provide direct emotional
and psychosocial support



Virtual storytelling for children and their caregivers

In collaboration with its MHPSS partner Metanoia, UNICEF Myanmar piloted a series of virtual storytelling sessions for children and their caregivers on social media. Delivery platforms, such as Zoom, are being tested to reach the most vulnerable children and those who are hardest to reach, such as children in residential care institutions. UNICEF Myanmar also adapted the *My Hero is You* storybook for the Myanmar context which received a final endorsement from the Ministry of Health to be aired on the national Myanmar Radio Station, with different characters in the story voiced by children. UNICEF Myanmar helped to develop the Safe Play Handbook for Children – MHPSS tool for use by children, caregivers and teachers in schools and at home. 25,000 copies were given to children and caregivers.

Building on its translation of the *My Hero is You* storybook for children, UNICEF Myanmar held virtual storytelling sessions, reaching 51 children and caregivers. UNICEF has also finalized and disseminated a series of nine illustrated children's books with supportive COVID-19 messages in the Myanmar language. UNICEF field offices will help to distribute 20,000 copies to reach more children.

1. Corona Tells a Story
2. All Because of Corona
3. Let's Wash Our Hands
4. Do Not Enter My House, Corona!
5. Corona's Journey
6. Let's Take Care of Our Pets
7. Greetings From Home
8. Wear Your Masks Properly
9. We Are All Heroes



Live web chats hosted on U-Talk

**to engage and
support youth during
social isolation**

Support for migrant children

[Children in Kachin State](#) face the multi-layered threats of COVID-19, conflict, displacement and the effects of migration. As return migration from China increases, protecting migrant children and their families is of the highest priority. UNICEF Myanmar is working with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and its partners in Kachin State to ensure children in quarantine centres and displaced children are protected. UNICEF Myanmar, with support from the Government of Japan, has set up child-friendly spaces in camps and provides

psychosocial support for children, including important COVID-19 awareness materials, and support for child protection case management services. Also, UNICEF is developing online courses for adolescents and parents in camps on topics such as positive parenting, life skills and child protection through its partner, Kachin Baptist Convention.

Safe return to school

The Return to School campaign, led by the Ministry of Education (MoE), includes MHPSS as a core component. UNICEF Myanmar is collaborating closely with MoE and DSW to train a core group of teachers on MHPSS in preparation for school opening and to mitigate the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 on children and teachers. UNICEF Myanmar is assisting in planning and executing training for 72,000 teachers to link the school system with child protection case management through DSW. The training responds to concerns in Myanmar about bullying and school-based violence against children.

Youth-led peer support

UNICEF Myanmar is partnering with Plan to launch a virtual, youth-led education and protection campaign. The campaign aims to empower adolescents and youth to become leaders in educating their peers and communities about COVID-19 and its subsequent risks, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse. It aims to engage youth in supporting and protecting each other, especially girls and young women, from violence and abuse during social isolation. Live web chats are hosted on the campaign's virtual platform, U-Talk, to enable youth to support and protect each other during social isolation.



Pacific Island Countries

Vanuatu

As part of the combined response to COVID-19 and Cyclone Harold, UNICEF Pacific supported the Government to deploy five psychosocial support teams to affected areas, reaching 11,604 people, including 4,779 adults (2,216 men; 2,563 women) and 6,825 children (3,460 boys; 3,365 girls).

Samoa

UNICEF Pacific is using television and radio to disseminate child protection messages. It has also developed [television ads](#) in Samoan, English and sign language encouraging people to stay home, with self-care tips to cope with stress.

4,779

Adults and

6,825

children

in Vanuatu received
psychosocial support from the
Government and UNICEF





Papua New Guinea

UNICEF Papua New Guinea (PNG) took a multi-sector approach employing various mass media channels to continue supporting people to access MHPSS. Approximately 6,500 vulnerable families were supported with tips for caregivers on self-care and parental support. Leaflets with contact information for existing hotlines that provide services to survivors of violence were also included in the distribution of hygiene and dignity kits. Good parenting tips were also posted on social media, reaching more than 39,000 parents online.

UNICEF PNG translated *My Hero is You* into Tok Pisin and developed a radio version of the storybook which is about to be broadcasted. Four public service announcements were produced for television and radio to raise awareness of helplines and provide children and adults with access to MHPSS and necessary support in case of violence against children (VAC) and domestic violence.

UNICEF PNG also trained teachers and social workers of pre-primary, primary and vocational schools as trainers on risk communication, hygiene practices, nutrition and MHPSS.

