



Syria Public  
Health Network



Thank you for your interest in attending this workshop titled:

## **Mental Health in the Syrian conflict: Substance abuse & Suicide among Syrians**

### **Details:**

Date: Wednesday 13th April 2022  
Time: 1400-1600 UK/ 1600-1800 Syria  
Location: Online  
Zoom link details:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88450359345?pwd=WXpBdEpuazJJVUNhYnhERnJFdkVOdz09>

Meeting ID: 884 5035 9345

Passcode: 885142

The [Syria Public Health Network](#), and the “Research for Health System Strengthening in northern Syria ([R4HSSS](#)) project” at King’s College London are pleased to welcome you to participate in this closed workshop on mental health in the Syrian conflict (with a focus on substance abuse and suicide). In this workshop, our aim is to bring together local and international experts on mental health who were involved in research and interventions related to mental health care inside Syria or for Syrians in exile.

### **Context**

More than a decade of the Syrian conflict has had a profound impact on the health of Syrians with more than a half million deaths, more than half of the country’s pre-conflict population are displaced, and a fragmented health system in the different areas of control. Almost all health indicators, including mortality and morbidity indicators, are expected to be on the decline since the start of the conflict.

The conflict also had a severe impact on the mental health in the Syrian communities. It is estimated that more than 60% of the population suffered from PTSD and severe mental disorders, such as psychosis and schizophrenia. However, the prevalence and the scale of these mental health disorders is yet to be researched. There have been many reports by local agencies and NGOs on self-harm and substance abuse. The Forensic Medicine report from Damascus reported 51 cases of suicide in the government held areas in 2020 alone. In the same year, the Idlib Health Directorate reported an increase of self-harm cases in opposition held areas.

Local and international humanitarian health efforts have focused on trauma care in the first few years of the conflict. The humanitarian response then included a mental health focus through community based psychosocial interventions mainly. The availability and coverage of advanced mental health care has been limited due to shortages of mental health specialists inside Syria as well as a lack of adequate resources or investment. The disorders of substance abuse and self-harm have received little attention with many cultural, societal, faith-related and institutional barriers to identifying the scale of the problem let alone initiating appropriate responses. There have however been some good practices at local and international levels in the field of mental health using community based interventions, family interventions, specialized care, and referral mechanisms. These interventions can be used to contribute to the response of various mental health disorders including substance abuse and self-harm.



## Objectives

The objectives of the workshop are:

- To highlight the mental health impact of the Syrian conflict on Syrians inside Syria primarily and on Syrian refugees across the world.
- To explore the prevalence, risk factors, and health services available with a focus on two mental health disorders: substance abuse, and self-harm.
- To encourage mental health professionals and practitioners to plan for harmonized and locally appropriate approaches to address these two mental health disorders.

Pre-workshop reading:

1. Hassan, G., Ventevogel, P., Jefee-Bahloul, H., Barkil-Oteo, A., & Kirmayer, L. J. (2016). Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of Syrians affected by armed conflict. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 25(2), 129–141. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796016000044>
2. Cheung F, Kube A, Tay L, et al. The impact of the Syrian conflict on population well-being. *Nat Commun*. 2020;11(1):3899
3. Alpak, G., Unal, A., Bulbul, F., Sagaltici, E., Bez, Y., Altindag, A., Dalkilic, A., & Savas, H. A. (2015). Post-traumatic stress disorder among Syrian refugees in Turkey: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Clinical Practice*, 19(1), 45–50. <https://doi.org/10.3109/13651501.2014.961930>
4. Bogic, M., Njoku, A., & Priebe, S. (2015). Long-term mental health of war-refugees: a systematic literature review. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/S12914-015-0064-9>
5. Hendrickx, M., Woodward, A., Fuhr, D. C., Sondorp, E., & Roberts, B. (2020). The burden of mental disorders and access to mental health and psychosocial support services in Syria and among Syrian refugees in neighboring countries: a systematic review. *Journal of Public Health*, 42(3), e299–e310. <https://doi.org/10.1093/PUBMED/FDZ097>
6. Bolton, L. (2018). Mental health and psychosocial support in Syria.

Post-workshop:

This workshop is a starting point for further collaboration exploring priorities for mental health in Syria. Based on the findings of the workshop, we might develop a policy briefing on strategies on how to address substance abuse and self-harm in the Syrian context.



