

Community-based psychosocial support interventions for populations affected by conflict and displacement: Lessons from a multinational collaborative study

THE ISC MHPSS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE (ISC MHPSS LC)

Established in 2020, the ISC MHPSS LC is a global network of practitioner and researcher pairings, policy-makers, donors and other stakeholders who regularly convene to share and consult the group on intervention studies, collaborate on evidence-to-use products, and consider emerging priorities.

The collaborative seeks to:

- Promote cross-site learning and enhance implementation efforts
- Synthesize research and advance the evidence base
- Accelerate evidence-to-use processes for community-level MHPSS interventions

To learn more about the ISC MHPSS Learning Collaborative, please scan the QR code or visit mhpssknowledgehub.sph.cuny.edu.



AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) interventions that have been most rigorously evaluated in humanitarian settings are clinical, individually focused mental health treatment interventions. The evidence base on preventative and community-level psychosocial interventions, which address the social considerations for basic services and security, and strengthening community and family support, is less robust.

The primary goal of this study is to assess the impact of community-based psychosocial support interventions in displaced and conflict-affected populations, considering diverse regions and contexts.

This study summarizes mental health and psychosocial outcomes collected across the five intervention studies which formed the MHPSS Learning Collaborative.

Lessons learned from these studies can inform the development of community-based and early prevention mental health task sharing in community settings.

THE STUDIES



Baby Friendly Spaces

Bangladesh
Psychoeducation, stress management, and childcare skills for refugee mothers



Nurturing Families

Jordan
Positive parenting skills for refugee families



Journey of Life

Uganda
Psychoeducation, positive parenting, and problem solving for refugee caregivers



Community Support Groups

Colombia
Collaborative problem solving and expressive activities for residents of high-conflict areas



Entre Nosotras

Panama & Ecuador
Psychoeducation, peer support, and stress management for displaced and host community women

To learn more about the interventions, please scan the QR code:



METHODS

- Series of four harmonization workshops to identify key MHPSS indicators and measures to be used across the studies



Distress (Kessler-6)



Wellbeing (Personal Wellbeing Index)



Functioning (WHODAS-12)



Coping (Brief COPE)

- Harmonization of key demographic (e.g., gender, employment, marital status) and implementation (e.g., provider type, setting) variables
- Development and analysis of cross-study data repository containing key outcome indicators identified above
- Monthly cross-study workgroup meetings to review findings and identify critical implications and recommendations

FINDINGS

Table 1. Effects of PSS Interventions on Harmonized Outcomes

Outcome	Comparison Group	Baby Friendly Spaces*	Nurturing Families*	Journey of Life	Community Support Groups	Entre Nosotras*
Distress (Kessler-6)	between baseline and post-intervention	p<0.05	p<0.05	p<0.01	p<0.001	p>0.05
	between intervention and control	p<0.05	-	p<0.001	p>0.05	p>0.05
Wellbeing (Personal Wellbeing Index)	between baseline and post-intervention	p<0.05	-	-	p>0.05	p<0.05
	between intervention and control	p<0.05	-	-	p>0.05	p>0.05
Functioning (12-Item WHODAS)	between baseline and post-intervention	p<0.01	-	p>0.05	p>0.05	p>0.05
	between intervention and control	p>0.05	-	p<0.001	p>0.05	p>0.05
Coping (Brief COPE)	between baseline and post-intervention	p>0.05	-	-	p<0.05	p<0.01
	between intervention and control	p>0.05	-	-	p>0.05	p<0.05

Legend | - Not measured | * control group received enhanced care as usual, or treatment as usual vs enhanced intervention

Table 2. Effects of PSS Interventions on Other Outcomes

Outcome	Baby Friendly Spaces	Nurturing Families	Journey of Life	Community Support Groups	Entre Nosotras
Key Psychosocial Outcomes Using Other Measures	Depression*	Caregiver-reported adolescent distress*	-	Depression* Anxiety* Post-traumatic stress disorder*	-
Other Psychosocial Outcomes	-	Family functioning** Parenting practices** Emotional regulation** Impact of self-defined problems**	Social support*** Parental warmth*** Undifferentiated rejection*** Violence against children attitudes***	-	Sense of safety Community connectedness

Legend | *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of PSS Interventions

- ✓ **Stronger effects were seen for distress outcomes.** Differences between control and intervention groups were less consistent for wellbeing, functioning, and coping.
- ✓ **Most interventions were intended to directly target distress more than the other outcomes.** There is a need to strengthen intervention components that also target changes in psychosocial skills.
- ✓ Statistically significant results were found for other outcomes, including social support, parental practices, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- ✓ Qualitative data collected from participants indicate positive impacts of the intervention on participants and help illuminate discrepancies in cross-site comparisons.

Challenges and Opportunities in Cross-site Evaluations

- ✓ Teams working together across multiple sites provided valuable opportunities for sharing learning across contexts, pooling data, and exploring similarities and differences of interventions.
- ✓ **Challenges arose with regards to the harmonization of instruments, intervention components, comparison groups, and timelines across diverse projects.** Variations observed in primary outcomes may have stemmed from the differences in study populations, contexts, interventions, comparison groups, and implementation, as well as variable performance of the assessment tools across studies.
- ✓ Future cross-study evaluations must emphasize the careful selection of sites with similar implementation timelines, consistent control group classifications, and homogenous study populations.

Measurement Selection and Validation

- ✓ **It is challenging to balance emic and etic tensions in the selection of standardized and localized measures that will facilitate meaningful cross-study comparisons while still identifying unique population-specific outcomes.** Researchers and implementers must emphasize the use of locally adapted, contextualized measures that have been validated in the target population.

Impact of Contextual & Structural Factors

- ✓ **It is challenging to improve individual and community outcomes if environmental and social circumstances worsen or remain the same.** Psychosocial interventions should consider how they might operate within multi-level and multi-disciplinary systems that aim to address structural change. To facilitate community-responsiveness researchers should utilize community partner processes to co-design intervention and evaluation.

Lessons Learned

- 01 Strengthened focus on psychosocial change processes and implementation-oriented studies
- 02 Importance of mixed-methods outcome evaluation
- 03 Need to incorporate context-specific psychosocial outcomes
- 04 Need to develop better instruments for measuring psychosocial outcomes