



HEARD Project Objectives

- To evaluate effectiveness
- To investigate implementation
- To disseminate results

The HEARD project seeks to better understand the effectiveness and implementation of community-level Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions, with an emphasis on PSS intervention components and impacts.

The primary aim of the adapted Journey of Life (JOL) project is to establish effective and sustainable evidence for psychosocial support and child protection activities in the Kiryandongo refugee settlement.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Health Evaluation and Applied Research Development (HEARD) under Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Uganda and Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL) is to better understand the effectiveness and implementation of community-level Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions, with an emphasis on PSS intervention components and impacts. The project was funded for 19 Months by USAID. The HEARD Project focuses on evaluative and targeted research that accelerates research-to-use processes and anticipates carrying research activities based on



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Key Project Achievements

- Evaluation of the JOL has been accomplished
- Investigation of implementation has been concluded
- Research results are complete and dissemination process is on going

Achol renewed courage, strength to defy suicide

Kenny Achol has lived most of her adult life in grief and sorrow; in 2000, Achol lost her husband to gun shots arising from interclan conflicts back at home in South Sudan. Months later, her brother-in-law who had taken her on together with the children was also killed under similar circumstances. With no option, Achol returned home to her parents who together with the entire family moved to Uganda in search of safer spaces. Months after reception and settling in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, Achol's father passed on and, the following year, her mother also followed. It was not long before her elder sister and brother also passed on. This left her hopeless and pondering about the next move.

“I was left alone to take care of my late brothers and sister's kids. It was too much for me and I contemplated suicide in 2019. Life was too hard as children were chased from school and others fell sick but I couldn't afford even basic education or medical care so I decided to hang myself,” said Achol”.

For the second time, Achol dared death through a second suicide attempt, this time using a rope. All children those of her departed sister and brother were brought under her care and being helpless, she couldn't afford to even put food on the table. The entire family lived under the tree shade without a house to call home. In fact, for a month, the family was hit by both heavy rains and deep heat. Incidentally, Achol reportedly found no reason to live, thus trying to end her life.

However, through the intervention and referral by the Village Psychosocial Assistant (VPA), Achol was rescued and enrolled on the Journey of Life (JoL) sessions.

“I am alive because of TPO Uganda; I was advised on how to live positively despite the many challenges of life. And every new day, I longed for the sessions with TPO Uganda because they supported me to open up and also socialize with neighbours as one of the coping mechanisms,” said Achol.

The enrollment on JoL demands for the grouping of clients like Achol. Together with 12 others, Achol started the JoL sessions to which she acknowledges change having underwent a series of life-threatening escapades.

“I have noticed a lot of change in my life due to the group sessions by TPO Uganda. I wouldn't have managed by myself without a partner like TPO Uganda. They helped to find me a home and peace of mind so I owe my life to the TPO Uganda interventions,” said Achol.

Despite the persisting challenges, the single mother has over time gained the courage to address them or even seek redress from neighbours and group members with no trace of suicidal thoughts. And to further manage the stress and trauma, Achol enrolled for practical tailoring training and just four months into the sessions, she has grasped the basic design and stitching skills. In fact, she has already tailored a few dresses for herself and some of the children under her care. Out of sight is not out of mind, and for Achol, despite the failing sight, she continues on the tailoring journey with the support of her children and nephews. Even when her care load expanded to accommodate her niece with similar challenges, having survived death by her husband, Achol is more energized to save even more women and counsel them based on experience and the JoL sessions.

“I thank you for saving my life; your advice and sessions have really done me well and kept me strong. I can now stand strong to share my story with others in a way to encourage them to manage similar challenges. Although I still have challenges especially fending for the big family of more than a dozen children, I am glad that some have been taken on by other organizations for welfare and education support,” said Achol.

Currently, TPO Uganda is initiating discussions with other implementing partners in the settlement to explore the possibility of enrolling Achol and dependents on education and livelihood support. This is in addition to working together with other partners to support the treatment and recovery of good eye sight in a way to ensure continuity of the tailoring business.