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chological counselling of the firefighters. "Usually, psychologically unwell rescuers/victims come to us through different development projects. We got projects on Rana Plaza rescuers and people who were affected by SIDR [the 2007 cyclone]. We still haven't gotten any project that emphasises the mental condition of firefighters," she says.

In the last two years of working at Mohammadpur fire station, Islam has changed a lot. Death doesn't affect him

the way it did before. During the recent Chawkbazar fire tragedy, he worked for almost seven hours, recovering approximately 34 dead bodies. "Our colleagues who went inside before us told us to not look down. They just told us to get in, hold the pipe of water and leave the spot when done. We had to think twice while stepping on the ground as we might end up stepping on someone's dead body," he says.

But what about the firefighters' families? Asking the question, this correspon-

dent received a counter question from Islam, "What about them? Do you think that they would let us do what we do if they knew about it?" Most of the time, he doesn't tell his mother before going to an operation. His father, however, is a retired fireman who understands his situation. Islam only calls his father while en route to an operation, to let him know that he's going in. "After the operation, I call my mother to let her know that there was a fire incident and that I had gone in and made it back."

Din Mohammad's answer to the question is more straightforward. He says, "If we do what we're doing while caring about our family, we won't be able to do it. When we jump inside the fire, we have to forget about everything else. Putting out the fire and saving the lives of the people becomes our first and foremost priority."

The overall job experience of firefighters in our country is pretty hard to believe. They need to work for 24 hours straight without any break. However, after every two to three days of continuous work, they get 24 hours of what is known as 'barrack rest'.

However, Mohammad Kazal Miah, senior station officer at Mohammadpur fire station says that this break doesn't come most of the time, due to the increasing numbers of fire incidents nowadays. The firefighters sometimes have to stay on duty for up to four days.

"We don't have enough manpower. A station that covers 20 square kilometers of the densely populated Dhaka City requires at least 3 station officers and 60 firemen to operate fluently," Kazal Miah says.

While talking to Din Mohammad, he says that the most satisfying thing in this world to him is to save someone alive. "When we manage to rescue someone alive, it means a lot to us. All of the sufferings we go through, all of the sacrifices we have to make suddenly seems like nothing at all." This satisfaction of saving people's lives is what motivates the firefighters to continue doing what they do.

Mohammad Tajul Islam is a contributor



PHOTO: TAJUL ISLAM

ADVERTORIAL

# What does it really mean to protect children?

STAR WEEKEND DESK

As of 2017, roughly 16.2 million people newly displaced around the world—an average of 44,400 people forced out of their homes every day, according to the UN-HCR Global Trends Report. Of them, 52 percent were younger than 18. The Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), which brings together academics and humanitarian organisations to improve the quality of child protection activities globally, likewise confirms that over half the people in the world impacted by conflict and disaster today are children. They are particularly vulnerable in these settings, in comparison to adults, girls more so than boys. They face neglect, physical and sexual abuse and exploitation, are separated from their families, trafficked, and are forced to join to armed groups.

The trauma of these experiences can often leave lifelong impact on these young victims of conflict. Helping them, therefore, goes far beyond simply protecting their basic rights. It involves understanding the needs and contexts specific to each child, granting them the agency to influence the kind of help they receive, and filling in the gaps in child protection activities on an ad hoc basis.

In an effort to incorporate these elements into their work with children, SEEP—the Social and Economic Enhancement Programme, Bangladesh—has come up with a 'Child Safeguarding Policy' that clearly defines how humanitarian actors, academics, consultants, media personnel, vendors, donor agencies, etc. should work with children. Serving as an offshoot of the "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action" mandated by CPWG, the SEEP policy seeks to

help humanitarian organisations be aware of, prevent, report, and respond to the abuse and sexual exploitation of children.

According to this policy, a representative of a humanitarian organisation can never physically assault or engage in a sexual relationship with anyone younger than 18 (even with their consent). They can never stay unsupervised overnight, sleep in the same bed, or spend too much time alone, with children they are working with. Equally important to their actions is the language they use with these children—they can never shame or humiliate them, discriminate against them, communicate provocatively with them, or do things for them "of a personal nature" that the children can take care of themselves.

A "culture of openness" needs to exist in the workplace in order for these rules to be implemented. Representatives must

feel accountable for others as well as their own actions, so that (confirmed and unconfirmed) acts of misconduct can be challenged and immediately reported within 24 hours. Openness also refers to including the children in the work being done—they must know their rights, understand what kind of behavior they can challenge, and participate in the decision-making processes surrounding their safety. It's important, also, to note some clauses from the CPWG minimum standards which influenced the SEEP policy—the representatives should consider how their actions impact both boys and girls, children younger than five as well as adolescents, children from different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, and children with different disabilities. If a child is somehow abused or exploited, the first call of action will be to immediately make the child safe.