

Ukraine - Russia wartime health crises

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A parable

One morning a rich man opens the paper and he sees the world is full of misery. He says "I have money I can help", so he gives away all of his money, - but it is not enough .The people are still suffering. While he is living in a small cottage the man sees another article: (A dozen die daily due to lack of donor organs for transplants). He decided he was foolish to think just giving money was enough. So he decides to go to the Doctor and says "Doctor, I want to donate a kidney". The doctor does the surgery. It is a complete success. While still lying in bed postoperatively he is hoping to feel good, but he does not ... for people are still suffering. So he goes back to the doctor. He says "Doctor this time I want to give it all". The doctor says: What does that supposed to mean, give it all?" He says "This time I want to donate my liver, but not just my liver I want to donate my heart. I want to donate my cornea. I want to give it all away, everything I am, all that I have. The doctor said "A kidney is one thing, but you cannot give away your whole body piece by piece. That is suicide". And he sends the man home ,but the man cannot live knowing that the people are suffering so and he could help so he gives the one thing he has left his life he cuts his wrist in the basin in the bathroom. He was buried and on his grave was written: 'Here Lies He Who Gave Everything'. The question is Does that work? Does it stop the suffering? So he killed himself for nothing? Did he?

Only a fool thinks he can solve the world's problems.

But you have to try, don't you?

I guess that is why we should publish this article. In response to intense emotions during the wars on my Country Iraq I have found ways to suppress them .While perhaps someone adaptive in past difficult situations, now causes these intense emotions to bubble up in unpredictable ways .Anger. Unrelenting worry. Sadness. The loss of joy. When I read the news about the break out of the Ukrainian war and watched the children and women trying to escape a harsh raw anger erupted from somewhere within me. It is a black stain in our collective humanity.

Dates in this article reflects the situatuon at the time of writing

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine enters the fourth week the results are destructive and cruel. At least 90 children have been killed and more than 100 injured. The first child reported killed in the invasion was identified as 10-year-old Polina.

Roughly 4 million people have fled to neighbouring countries. Humanitarian organisations have said it is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War 2. According to the joint statement by UNICEF Executive director Catherine Russell and the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees Filippo Grandi on 7th March 2022 Hundreds of thousands of them are children. Amongst those fleeing, many are unaccompanied or have been separated from their parents or family members. Children without parental care are at a heightened risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. The risk of trafficking also soars in emergencies. UNICEF and UNHCR urge all neighbouring and impacted countries to ensure the immediate identification and registration of unaccompanied and separated children fleeing from Ukraine, after allowing them access to their territory. States should offer safe spaces for children and families immediately following crossing, and link these to national child protection systems. The current emergency also necessitates rapidly expanding the capacity of emergency care arrangements with screened caregivers as well as other critical services for the protection of children, including against gender-based violence, as well as family tracing and reunification mechanisms. For children who have been displaced across borders without their families, temporary foster or other community-based care through a government system offers critical protection. Adoption should not occur during or immediately after emergencies. Every effort should be made to reunify children with their families when possible, if such reunification is in their best interest. Nearly 100,000 children, half of them with disabilities, live in institutional care and boarding schools in Ukraine. Many of these children have living relatives or legal guardians. We have received reports of institutions seeking to move children to safety in neighbouring countries or beyond. While recognizing that, under specific circumstances, humanitarian evacuations can be lifesaving and welcoming efforts to bring children to safety, it is critical that special measures be taken in the best interest of the children, and that the consent of their parents or persons responsible for their care be granted. Under no circumstances should families be separated as a result of relocation or evacuation movements.

“Those legally responsible for children in institutions in Ukraine must ensure that evacuations are done in line with national authorities’ instructions. Movements must be reported to competent authorities in Ukraine and neighbouring countries immediately upon crossing the border, and as far as possible, children should be evacuated with their identification papers and case files. Humanitarian organisations have said it is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War 2. Solidarity by the global community has spoken with Ukraine, but the humanitarian emergency and widespread harms to health and wellbeing demand a concrete international plan. It is a fact that Ukraine has severe epidemics of some major infectious diseases. It has the fourth highest incidence rate of tuberculosis in the WHO Europe region, an estimated 32,000 people there develop active TB each year, and about one third

of all new TB cases are drug resistant, and a major HIV/AIDS epidemic, with an estimated 260,000 people living with HIV. A disease worsened by crowding and poverty. Drug resistant TB arises when people do not adhere to their arduous regimen of daily drugs.” *If you have TB or HIV, no one has time to get their treatment and run with it, they barely have time to get their kids, pets and run”.*

Other infectious diseases, including measles and rubella, are a concern, and the nationwide polio vaccination campaign, which started in February, 2022, has now been suspended. Moreover, vaccination rates for COVID-19 are among the lowest in Europe, at just 35%. Many neighbouring countries have waived existing requirements of proof of COVID-19 vaccination or a negative test for the virus for refugees from Ukraine.

