

CASE STUDIES: MHPSS EVIDENCE WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO CHANGE

Living with Uncertainty: Needs of the families of missing persons in Sri Lanka

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sri-lanka-families-missing-persons>

In 2014-15 the ICRC conducted an assessment of the needs of the families of missing persons in Sri Lanka, which included an assessment of their psychological and psychosocial needs. It included a description of the needs identified, the existing resources available and the current coping mechanisms used by families. It also included the ICRC's recommendations on how to respond to such needs.

At the beginning of the report, the authors write: *'Our hope is that this report will help the Government to put in place a comprehensive response to address the humanitarian needs of all families of missing persons and that it will provide grounds for other national and international stakeholders in Sri Lanka to develop programmes in their favour'*. In fact, as a result of the assessment this is what occurred. The findings of the assessment enabled the ICRC to advocate with the Office of the Prime Minister in Sri Lanka so that they were able to implement some pilot MHPSS projects with families of missing persons. The findings were also used to advocate with the government to set up an "Office of Missing Persons" that has a comprehensive mandate of search/trace, protect the rights and interests of victims and families, and redress, among others (<http://www.omp.gov.lk/about/mandate>). The OMP Act was passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka on 11th August 2016. Regular M&E data of the Accompaniment program (MHPSS component) was used to conduct a retrospective study¹ on the outcome of the interventions, which allowed the ICRC to expand the program nationwide to cover all registered families of missing persons. The findings/article was also used to advocate for a comprehensive MHPSS program to the OMP, under their mandate for Redress.

Demonstrating the need for MHPSS to be part of a holistic support package

ICRC conduct regular monitoring and evaluation activities of the MHPSS projects with the different populations they work with. In some cases, retrospective studies from these M&E data have resulted in papers published in peer-reviewed journals².

One of the findings of this research was that individuals in conflict settings who had lost property or income did not benefit from MHPSS interventions in the same way that others did. The research concluded that for those with acute financial needs resulting from exposure to violence, MHPSS outcomes such as reduced psychological distress cannot be achieved unless financial needs are addressed in parallel with the psychological support. The authors recommended a more systematic inclusion of a financial component of projects for victims of violence, along with regular monitoring of MHPSS outcomes of financial support.

¹ Andersen, I., Poudyal, B., Abeyapala, A. et al. Mental health and psychosocial support for families of missing persons in Sri Lanka: A retrospective cohort study. *Conflict and Health* 14, 16 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-020-00266-0>

² Andersen I, Rossi R, Yabutu MNM and Hubloue I (2020) Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Into Health Facilities in Conflict Settings: A Retrospective Review From Six African Countries. *Front. Public Health* 8:591369. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2020.591369;

Andersen, Ida & Rossi, Rodolfo & Hubloue, Ives. (2022). Community-Level Mental Health and Psychosocial Support During Armed Conflict: A Cohort Study From the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Nigeria. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 10. 10.3389/fpubh.2022.815222.

Andersen I, Rossi R, Nyamkume PK, Hubloue I (2022) Mental health and psychosocial support for the war-wounded: A retrospective cohort study from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Nigeria. *PLoS ONE* 17(5): e0268737. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0268737>

Andersen, I., Rossi, R., Mukubirho, C.K., Ragazzoni, L. & Hubloue, I. (2022): Mental health and psychosocial support during physical rehabilitation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: a retrospective cohort study, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, DOI: 10.1080/09638288.2022.2107093

This research was used to advocate internally with the management and Economic Security department to include victims of violence in their projects. As a result, victims of violence did become systematically included in economic activities, including Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA).

Using evidence to advocate for a focus on MHPSS within a National Society

The Lesotho Red Cross have only just begun to strengthen systems around MHPSS. The MHPSS focal point, Lintle Mathosi, thought it would be useful to begin by learning more about the needs of staff and volunteers in terms of providing MHPSS support. She worked with the Psychosocial Centre's Technical Advisor for the Africa region to develop a short survey which she distributed amongst staff and volunteers. The questions focused on their confidence and competence to provide support to community members, and the findings showed that not only did the respondents lack the skills to provide support to others, they were also experiencing high levels of distress themselves.

Lintle presented the findings to a group of managers within her National Society, who were concerned at the experiences reported by the staff and volunteers. They mobilised resources to address the issues raised. Initially all staff and volunteers who come into contact with vulnerable individuals (e.g. those working in health and social services clinics; people implementing WASH and other types of interventions) were trained to have supportive conversations through PFA and make referrals. Secondly, the whole of the management team and some external partners came together for a workshop to develop an MHPSS action plan outlining how the organisation will move forward.

Lintle says 'Staff and volunteer mental health and wellbeing was not prioritised until the survey came and showed that there are MHPSS issues amongst staff and volunteers. The survey gave me confidence and credibility to advocate for MHPSS. It was something small but it was very impactful'.