

Mental health and psychosocial support for vulnerable populations exposed to adversity: from evidence to implementation



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WHO COLLABORATING CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND TRAINING IN MENTAL HEALTH AND SERVICE EVALUATION. DEPARTMENT OF
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COCHRANE GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF VERONA, VERONA, ITALY.

Presentation outline

Vulnerable population groups and
risk of common mental disorders

WHO interventions

Scientific evidence

From evidence to implementation

Implementation issues and
dilemmas

Conclusions

CMDs

distress / PTSD

depression

anxiety

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Vulnerable populations are groups of individuals who are at increased risk for health problems and health disparities due to a range of social, economic, environmental, and systemic disadvantages

WHO, 2022.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

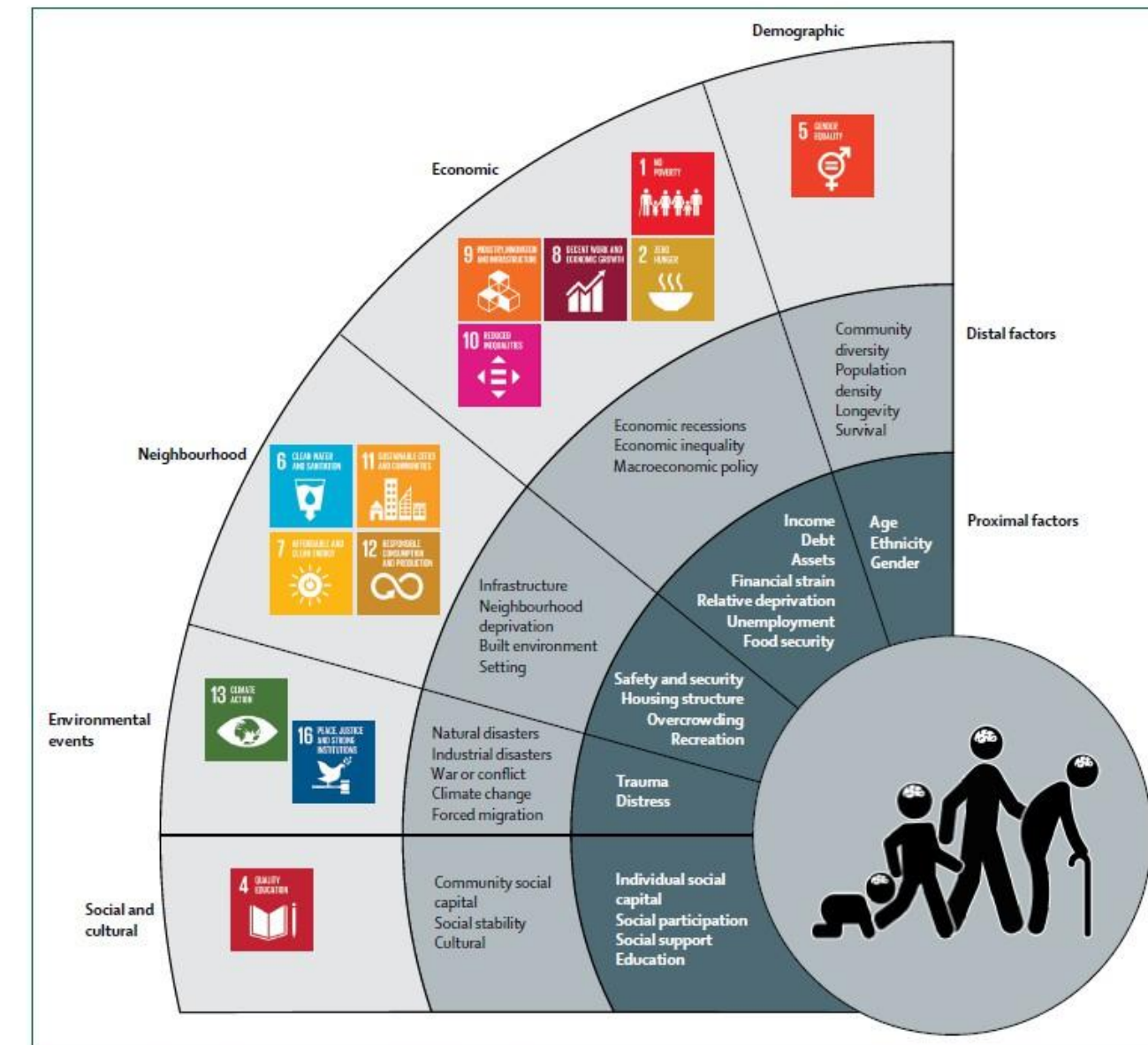


Figure 1: Social and cultural determinants of mental disorders and the Sustainable Development Goals: a conceptual framework

Lancet

. 2019 Jul 20;394(10194):240-248.

