Ensuring psychosocial wellbeing of teachers and students in Indonesia

In her role as Child Protection Officer, Pritta Damanik supports a project in bullying prevention, prevention of child marriage and positive discipline in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. She serves with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and works in close coordination with an implementing partner and the Government for the projects implemented in schools. During the COVID-19 crisis, she stepped forward to develop psychosocial support guidelines that can help teachers and students. Here, Pritta shares her story.

I was initially confused about the kind of support I can provide during the crisis. We had started working from home when I was contacted by a person with the implementing partner who said that most students were feeling anxious about the online learning system and teachers were not sure how to address this matter.
I am proud of this opportunity to be serving as a UN Volunteer. It has not only helped me deliver on my passion to safeguard the rights of children through what I do, but it has also given me the opportunity now to directly contribute towards the efforts to help others on how to cope with this crisis. --UN Volunteer Pritta Novia Lora Damanik, Indonesia

Taking the initiative

Although I did not have a professional background on psychology, my previous experience as a survivor of the Central Sulawesi earthquake in 2018 and supporting psychosocial activities for a child protection project got me thinking of ways I can help these teachers and students. I knew that although many institutions provided information and education material, there was a lack of proper instructions on how to use this material. So, I thought it’s the right time for me to combine it all into a simple guideline.

I contacted my supervisor and shared my idea to develop some material for guidelines highlighting how to involve school teachers in preparing and delivering psychosocial support for students through online systems. She understood the situation, provided me with the necessary advice from a psychological perspective and suggested resources I could refer to in order to improve the output further.

Creating psychosocial support material for teachers

I have now completed writing these guidelines in Bahasa Indonesia. They focus on some contextual issues such as stigmatization, clean and healthy behaviours, hoax busters and online learning. They also outline methods that could help teachers interactively engage students and deliver lessons online.

In the guidelines, I cover topics such as information on the COVID-19 pandemic, how to stay healthy, physically and mentally, what do to overcome the boredom, preparing a Quarantine Diary, planning and providing a fun and meaningful learning experience from home, and building communication and student monitoring.
I believe these guidelines will help teachers not only plan but also disseminate COVID-19 information in a simple manner. They will also help boost their ability to stay positive when preparing the required materials for online learning.

My aspiration is that the guidelines also help teachers deliver psychosocial support to their students - although they are unable to meet like before. This material is now in the final stages of being designed and in the future, we also hope to prepare interactive content for students as well.

**Coping with the crisis**

For me, the first week of working from home was stressful, as most of the project activities were pending, and I could not meet my colleagues. After I shared my idea, and it started materializing, my spirits lifted, and I was proud to be contributing to support children during this crisis.

This experience pushed me to go the extra mile. When writing the guidelines, I read many resources relating to psychosocial support, which also helped me with the stress I was feeling. I strongly believe that taking care of your mental health, as well as the children's, is particularly important right now.

During this challenging time, our efforts should not only be dedicated to fighting the virus, but we also need to keep our spirits high. I feel it is important to have a daily plan, exercise, and stay connected to ensure that we have a healthy, mindful life.

• UNICEF • COVID-19 • psychosocial support

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being SDG 10: Reduced inequalities SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals