LESSONS LEARNT: MHPSS ASSESSMENTS

Every National Society and its staff and volunteers have diverse needs in very diverse situations. That is why it is important to find the right tools to assess MHPSS needs. MHPSS assessment findings form the basis for planning activities and interventions.

Rapid needs assessments give us a snapshot and an immediate glimpse of what is needed, and we need to have a follow-up on what the needs are and how they evolve within the changing context of an emergency. The idea is to have a beginning, a middle, and an end to help us learn more about the needs, approach, and resolution of MHPSS needs and the progression of the needs.

1.   Challenges with MHPSS assessments

- MHPSS Assessments need to be prepared: When starting with emergency assessments management often forgets to include MHPSS in the assessment with a quick request to include one or two questions about MHPSS.

- Approach with assessments: We cannot assess if there are no referrals; not only about learning about the assessment but also to being aware of the broader picture.

- Assessment questions can only be focused on PTSD or MH conditions and do not give the full overview of the MHPSS needs and the threats to the general population. There is a perception to count PTSD so we can then provide support.

- Drowning in the data: We can have a huge amount of data. Sifting through the data and the questionnaire can be confusing and the time needed for this can be challenging in emergencies. There is a need to be aware of the timeframe for the assessment to inform the activities/programme.

- Omit the anticipated needs on how we are going to recover and resolve MHPSS needs: We complete forecasts of the needs but not on how to recover.

2.   Opportunities with assessments in MHPSS

- Help to know the needs of the target population.

- Gives us a baseline to know the effectiveness of the intervention.

- Deeper understanding of the context of the interventions.

- Use the data collected to design an intervention to meet the needs and gaps.

3.   Learnings from case studies

The purpose of assessments in emergency settings is to:

- Create a broad and immediate picture of a population's well-being (beneficiaries as well as staff and volunteers).

- Identify emergency issues that require immediate follow-up (triage).

- Provide information (including psychoeducation) and recommendations that aid survivors and their families during their recovery process.

- It is essential to be and stay informed about the development of appropriate policies and practices.

- Always keep the whys and outcomes of assessments in mind when you plan and carry out an assessment.

When looking at specific MHPSS assessments, they provide:

- An understanding of the emergency.

- An analysis of threats to and capacities for mental health and psychosocial well-being.

- An analysis of relevant resources to determine, in consultation with stakeholders, whether a response is required and if so, the nature of the response needs an array of assessment tools to be able to answer the assessment objectives and goals.

Cultural adaptation and contextualisation:

- MHPSS Assessments need to be adapted to the context and the cultural understandings of MHP and well-being.

- Use of secondary data to inform how to assess.

- Understand how people explain and know wellbeing in the context.

- Terminology and cultural identity need to be included and how these terms are understood.

- Ensure the language applied is the language used by the target population – this can be done via Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the population to inform the tools and terminology.

- Social stigma included in the study questions: FGD and including people with MH to be able to know how people think about MH normalization.

4.   Building blocks in assessments

•   Know the 4Ws and H for your assessment: Who, Where, Why, When and How.

•   Systems/tools/support needed to implement MHPSS assessments.

•   Considerations: Are there vulnerable groups who need to be included, are there gatekeepers you need to include, and what are the risks and assumptions you need to be aware of before starting?

•   Using the IASC MHPSS intervention pyramid/Movement MHPSS Pyramid as a guiding framework in introducing appropriate tools and support.

5.   Advocating for MHPSS assessments

•   Building relationships with key actors in this field who are well-experienced in needs assessments.

•   Emphasize the importance of assessments and include this in funding proposals.

•   Ensure staff and volunteers know what is included in an assessment and why there need to be MHPSS questions designed from the beginning and not drafted at the last minute.

•   Recognize that all people are different and exist within unique contexts, highlighting the need for assessments to better understand the specific needs and gaps in services.

•   Assessments prevent harm by better understanding the needs and gaps and prevent duplication of services.

6.   Helpful tools and resources
"Rapid MHPSS Assessment tool for Ukraine and affected countries in crisis"

https://pscentre.org/?resource=rapid-mhpss-assessment-tool-for-ukraine-and-affected-countries&wpv_search=true&selected=single-resource

"Rapid Assessment for Psychosocial Support and Violence Prevention"

https://pscentre.org/?resource=rapid-mhpss-assessment-tool-for-ukraine-and-affected-countries&wpv_search=true&selected=single-resource

"IASC Reference Group Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Assessment Guide"

https://pscentre.org/?resource=iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-assessment-guide&wpv_search=true&selected=single-resource

"Guidelines for Caring for Staff and Volunteers in Crises"

https://pscentre.org/?resource=guidelines-for-caring-for-staff-and-volunteers-in-crises&wpv_search=true&selected=single-resource

"Mental Health Matters: Mapping of MHPSS Activities within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement"

https://pscentre.org/?resource=mental-health-matters-mapping-of-mhpss-activities-within-the-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-2&wpv_search=true&selected=single-resource

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241548236