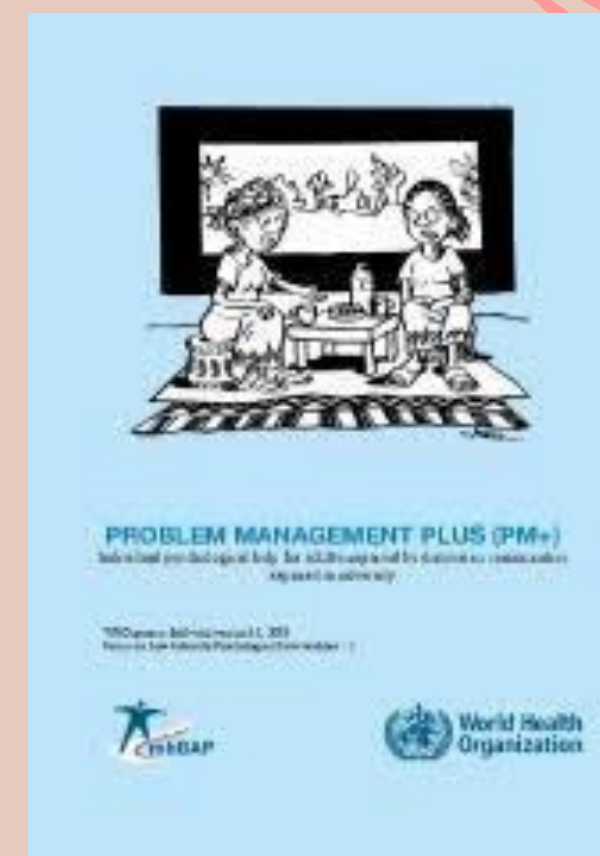
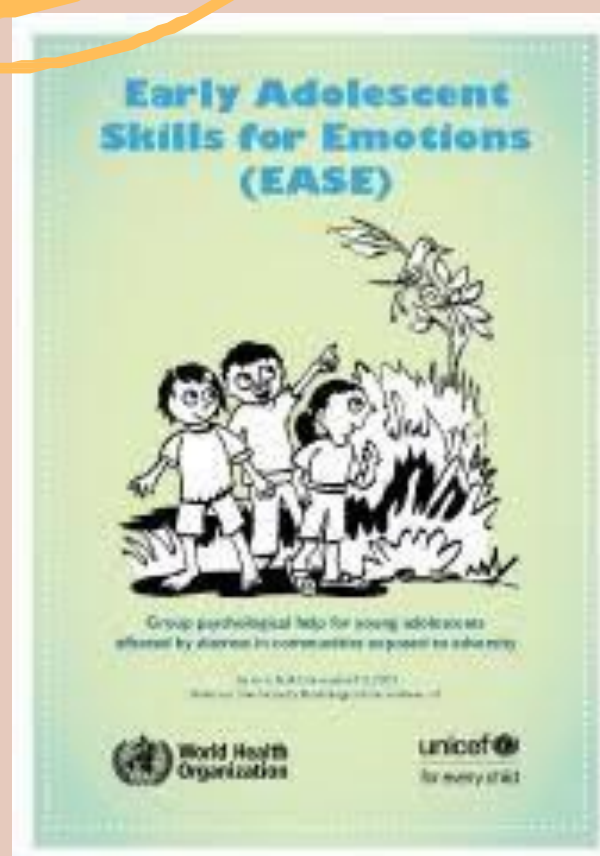
New WHO prevalence estimates of mental disorders in conflict settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Fiona Charlson 1, Mark van Ommeren 2, Abraham Flaxman 3, Joseph Cornett 4, Harvey Whiteford 1, Shekhar Saxena 5

Lancet Psychiatry

. 2018 Apr;5(4):357-369.

