

Title: 'Evaluating effectiveness of psychosocial interventions in and after armed conflict in the areas of former Yugoslavia'

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Abstract:

Problem statement: The context of the thesis subject is the reality of an intensive implementation of psychosocial programs in former Yugoslavia. Over the last 10-15 years, the growth of psychosocial interventions and the plenty existing alternative approaches addressing psychosocial effects have led to controversial discussions about concepts, approaches and effectiveness of psychosocial interventions. Effectiveness of psychosocial interventions has been put into question. Evaluation of psychosocial interventions has been notoriously inadequate in quality and quantity. There is a lack of evidence base. The lack and major differences in approaches to evaluation for showing effectiveness of various activities have led to the research questions and objectives.

Objectives: The overall objective of the study is to develop recommendations towards the aim to help to implement or improve evaluation of effectiveness of psychosocial programs in conflict areas. The specific objectives are: (1) to compare and discuss appropriateness of approaches/methods to evaluation of effectiveness of psychosocial interventions in the study area of former Yugoslavia, (2) to assess and analyse the postulated extent of effects of psychosocial interventions on individuals, communities, and special person groups in the study area, (3) to add further clarity to a general controversial discussion surrounding evaluation of psychosocial interventions.

Method: The method is a critical qualitative desk review of the methodology applied for evaluating outcome and impact of psychosocial interventions. It looked at the question how effectiveness of psychosocial interventions was evaluated, defined, and constituted. The papers and studies for the data collection were identified through (1) Highly sensitive search strategy in scientific electronic databases (PubMed, Medline), (2) Hand searches of special journals, textbooks, and guidelines, (3) Scanning reference lists of review articles, (4) Browsing websites of different organizations, UN systems, WHO, and (5) Other resources in the field of mental health.

Special criteria for analysing programs have been outlined. Seven psychosocial programs were found, reviewed, analyzed and compared in-depth towards appropriateness of evaluation methodology and postulated extent of their effectiveness.

Results: have been developed through a cross-sectional comparison analysis of seven programs. Results revealed that plenty methodological difficulties in evaluation were observed: methods were inappropriate, lacking and limited in many aspects. The overall extent of effectiveness of seven programs has been defined as low. There is a correlation of appropriate methodology of evaluation and degree of solid evidence. There was a low evidence of low effectiveness in seven psychosocial programs. Results cannot be generalized to other programs and locations due to representability and validity issues.

Conclusion: More descriptions and analysis of previous and running psychosocial intervention programs and their evaluation results will help to fill the gap in evidence base and effective interventions. In addition to the principles of good practices in applying methodology of evaluating effectiveness and avoidance of selection of poor instruments lacking trans-cultural validity other principles are prerequisites for generating the necessary evidence base of effectiveness. Key projects are emphasizing ethical, cultural, and social issues on all levels of care, as well as methodological sound evaluation in addition that are communicated broadly to all involved.