

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Beirut's children are likely to suffer from anxiety, night terrors – Save the Children

Beirut, August 7, 2020 – The mental health of children who experienced the Beirut explosion could be under serious threat, Save the Children warned today. Many are likely suffering from anxiety, sleeplessness or night terrors.

The aid agency says supporting children's mental wellbeing must be a key part of the response to the devastating explosion that killed over 135 people and injured thousands as it ripped through Beirut. Without proper support, children might face long-term consequences.

Anne Sophie Dybdal, Save the Children's Senior Child Protection Advisor, said: "Anxiety, trouble sleeping, attacks of night terror - the impact on children can be very deep. A child will be trying to understand what's happened and set their mind at ease."

Some children might even develop feelings of guilt from thinking whatever they were doing at the time triggered the explosion, Ms Dybdal said. "Those would mostly be younger children who may still have a magical way of thinking. Older children may hold feelings of guilt related to their parents' sadness, anger or confusion."

Researchers found that 16 months after a large explosion at a fireworks warehouse in Denmark in 2004, children were still suffering negative psychological effects. More young children (23%) than older ones (11%) were easily startled or avoided of people who reminded them of the event.

Dybdal continued: "This is a similar incident. Children can't turn their anger towards someone. This happened to many people – children need to understand that and be reassured, for example by saying that doctors are helping people."

After a major incident, children will feel safer when they are with their parents or people they trust, studies have found. Therefore, it is crucial any children separated from their parents in the blast are urgently reunited with them. To help children get over a critical incident, it is vital parents provide reassurance, information and a sense of security.

Many children in Lebanon will already have been under strain, as the country was enduring civil unrest and an economic collapse. [Half a million children](#) in the greater Beirut area have been pushed into a struggle to survive and in some cases hunger.

"Children were already experiencing high levels of distress because of COVID-19 and the lockdown," said Joy Abi Habib, a Mental Health Specialist for Save the Children in Beirut: "Now, the explosion has had a devastating effect on families. For children, like adults, the images and memories will resurface unexpectedly. In the aftermath, children could develop emotional, behavioural and even physical symptoms. While these might settle down for some children in the coming months, others may have persistent difficulties requiring specialised support."

To support families affected by the explosion, Save the Children is assessing where the greatest needs are for the most vulnerable, with a focus on their psychological wellbeing. Save the Children also plans to help reunite children with their families, providing food, hygiene and shelter.

Bei Interviewanfragen wenden Sie sich bitte an unsere Pressestelle.

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Über Save the Children

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