Social determinants of mental disorders and the Sustainable Development Goals: a systematic review of reviews
Crick Lund 1, Carrie Brooke-Sumner 2, Florence Baingana 3, Emma Claire Baron 4, Erica Breuer 4, Prabha Chandra 5, Johannes Haushofer 6, Helen Herrman 7, Mark Jordans 8, Christian Kieling 9, Maria Elena Medina-Mora 10, Ellen Morgan 11, Olayinka Omigbo 12, Wietse Tol 13, Vikram Patel 14, Shekhar Saxena 15



Lancet Psychiatry

2024 May;11(5):325-326.

Why treatment manuals of psychological interventions should be freely available

Pim Cuijpers 1, Niall Boyce 2, Mark van Ommeren 3

Lancet Psychiatry

2021 Mar;8(3):174-176.

Regulatory requirements for psychological interventions
Marianna Purgato 1, Pim Cuijpers 2, Corrado Barbui 3

World Psychiatry

2020 Jun;19(2):251-252.

Open access of psychological intervention manuals
Sarah Watts 1, Mark van Ommeren 1, Pim Cuijpers 2

RCT 1

RCT 2

Publication of
intervention
manual



Further
effectiveness
or
implementation
research



RCT 1

Lancet Glob Health 2020;
8: e254–63

Guided self-help to reduce psychological distress in South Sudanese female refugees in Uganda: a cluster randomised trial

Wietse A Tol, Marx R Leku, Daniel P Lakin, Kenneth Carswell, Jura Augustinavicius, Alex Adaku, Teresa M Au, Felicity L Brown, Richard A Bryant, Claudia Garcia-Moreno, Rashelle J Musci, Peter Ventevogel, Ross G White, Mark van Ommeren

692 Refugee women in Uganda showed significant positive changes in psychological distress, PTSD and depression symptoms, explosive anger, functional impairment, and subjective well-being.



RCT 2

Psychotherapy and
Psychosomatics

Standard Research Article

Received: February 9, 2021
Accepted: May 29, 2021
Published online: July 20, 2021

Psychother Psychosom
DOI: 10.1159/000517504

Effectiveness of Self-Help Plus in Preventing Mental Disorders in Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Western Europe: A Multinational Randomized Controlled Trial

Marianna Purgato^{a,b} Kenneth Carswell^c Federico Tedeschi^a Ceren Acarturk^d Minna Anttila^e Teresa Au^c Malek Bajbouj^f Josef Baumgartner^g Massimo Biondi^h Rachel Churchillⁱ Pim Cuijpers^{j,m} Markus Koesters^k Chiara Gastaldon^{a,b} Zeynep Ilkkursun^d Tella Lantta^e Michela Nosè^{a,b} Giovanni Ostuzzi^{a,b} Davide Papola^{a,b} Mariana Popa^l Valentina Roselli^h Marit Sijbrandij^{j,m} Lorenzo Tarsitani^h Giulia Turrini^{a,b} Maritta Välimäki^e Lauren Walkerⁿ Johannes Wancata^g Elisa Zanini^a Ross White^l Mark van Ommeren^c Corrado Barbui^{a,b}

459 Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Western Europe. SH+ prevented the development of mental disorders in the short term in refugees with different backgrounds.



RCT 1
bis

Open access

Original research

BMJ Open Prevention and promotion effects of Self Help Plus: secondary analysis of cluster randomised controlled trial data among South Sudanese refugee women in Uganda

Jura Augustinavicius^{1,2} Marianna Purgato^{3,4} Federico Tedeschi^{3,4} Rashelle Musci² Marx Ronald Leku⁵ Kenneth Carswell⁶ Daniel Lakin² Mark van Ommeren⁶ Pim Cuijpers^{7,8} Marit Sijbrandij^{7,8} Eirini Karyotaki^{7,8} Wietse A Tol^{9,10,11} Corrado Barbui^{3,4}

We created a latent variable as a proxy for diagnosis and looked at how many participants went on to develop a diagnosis after the intervention. SH+ had a preventative role.



RCT 3

RESEARCH REPORT

World Psychiatry
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE WORLD PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION (WPA)

Effectiveness of a WHO self-help psychological intervention for preventing mental disorders among Syrian refugees in Turkey: a randomized controlled trial

Ceren Acarturk¹ Ersin Uygun² Zeynep Ilkkursun¹ Kenneth Carswell³ Federico Tedeschi⁴ Mine Batu² Sevde Eskici¹ Gulsah Kurt¹ Minna Anttila⁵ Teresa Au³ Josef Baumgartner⁶ Rachel Churchill⁷ Pim Cuijpers⁸ Thomas Becker⁹ Markus Koesters⁹ Tella Lantta⁵ Michela Nosè⁴ Giovanni Ostuzzi⁴ Mariana Popa¹⁰ Marianna Purgato^{4,11} Marit Sijbrandij⁸ Giulia Turrini⁴ Maritta Välimäki⁵ Lauren Walker⁷ Johannes Wancata⁶ Elisa Zanini⁴ Ross G. White¹⁰ Mark van Ommeren³ Corrado Barbui^{4,11}

