

PARAPROFESSIONALS IN ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM (ACF) Testing Simplified EMDR- and CBT-Based Group Approaches

Many large INGOs understand the importance of addressing mental health concerns of the large populations they serve. So does ACF. But a constraint they face is shortage or lack of trained and certified mental health professionals. GIST-T believes that one solution is to extend carefully defined skills sets to paraprofessionals by training them in very specific and evidence-based therapeutic group protocols, applied under close supervision.

In cooperation with Action against Hunger (ACF), the University of Worcester and two pioneer-psychologists from the Middle East, GIST-T proposes to research the efficacy of these protocols in four distinctly different settings: Iraqi Kurdistan, Central African Republic and two other countries. This study will test the hypothesis that group protocols can be safely administered by trained paraprofessionals who are provided training, ongoing supervision and monitoring. Furthermore, as the research study will be done in different countries and continents, it will look into the issue of cultural adaptability and efficacy.

The aim of the comparative study is to explore the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of two short-term group protocols based in the two WHO-approved trauma therapies, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with a Trauma Focus (CBT-TF) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR).

Action against Hunger was founded in France in 1979 and has since grown into an organization with five global headquarters, projects in over 45 countries with over 6,500 field staff assisting almost 15 million people. ACF is recognized as one of the leading organizations in the fight against hunger worldwide, saving lives through prevention, detection and treatment of malnutrition, in particular during and following natural disasters and conflicts. ACF also knows through its extensive experience that when parents are depressed, in an enduring state of shock or have very little time, their children run a high risk of growing up less healthy and might be having greater difficulty in recovering from an episode of acute malnutrition—which is why their programmes include a mental health component, providing psychosocial and psychological support.

ACF field staff already involved in psychosocial support will conduct the study that will include groups of adults and youth drawn from ACF project beneficiary populations suffering from trauma symptoms. The University of Worcester will provide guidance in the research design, implementation and data collection. Ethical clearance has already been secured. The results of the study will contribute to the growing body of evidence that group protocols can be safely administered by trained paraprofessionals provided with sufficient training, ongoing supervision and monitoring.

GIST-T is brokering technical and financial support for this applied research project.