6,500

vulnerable families

supported with tips for
caregivers on self-care and
parental support



Television and radio

promoted helplines on MHPSS,
VAC and domestic violence

Through the UNICEF and ChildFund partnership, 1,562 people have received MHPSS and case management services, including 505 children. The partnership expands the “1-Tok Kanselin Helpim Lain” helpline, which offers immediate support, counseling, and MHPSS to children and families at risk of violence and other distress. UNICEF PNG provides counsellors with training on MHPSS, gender-based violence and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse for survivors of family and sexual violence, including children and adolescents, as well as parents and caregivers. An emergency fund has been developed to facilitate links between the helpline and other service providers, such as the welfare office and police, and strengthen case management.



Philippines

UNICEF Philippines launched the third U-Report poll on 11 May 2020. [The findings from 1,485 youth responses](#) were used to develop advocacy messages on mental health during COVID-19 that were shared widely on [various platforms](#). UNICEF is coordinating with the Ministry of Health and child protection authorities on the development of child protection, parenting and MHPSS products that are planned to reach 200,000 people.

UNICEF Philippines continues to support the nationwide helplines of the Philippine Red Cross. From 17 April to 24 August 2020, 9,790 helpline callers (5,624 males, 4,166 females) received lifesaving information on mental health and case management concerns, among others. Services include MHPSS counselling for children and adolescents, and facilitation of case management services for children and women survivors of violence.

UNICEF Philippines is also supporting the Department of Education (DepEd)'s initiative "Kakaiba-yanihan": Inclusive psychosocial support for learners with disabilities affected by COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF is working closely with DepEd to integrate child protection into the Learning Continuity Plan through key actions. This includes, reviewing the child protection policy, training teachers, identifying specific actions to strengthen the collaboration between social welfare and education authorities at the provincial and local levels to improve case management and strengthening coordinated actions for out-of-school children.

When the lockdown began, youth organizations were mobilized to create strategies to encourage adolescents to stay at home, protect youth from any form of violence and engage in activities that promote health and well-being. Some 47 youth organizations and elected youth leaders participated in Young House Heroes initiatives of the Positive Youth Development Network, the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and UNICEF Philippines. The youth participants created a support group to deliver MHPSS. As of 31 August, the initiatives recorded 20,500 youth participants, and media engagement reached a total of 1,344,629 people.



9,790
helpline callers

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management concerns from
17 April to 24 August 2020

Kabatanan: Youth for community care

UNICEF and ING in partnership with Positive Youth Development Network supported the Kabatan: Youth for Community Care initiative in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Childhood trauma is particularly challenging for educators to address because many children are unable to express their feelings in easily recognizable ways. Their behaviour may be aggressive or offputting, and those experiencing abuse, family related issues, evacuation from areas affected by armed conflict, or other challenges may not know how to seek support.

In conflict-affected Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao, the Philippines, 2,000 elementary pupils in three schools participated in the pilot project Kabatan (“resilience” in the local language) on mental health needs. Learning sessions for teachers focused on responding to students’ needs and establishing safety networks in and outside schools. They emphasized the importance of a whole-community approach to caring for mental well-being. For example, some 48 teachers brought the “Kabatan Emotions Box” into the classroom, and they encouraged students to write about their feelings and problems and deposit those written notes in the box for the teacher to read and respond. This project has been adopted by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARRM) Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education.



Click, Like and Share

In February 2020, CWC and Optimum Media Minds Production partnered to support “Click, Like and Share” – a compilation of three short advocacy films on mental health, cyber-bullying and HIV/AIDS. Screenings include debriefing sessions on adolescent well-being, advocacy against peer violence and awareness-raising on online safety and to reduce the stigma against HIV/AIDS. A facilitator guide was developed to standardize the sessions online and offline or for self-study while learning at home.

Mental health and wellness youth camps for children and adolescents in special situations

CWC, in partnership with UNICEF Philippines, the Department of Health and Philippine Red Cross, held several one-day mental health and wellness camps for children and adolescents in special situations, including adolescents living with HIV/AIDS, child survivors of online sexual abuse and exploitation, and children in situations of armed conflict.

The Council will offer additional youth camps, including for teen mothers, and produce an awareness-raising documentary on mental health to reduce stigma. It will also advocate the integration of mental health in its review of the National Plan of Action for Children and the Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence Against Children. CWC also adopted a resolution making mental health a priority sectoral issue of the Government of the Philippines.



Thailand

UNICEF Thailand with the Children and Youth Council of Thailand and United Nations partners conducted an online survey on the impact of COVID-19 on youth from 28 March to 10 April 2020 during the initial bans on public gatherings.