¹Department of Psychology, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Koc University, Istanbul, Turkey; ²Department of Trauma and Disasters Mental Health, Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey; ³Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland; ⁴WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health and Service Evaluation, Department of Neuroscience, Biomedicine and Movement Sciences, University of Verona, Verona, Italy; ⁵Department of Nursing Science, University of Turku, Turku, Finland; ⁶Clinical Division of Social Psychiatry, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria; ⁷University of York, York, UK; ⁸Department of Clinical, Neuro, and Developmental Psychology, Amsterdam Public Health Institute, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; ⁹Department of Psychiatry II, Ulm University, Ulm, Germany; ¹⁰Institute of Population Health, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; ¹¹Cochrane Global Mental Health, University of Verona, Verona, Italy

642 Syrian refugees in Turkey. SH+ halved the risk of a mental disorder six months after the randomization.

Open access

Systematic review

BMJ
Mental
Health

Self-Help Plus for refugees and asylum seekers: an individual participant data meta-analysis

Eirini Karyotaki ^{1,2}, Marit Sijbrandij,^{1,2} Marianna Purgato ³, Ceren Acarturk,⁴ Daniel Lakin,⁵ Della Bailey,⁶ Emily Peckham,⁶ Ersin Uygun,⁷ Federico Tedeschi,³ Johannes Wancata,⁸ Jura Augustinavicius,⁵ Kenneth Carswell,⁹ Maritta Välimäki,^{10,11} Mark van Ommeren,⁹ Markus Koesters,¹² Mariana Popa,¹³ Marx Ronald Leku,¹⁴ Minna Anttila,¹⁰ Rachel Churchill,¹⁵ Ross G White,¹³ Sarah Al-Hashimi,⁸ Tella Lantta,¹⁰ Teresa Au,⁹ Thomas Klein,¹² Wietse A Tol,¹¹ Pim Cuijpers ^{1,2}, Corrado Barbui³

SH+ had significantly larger effects among participants who were not employed ($\beta=1.60$, 95% CI 0.20 to 3.00) and had lower mental well-being levels ($\beta=0.02$, 95% CI 0.001 to 0.05)

RESEARCH REPORT

Effectiveness of a stepped-care programme of WHO psychological interventions in a population of migrants: results from the RESPOND randomized controlled trial

Marianna Purgato¹, Federico Tedeschi¹, Giulia Turrini¹, Camilla Cadorin¹, Beatrice Compri¹, Giulia Muriago¹, Giovanni Ostuzzi¹, Irene Pinucci², Eleonora Prina¹, Riccardo Serra^{1,2}, Lorenzo Tarsitani², Anke B. Witteveen³, Aurelia Roversi⁴, Maria Melchior⁴, David McDaid⁵, A-La Park⁵, Papoula Petri-Romão⁶, Raffael Kalisch⁶, James Underhill⁷, Richard Bryant⁸, Roberto Mediavilla Torres⁹⁻¹¹, José Luis Ayuso-Mateos⁹⁻¹¹, Mireja Felez Nobrega^{10,12}, Josep Maria Haro^{10,12,13}, Marit Sijbrandij³, Michela Nosè¹, Corrado Barbui¹

N= 217 adult migrants

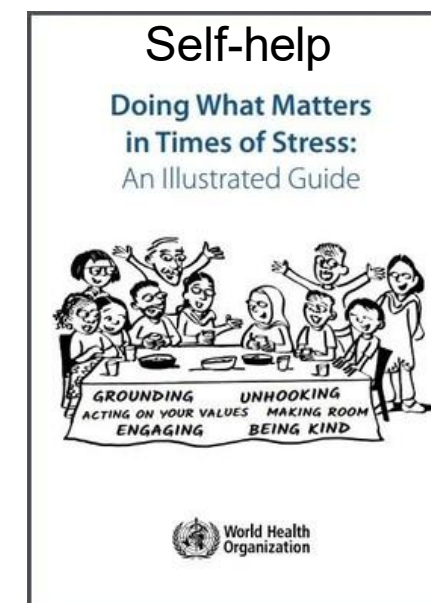
“Participants receiving the stepped-care programme showed a greater reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms compared to CAU (coefficient: -3.460, standard error, SE: 1.050, $p=0.001$) at **week 21**, at **week 7** (coefficient: -3.742, SE=1.008, $p<0.001$) and **week 14** (coefficient: -6.381, SE=1.039, $p<0.001$)”.

