

USAID'S HEALTH EVALUATION AND APPLIED RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT (HEARD) PROJECT

RESEARCH BRIEF: ENTRE NOSOTRAS: PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION FOR MIGRANT AND HOST COMMUNITY WOMEN IN ECUADOR AND PANAMÁ

KEY FINDINGS

- Psychological distress, depression, xenophobia and discrimination, and gender-based violence are important psychosocial problems facing migrant women in Ecuador and Panamá.
- It is feasible to integrate community-based participatory methodologies to design and deliver psychosocial interventions that align with the needs and preferences of populations in humanitarian settings
- Non-specialists can deliver a group psychosocial intervention to community members with high fidelity and competency.
- Preliminary findings reveal contextual barriers and facilitators to implementation of community-based psychosocial programs that should be examined in future research.

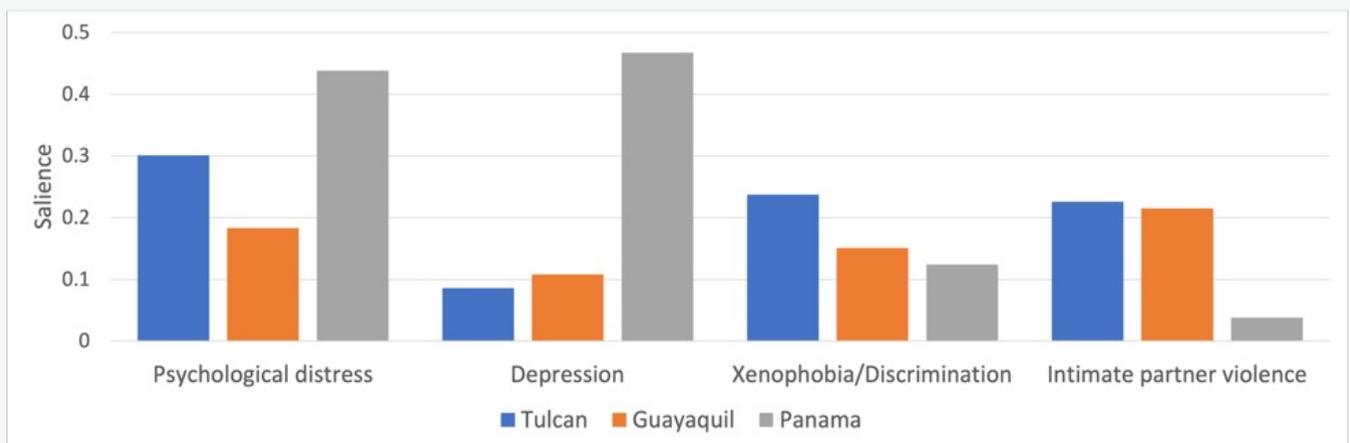
BACKGROUND

The Entre Nosotras intervention is a five-session intervention implemented by HIAS in eleven communities in Ecuador and Panamá. Entre Nosotras was designed to address salient psychosocial needs of migrant women in these communities, namely psychological distress, lack of social support and isolation, xenophobia and discrimination, and safety and protection concerns. The objective of this case study brief is to describe the design, implementation, and preliminary evaluation of the Entre Nosotras intervention in Ecuador (Guayaquil, Tulcán) and Panamá (Panamá City).

INTERVENTION DESIGN

We conducted 97 free listing interviews with community members to identify priority psychosocial problems affecting migrant women and 36 in-depth interviews with key informants representing a range of stakeholder groups. In these interviews, we found that psychological distress, depression, xenophobia and discrimination, and intimate partner and other forms of gender-based violence were the most highly prioritized problems among women in the study communities.

Priority psychosocial problems affecting migrant women in Ecuador and Panamá



Through a participatory process involving community consultations and mock sessions, we designed a five-session intervention that combined elements of psychoeducation, problem solving, stress management/coping, safety planning, and mobilizing social support and resources. The intervention, *Entre Nosotras*, was delivered by pairs of trained community members to groups of 6-10 women from the community. All intervention providers received supervision and support from HIAS staff, including psychologists. We tested two versions of this intervention – one standard format and one with an integrated stress management component ('Doing What Matters in Times of Stress' produced by the World Health Organization).

STUDY DESIGN

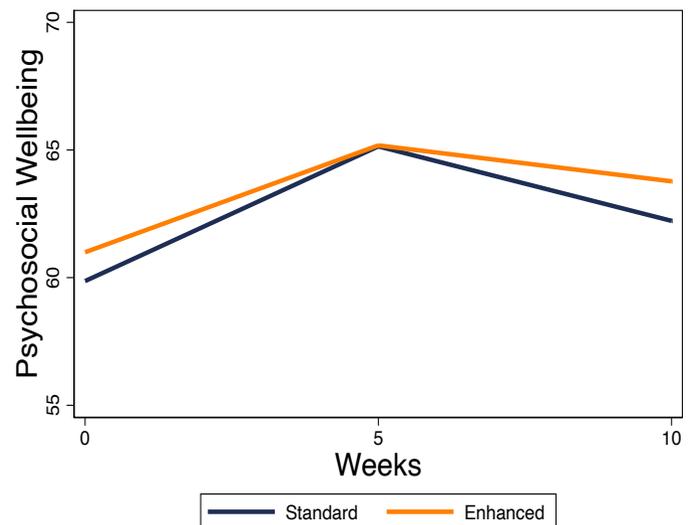
We evaluated the feasibility of delivering the standard and enhanced version of the intervention in the study communities using a cluster randomized comparative effectiveness feasibility trial. Each of the communities were randomly allocated to receive the standard or the enhanced version of *Entre Nosotras*. We enrolled 225 women to participate in the study and evaluated their psychosocial wellbeing, psychological distress, social support, coping strategies, and functioning pre-intervention, post-intervention, and five weeks after the intervention had been completed using existing survey tools. The women who participated in the study were 36 years of age, on average and most were unemployed (54%), had completed primary school (94%), were from Venezuela (66%), and had been living in the study community for more than one year (76%).

FINDINGS

Results suggest that the intervention is feasible to implement with fidelity by facilitators to groups of women in community settings, but there are important barriers to attendance and participation that should be considered in future implementation and/or adaptations of the program. In this study we found that participants attended an average of 2.8 of the 5 sessions (SD=1.9, median=3 sessions). Work and other responsibilities, moving out of the study community, and other factors contributed to poor attendance.

The program was perceived to be appropriate and beneficial to women who participated in the intervention as well as by facilitators. We observed small to moderate improvements in psychosocial wellbeing across both groups, with the only difference between groups being greater reductions in avoidant coping post-intervention in the groups that received the additional stress management component. Improvements in psychosocial outcomes attenuated after the intervention period.

Change in psychosocial wellbeing by intervention group



REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This participatory design, implementation, and evaluation of the *Entre Nosotras* intervention provides a model for developing and delivering community-based mental health and psychosocial support interventions in situations of displacement and human mobility. Some key reflections include:

- Community participatory approaches may enhance ownership and investment in psychosocial programs
- Community members can be trained to deliver a group psychosocial intervention with high fidelity and competencies
- It was feasible to conduct a rigorous multi-site research study in three diverse contexts
- It was acceptable to connect migrant and host community populations in these intervention groups providing some insight into possible opportunities for strengthening local integration
- Results from this research highlight the salience of the protection and social dimensions mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, underlining the need for multisectoral programming