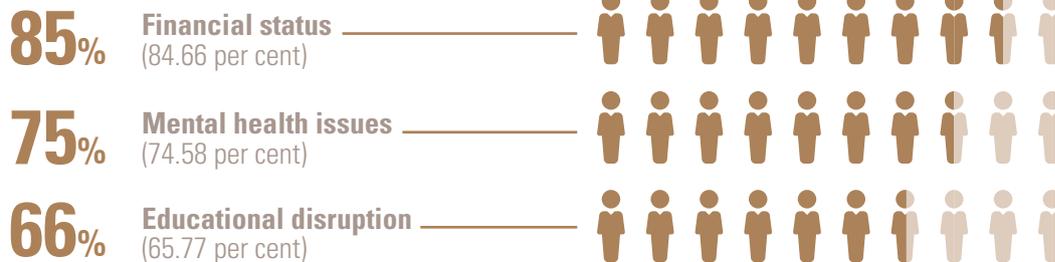
[The survey](#) found that mental health issues caused by the lockdown were the primary concern of 79 per cent of LGBTI youth and more than 82 per cent of youth aged 20 and up.



The most significant impacts of COVID-19 were:

1. Financial status - young people, their guardians or families as many people were unable to work normally
2. Mental health issues such as stress, boredom, lack of motivation and frustration caused by the lockdown
3. Disruption to normal education, leading to an impact on educational efficiency

What are young people most concerned about? _____



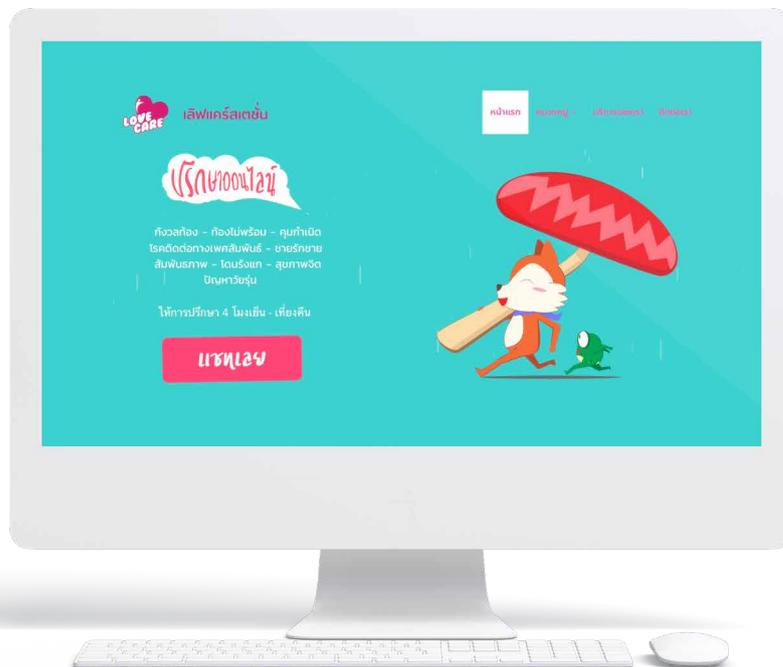


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Concern over the financial status of families correlates with the sufficiency of protection supplies such as masks, hand sanitizer.

In details, mental health issues caused by the lockdown were the primary concern for those who identified themselves as LGBTI (79.71 per cent), those age 20–24 (82.57 per cent), and those above age 25 (85.33 per cent). Respondents in Bangkok expressed the most concern (80.45 per cent).

Online counseling could reduce stress and raise confidence and the ability to perform at age-appropriate skill levels. For example, UNICEF-supported “[Lovecare Station](#)” enables children and young people to have an online live chat with professional psychologists and offers individual counselling for children and young people affected by COVID-19. Severe cases are referred to hospitals for follow-up.





Timor-Leste

UNICEF Timor-Leste supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) to establish a dedicated hotline for MHPSS for children, parents and caregivers who are affected by COVID-19.

As part of the Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls, UNICEF Timor-Leste is collaborating with UN Women and UNFPA to develop online courses for pre-secondary and secondary school students. The online courses will cover topics on gender equality, healthy relationships and social-emotional skills for violence prevention. The courses will be added to the distance learning platform, "[Timor-Leste Learning Passport](#)"; launched by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education as part of the COVID-19 response to

school closures. These digital learning opportunities are planned to continue once schools reopen.

A telephone hotline for MHPSS was launched by MoH with UNICEF support. The hotline will be operated in conjunction with PRADET, an NGO that provides psychosocial services, for people who experience trauma, mental illness and psychosocial challenges, including those who experience domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. Calls are answered by trained mental health counsellors providing support and referrals to other services if needed. General health information is provided for key health issues, including maternal and child health and newborn care.



As part of the Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls, UNICEF Timor-Leste is collaborating with UN Women and UNFPA to develop online courses for pre-secondary and secondary school students.



Viet Nam

Mental health and psychosocial well-being among children and young people

In 2019, UNICEF conducted a well-being assessment of school children aged 11–17 in Viet Nam, including a literature review and qualitative data collection from interviews with 110 service providers, parents, children and youth.