Psychological support



PROBLEM MANAGEMENT PLUS (PM+)
Self-help problem management for people with common mental disorders

WHO Geneva 2014 (revised 2015, 2019)
Report No. WHO/MSD/14.01 (revised 2015, 2019)



Open access

Systematic review

BMJ
Mental
Health

Self-Help Plus for refugees and asylum seekers: an individual participant data meta-analysis

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Floris M., Bruno G., Purgato M.,
Cammilli I., Bottesi G., Salcuni S.,
Spoto A., Gentili C.*, Cristea I.A.

Unguided self-help to bridge waiting
time to face-to-face therapy in a
university student mental health service:
An interrupted time-series analysis

BrJPsychOpen, *in press*

RESEARCH REPORT

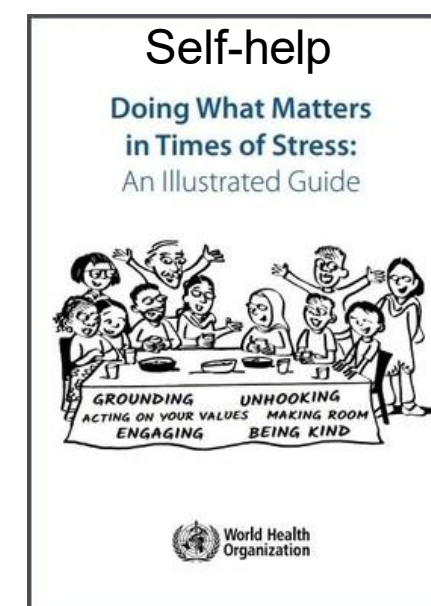
Effectiveness of a stepped-care programme of WHO psychological interventions in a population of migrants: results from the RESPOND randomized controlled trial

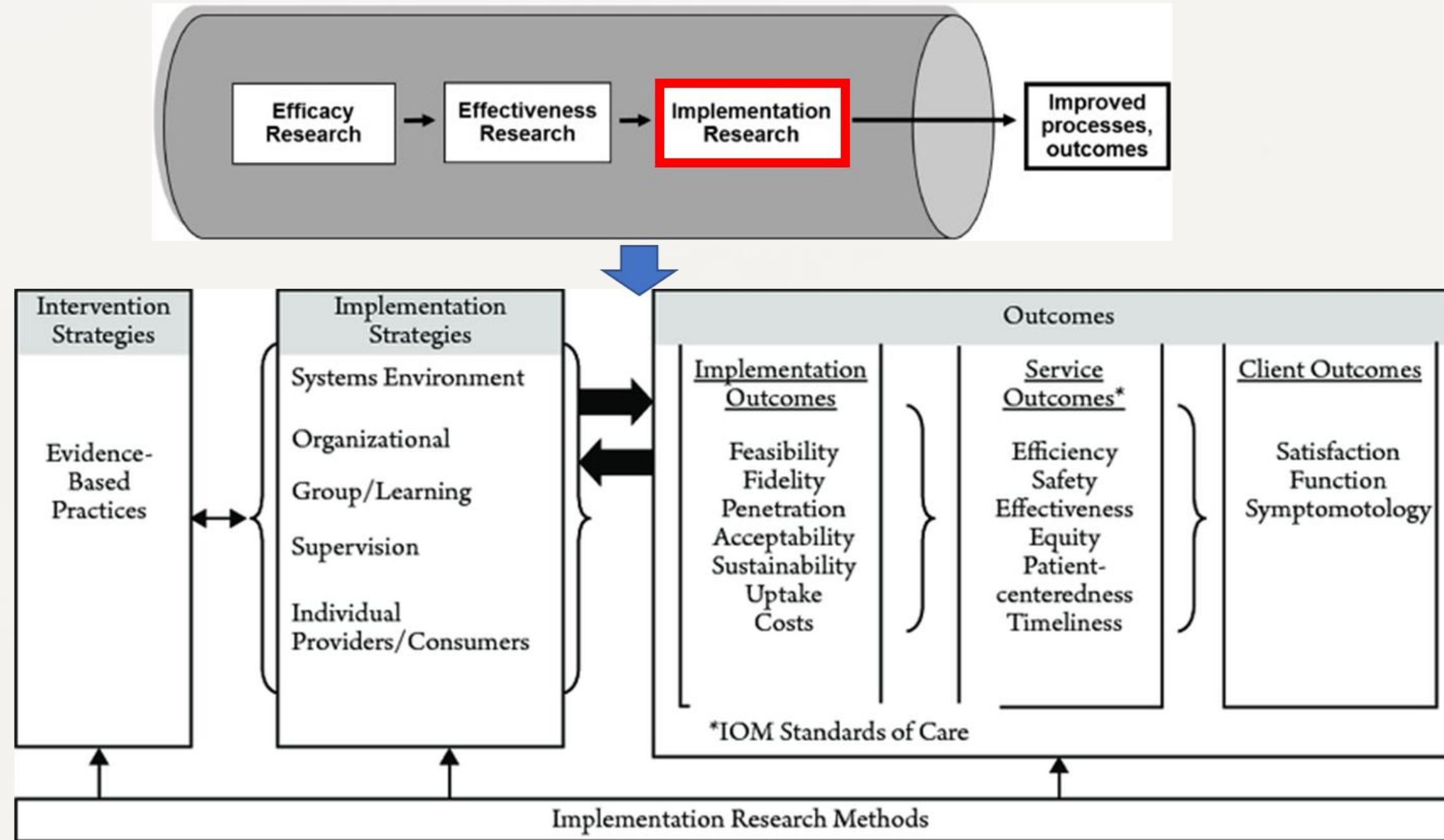
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Psychological support