## Schedule

| Time (UK) | Session   | Chairs  |
|-----------|---|---|
| 1400-1405 | Introductions   | Dr <a href="#">Fouad Mohammad Fouad</a><br>Syria Public Health Network<br>Associate Professor of Practice<br>Faculty of Health and Science<br>American University of Beirut<br><br>Dr <a href="#">Abdulkarim Ekzayez</a><br>Syria Public Health Network<br>R4HSSS, King's College, London |
| 1405-1420 | Substance abuse: available evidence on prevalence, response, and management in conflict settings generally and in the context of Syria specifically | Professor Mohammed Abou Saleh   |
| 1420-1435 | Self-Harm: available evidence on prevalence, response, and management in conflict settings generally and in the context of Syria specifically       | Dr Nadim Almoshmosh   |
| 1435-1450 | Field practices related to substance abuse and self-harm in the context of northwest Syria and the cross border humanitarian response               | Dr Mohammad Abo Hilal   |
| 1450-1505 | Family interventions for mental health care - can they be used to address substance abuse and self-harm?  | Dr Aala El-Khani  |
| 1505-1555 | Moderated Session with inputs from workshop participants*   | Chair: Dr Diana Rayes<br><br>Discussants: Panelists, Dr Redwan El-khayat, Dr Andres Barkil-Oteo, Beshr Alhaj Hussain, Dr Masa Kurdi, Dr Nidal Sadon.  |
| 1555-1600 | Summing Up and further work   | Dr Fouad Mohammad Fouad<br>Dr Abdulkarim Ekzayez  |

### \*Moderated session:

The moderated session is an opportunity for all participants to contribute their experience on priorities for mental health in Syria. Key areas of discussion will be:

1. Key priorities for mental health needs in Syria.



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2. Health system response to mental health disorders in Syria
3. Coping mechanisms that showed effectiveness among local communities.
4. Coordination among involved health actors.

### Speakers bios:

**Prof Mohammed Abou-Saleh** is currently Professor of Psychiatry at St George's, University of London and Consultant in Addiction Psychiatry. Previously he held the post of Chief Executive Officer of the Qatar Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre. He had previously served as Director of Research and Development and Deputy Head of the Division of Mental Health and Head of the Addictions Research Group at St George's, University of London and as Clinical Director of Addiction Services. He served as Academic Secretary and Honorary Secretary of the Faculty of Addictions; Honorary Secretary of the Higher Specialist Training Committee and elected Chairman of the Middle East Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and Secretary General of the Federation of Arab Psychiatrists. Also he was Professor and Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences and Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, United Arab Emirates University (1991-1998). Internationally he is Chairman of the the World Psychiatric Association Section on Biological Psychiatry since 1998. He has served as Consultant for the World Health Organization in substance misuse in Oman, Beirut, Cairo and Qatar and UAE. He was Assistant Editor of the British Journal of Psychiatry, Co-editor of the European journal Acta Neuropsychiatrica and Member of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors and Vice-President of the World Federation for Mental Health from 2007-2015.

He has 270 publications including 140 publications in refereed journals. He is Editor of the 3rd edition of Principles and Practice of Geriatric Psychiatry 2011 and had edited 2 supplements of the British Journal of Psychiatry on Brain Imaging in Psychiatry and Prediction in Psychopharmacology and 2 supplements of Acta Neuropsychiatrica on Dual Diagnosis: An International Perspective, and Recent Advances in the Psychopharmacology of Addictions. His research interests are in biological psychiatry, psychiatric epidemiology and applied addictions research and prevention psychiatry.

**Dr Nadim Almoshmoh** is a Consultant Psychiatrist, Ascot Rehab. Founding member of the Syrian Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

**Dr. Mohammad Abo Hilal** is a Syrian psychiatrist, trainer, supervisor and researcher in mental health, psychosocial support and protection. Founder of Syria Bright Future organization: a Syrian organization specialized in MHPSS and protection. He is a co-founder of several other NGOs that works in the Syria context in the field of MHPSS, Women protection and youth empowerment. Over the last nine years, he designed and supervised many MHPSS programs and projects that supported Syrian inside Syria and in neighboring countries (Turkey and Jordan). He authored and co-authored several research papers about mental health of Syrians. He is a PM+ Trainer and Supervisor. He is an Advisory Board member for STRENGTH project that in which PM+ and its derivatives is being applied to Syrian refugees in & countries. He has special interest in: 1- Adapting the MHPSS curricula to the Syrian culture. 2- Building mental health systems that is flexible, innovative and sustainable.



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**Dr Aala El-Khani** researches and develops innovative ways to reach families that have experienced conflict and displacement with parenting support and training. Her work has significantly contributed to an agenda of producing materials for families affected by conflict, displacement and residing in low resource contexts. She is a developer of numerous family skills resources as well as a global trainer of family skills programmes and research methods, having conducted training in over 20 countries. Aala is a humanitarian psychologist and works as a consultant for several international organisations including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. She is also an honorary Research Associate at the University of Manchester at the Division of Psychology and Mental Health. Her current work collaborates the efforts of the UNODC and The University of Manchester in developing and evaluating family skills programmes in countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Palestine, Uzbekistan and Indonesia. Aala is passionate about highlighting the significant role that caregivers play in protecting their children during conflict and displacement. Her two TEDx talks have been viewed over 1.4 million times.