“In a crisis of this kind, many people think of casualties and injuries, but they do not necessarily think of the problem of cancer patients, people with diabetes, people with HIV, people suffering from COVID.” Speaking in a webinar on Feb 4, John F Ryan, acting Deputy Director General at DG SANTE, the European Commission’s health policy body, said.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director of the World Health Organisation (WHO) said at a 2 March press briefing that when Russian invaded On 24 February, Ukraine was coming off the worst of its Omicron wave, which had peaked that month. COVID-19 has fallen there since the conflict began, which means undetected transmission is probably significant.

Julia Hall, Deputy Director for Research at Amnesty International, whose staff are monitoring the crisis, said “ There are lots of people who are deeply traumatized by what they have been through. Many are still in utter shock at the sheer speed of how their lives have been turned upside down. The issue of mental health care is going to be a big one.”

Research has shown that the consequences of human-caused trauma can be much greater and can last longer than the consequences of trauma induced by, for example, natural disasters. The sooner treatment is given for trauma, the better, so the sooner countries taking in refugees start dealing with this, the better.

“Services in receiving countries will definitely be more strained— just look at the sheer numbers of refugees,” said Toby Fricker, Chief of Communication and Partnerships at UNICEF South Africa.

In Poland, which has taken in more than 2.1 million Ukrainian refugees, two-thirds of the total number of people who have fled Ukraine since the start of the invasion, health authorities have secured thousands of hospital beds for refugees needing treatment. However, local officials say that the rapid influx of refugees, which has seen Warsaw’s population alone grow by 20% since the start of the war, is likely to have an effect on a healthcare system still recovering from the COVID-19

pandemic. "You know, our health system is under an incredible strain after COVID-19" Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw, told international media, adding "so now, if we have 20% more inhabitants in Poland...it is going to put an additional strain on the health service". WHO has admitted there is concern among health-care workers over the challenge they are now facing. 'we are very ready to care for refugees, but our workforce is exhausted after 2 years of pandemic and now we have this on top of it,'" said Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

The UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) warned "As the war continues to rage in Ukraine, impacts of rising food prices and shortages of staple crops will escalate global hunger and poverty".

A quarter of global wheat exports come from Russia and Ukraine. Forty percent of wheat and corn from Ukraine go to the Middle East and Africa, which are already grappling with hunger issues, and where further food shortages or price increases risk pushing millions more people into poverty.

IFAD's analysis shows that price increases in staple foods, fuel and fertilizer and other ripple effects of the conflict are having a dire impact on the poorest rural communities. For example: • In Somalia, where an estimated 3.8 million people are already severely food insecure, the costs of electricity and transportation have spiked due to fuel price increases. This has a disproportionate impact on poor small-scale farmers and pastoralists who, in the face of erratic rainfall and an ongoing drought, rely on irrigation-fed agriculture powered by small diesel engines for their survival.

- In Egypt, prices of wheat and sunflower oil have escalated due to Egypt's reliance on Russia and Ukraine for 85 percent of its wheat supply and 73 percent of its sunflower oil.

- In Lebanon, 22 percent of families are food insecure and food shortages or further price hikes will exacerbate an already desperate situation. The country imports up to 80 percent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, but can only store about one month's worth of the crop at a time due to the blast in Beirut's port in 2020 that destroyed the country's major grain silos.

We join others in calling for the immediate cessation of violence by the Russian Government in Ukraine and urge all European countries to adopt evidence based approaches in supporting and responding to the health needs of displaced populations from Ukraine.

First, we urge Russia to desist from attacking health facilities and allow access for evacuation of wounded and vulnerable civilians.

Second, governance must be migration-sensitive so that official processes do not worsen the health of already vulnerable and traumatised populations. Border controls and authorities should undertake their responsibilities by acting to counter all discrimination and mitigate health risks.

Third, to ensure that those with chronic illnesses do not suffer, health-care services must secure continuity of care during and after their journey. We call for immediate and rapid access to medicines for individuals with insulin dependence and those requiring dialysis, chemotherapy, anticoagulation, and other lifesaving treatments. Immediate attention must be paid to people who need mental health and psychosocial services, particularly children.

Fourth, we ask that health workers from Ukraine are allowed to continue working in reception countries, for automatic recognition of their qualifications, and for those in training to be allowed access to medical, nursing, and other health schools throughout Europe.

Finally, we urge all countries aiding Ukraine to include support for the needs of the Ukrainian health system in the context of conflict by providing needed medicines, equipment, and any particular health needs as identified by the Ukrainian Government, and ask Russia to allow unimpeded supply.

Such actions will help mitigate the continuing displacement, suffering, and tragedy unfolding in Ukraine. (1).

Finally I quote

The war will end. The leaders will shake hands. The old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son. That girl will wait for her beloved husband. And those children will wait for their heroic father. I don't know who sold our homeland. But I saw who paid the price.

~Mahmoud Darwish

Reference

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