

Case Study: Ten Lessons Learned while Carrying Out a MHPSS Intervention with War-Affected Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Protecting and improving people's mental health and psychosocial well-being in humanitarian crises has recently emerged from its 'humanitarian ghetto' (Wessells, 2009) towards acceptance as a fundamental and essential part of any post-humanitarian emergency provision. Yet, this newly emerging field of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) has a long way to go before acceptance and full integration as an evidence-based component of all post-conflict and post-disaster interventions. This is because this incipient field is hampered by gaps in practitioners' field experience (IASC, 2007), a scarcity of rigorously evaluated research studies (Jordans, Tol, Komproe, Lasuba, Ntamutumba, et al. 2010) and inadequate training of international humanitarian psychologists who deliver these MHPSS interventions in the field (Wessells, 2009). In order to avoid the many pitfalls of inadvertently causing harm through good-intentioned yet ultimately detrimental practices, there is a need to incorporate new emerging insights (IASC, 2007) and learn from the experiences and oversights of others.

Opportunities for mental health and psychosocial support in the field are often limited by a lack of resources, training, and supervision. This is particularly true in conflict-affected areas where the needs are high and the resources are low. In such situations, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the local context and to work with the community to develop culturally appropriate interventions. This requires a deep understanding of the local culture, beliefs, and practices, as well as the ability to build trust and rapport with the community. It also requires a focus on building local capacity and sustainability, rather than relying on external support.

One of the key challenges in providing MHPSS in the field is the lack of trained personnel. In many conflict-affected areas, there are very few mental health professionals, and those who are present often lack the necessary training and experience. This makes it difficult to provide high-quality care. To address this challenge, it is important to invest in training and supervision of local staff. This can be done through a variety of methods, including on-the-job training, workshops, and courses. It is also important to provide ongoing supervision and support to ensure that staff are able to provide effective care.

Another challenge is the lack of resources. In many conflict-affected areas, there are very few resources available for MHPSS. This makes it difficult to provide high-quality care. To address this challenge, it is important to be creative and resourceful. This can be done through a variety of methods, including using local resources, seeking out donors, and working with the community to develop sustainable funding mechanisms. It is also important to focus on low-cost, high-impact interventions that can be delivered with minimal resources.

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Lesson 1: Do Not Leave your Bags Unattended in an Embassy

During the intervention, we learned that it is crucial to always have your bags with you, especially in an embassy. In one instance, a staff member left their bag unattended, and it was stolen. This was a significant loss, as it contained important documents and supplies. This incident highlighted the need for vigilance and the importance of always having your bags with you, even in what might seem like a safe environment.

Another lesson learned was the importance of having a backup plan. In one instance, a staff member was unable to access their bag because they had left the key with someone else. This was a frustrating situation that could have been avoided by having a backup key or a plan in place. This incident highlighted the need to always have a backup plan in place, especially when it comes to important documents and supplies.

It is also important to be aware of your surroundings at all times. In one instance, a staff member was walking alone at night and was approached by several individuals who demanded money. This was a scary experience that could have been avoided by being more aware of the surroundings and having a plan in place. This incident highlighted the need to always be aware of your surroundings and to have a plan in place in case of an emergency.

Finally, it is important to have a good relationship with the local staff. In one instance, a staff member was unable to access their bag because they had left the key with someone else. This was a frustrating situation that could have been avoided by having a backup key or a plan in place. This incident highlighted the need to always have a backup plan in place, especially when it comes to important documents and supplies.

Lesson 2: Divide your Money into Small Bundles when Travelling

During the intervention, we learned that it is crucial to always have your money in small bundles. In one instance, a staff member had all their money in one place, and it was stolen. This was a significant loss, as it contained all their money. This incident highlighted the need to always have your money in small bundles, so that if one bundle is stolen, you still have some money left.