Despite a relatively low incidence of mental health problems reported in secondary data, there is a general perception that both mental health and psychosocial problems are increasing, particularly among children and young people. High expectations and pressure from family and school, social norms (including early marriage) which often place girls at a disadvantage to boys and increasing exposure to the Internet are potential psychosocial well-being risk factors. These may result in social isolation, worries, sadness, anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness and, in some cases, suicide.



“Opening Up Better Schools”

initiative addressed student’s mental well-being and the prevention of SR-GBV when children returned to their classrooms

Important risk factors for the mental health of boys and girls include overly restrictive household rules; household tensions, including pressure to achieve academically; poor communication between parents and children; neglect and feelings of not being understood; and parental marital conflict and domestic violence. An unsupportive school environment including bullying and peer conflict, boarding schools, lack of leisure activities and unsupportive teachers are key sources of anxiety for children and adolescents. The COVID-19 crisis has aggravated this situation in Viet Nam and increased concerns for long-term repercussion on children and adolescents’ well-being and capacity to cope with adversity.

As part of its COVID-19 response, UNICEF Viet Nam translated and disseminated the Parenting for Lifelong Health Parenting Tips and developed a leaflet on MHPSS for children and adolescents in quarantine and childcare facilities. UNICEF Viet Nam also supported the development of two training programmes on MHPSS. The training enables the National Child Protection Helpline and frontline workers to provide primary mental health care and support for children coping with stress, depression and other mental health issues during the COVID-19 crisis.

Furthermore, UNICEF Viet Nam supported the translation of the *My Hero is You* storybook into eight ethnic minority languages and developed a video adaptation of the storybook to support more children, parents and caregivers, including those with disability.

UNICEF Viet Nam has also integrated MHPSS into the training modules for teachers to support the online learning efforts and supported the development and roll-out of the [“Opening Up Better Schools”](#) initiative. A major component of this initiative focused on addressing student’s mental well-being and the prevention of school-related gender-based violence (SR-GBV) when children

returned to their classrooms. A teacher’s manual has been developed, addressing stigma and SR-GBV, and an online teacher training to promote psychosocial well-being in virtual and face-to-face classroom settings is being drafted.

Children with disabilities, especially children with mental disabilities, showed signs of serious distress during the school closures due to the lack of services and the sudden interruption of their daily routines. Therefore, UNICEF Viet Nam supported home visits of professionals to provide specialized services, including psychosocial support, for children with disabilities.



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UNICEF, in collaboration with UNWomen, UNFPA and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, launched the Blue Heart campaign, with the message that violence against women and children is never acceptable, not even during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaign calls for action from the public, parents, women, men, girls and boys, as well as local authorities to speak up against and report violence. It also provides knowledge and skills to women and children to address violence and abuse and improve their mental health.

Way forward

Provision of MHPSS services is an essential part of government responses to COVID-19 and beyond. UNICEF regional and country offices will continue to work with partners to promote investment in multi-tiered child and gender-responsive MHPSS services, through a multi-sectoral and systems strengthening approach in East Asia and the Pacific.

Our vision for mental health

- Mental health is recognized as fundamental to overall health, is integrated into universal health care and all relevant sectors – health, social welfare, education and adolescent development – play their role in the provision of services.
- Stigma is eliminated and children, adolescents and parents experiencing mental health issues and substance abuse problems no longer have to hide.
- Children, adolescents and parents/caregivers have access to quality, multi-tiered MHPSS services, staffed by trained professionals, especially children who have suffered violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect and adolescents.
- Barriers in law and practice that prevent safe and ready access to MHPSS, especially for vulnerable groups such as LGBTIQ youth, children with disabilities, and migrant and displaced children and adolescents, are identified and addressed.
- Help-seeking is facilitated by recognizing and addressing the specific gendered barriers for girls and for boys, as well as by ensuring under-18s have information tailored to their age and needs about how and where to seek support.
- Frontline workers themselves, such as teachers, care workers and social workers, have the support they need to manage their own stress and cope so that they can fulfil their roles.
- Robust evidence and age and sex-disaggregated data on mental health is available to ensure that the extent of the problem is understood, and policies, programmes, services and strategies are effectively designed and delivered.
- Gender-responsive mental health awareness and skill training is provided in schools to address how gender norms and stereotypes impact the mental health and behavioural responses of girls/women and boys/men.
- Adolescents are engaged as change agents and in the development of systems and services, especially those with lived experience of mental health conditions.

We have a responsibility to children's health and well-being — including their mental health and psychosocial well-being — and to support parents and caregivers as they, in turn, support children and young people. We must act now to gather and mobilize public and private resources to support the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the world's most vulnerable children and young people at this extraordinary time.

Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, 1 May 2020



unicef 
for every child

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