

UNICEF scales up psychosocial support for Papua New Guinea's children after devastating quakes

Children are suffering significant trauma and stress one month after a series of major earthquakes hit Papua New Guinea, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said on Wednesday, warning about the possible long-term negative consequences.

"Children are still being confronted by [fear, loss, confusion](#), family separation, deteriorated living conditions and disruption of social and school activities," said Karen Allen, UNICEF Representative for Papua New Guinea.

"Psychological damage among children should not be overlooked. It can have a negative impact on children's brain development, mental health and overall wellbeing in the long-run," she added.

Ms. Allen elaborated that children who have suffered from trauma have an increased risk of delayed development, mental health disorders, depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide.

Before the earthquakes, available data indicated that children in Papua New Guinea experience some of the highest rates of violence in Asia-Pacific region.

About 80 per cent experience emotional abuse in their lifetime, with some 75 per cent having reported physical abuse.

A recent Médecins Sans Frontières report showed that 12,000 cases of family and sexual violence are treated each year in Tari Family Support Centre in Hela Province, where the worst earthquake damage occurred.

The Government estimates 270,000 people need urgent assistance, including 125,000 children, some 15-20 per cent of whom, according to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), require psychological support.

Supported by UNICEF Australia, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and the Government of Australia, UNICEF in Papua New Guinea is currently setting up 26 child-friendly spaces to provide psychosocial support services for more than 14,000 children in the severely-affected areas of Hela and Southern Highland provinces.

These spaces safe places where children can play, learn life skills and regain a sense of normalcy.

Outreach teams will also be dispatched to affected communities to organize recreation activities, such as music and sports, and identify those in need

of psychosocial support.

To date, UNICEF has already delivered 23 metric tons of relief supplies to the country, including tents and tarpaulins, water purification tablets and hygiene kits. Additionally, some 12,000 packets of therapeutic food and vaccines to protect 31,700 children against the increasing risk of disease outbreak and malnutrition have been delivered.

Over the next year, UNICEF needs \$14.6 million to help children and families affected by the earthquake.