Proctor conceptual model of implementation research.



European Health And Digital
Executive Agency
(HADEA)
(EU4H-2022-PJ09)
(Grant Agreement: 101101495)



European Health And Digital
Executive Agency
(HADEA) (EU4H-2023-PJ)
(Grant Agreement 101161167)



Italian Ministry of University
and Research
(Prot. 20224XSWRH)



European Union's Horizon-
HLTH-2022-STAYHLTH-01-01-
two stage (Grant Agreement
101080323)



European Health And Digital
Executive Agency
(HADEA)
(EU4H-2022-PJ09)
(Grant Agreement: 101101495)

CASCADE TRAINING



European Health And Digital
Executive Agency
(HADEA) (EU4H-2023-PJ)
(Grant Agreement 101161167)

POPULATION GROUP



Italian Ministry of University
and Research
(Prot. 20224XSWRH)

ONLINE APP



European Union's Horizon-
HLTH-2022-STAYHLTH-01-01-
two stage (Grant Agreement
101080323)

BOOSTER SESSIONS

Key challenges and dilemmas

01

***Balancing Standardization with Contextual
Relevance***

Key challenges and dilemmas

01

Balancing Standardization with Contextual Relevance

Tension: Too much rigidity makes programs irrelevant; too much change can dilute core components

Way forward: Achieve "flexibility within fidelity" - adapting nuances while upholding core elements

Key challenges and dilemmas

02

Quality assurance in Non-Specialist Delivery

Key challenges and dilemmas

02

Quality assurance in Non-Specialist Delivery

Tension: How can we ensure these providers are safe and can deliver the intervention with competence and fidelity?

Way forward: Ensure that non-specialist delivery is safe, supportive, and effective by building structured systems around facilitators.

Key challenges and dilemmas

02

Quality assurance in Non-Specialist Delivery



Lancet Psychiatry
.2025 Jan;12(1):67-80.

Competency-based training and supervision: development of the WHO-UNICEF Ensuring Quality in Psychosocial and Mental Health Care (EQUIP) initiative

Brandon A Kohrt 1, Gloria A Pedersen 2, Alison Schafer 3, Kenneth Carswell 3, Fiamma Rupp 4, Mark J D Jordans 5, Elise West 6, Josephine Akellot 7, Pamela Y Collins 8, Carmen Contreras 9, Jerome T Galea 10, Frezgi Gebrekristos 11, Muthoni Mathai 12, Kristina Metz 8, Naser Morina 13, Mwamba Mwila Mwenge 14, Frederik Steen 15, Ann Willhoite 4, Mark van Ommeren 3, James

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Way forward: Ensure that non-specialist delivery is safe, supportive, and effective by building structured systems around facilitators.

Muneghina O., 2025, in press

Key challenges and dilemmas

03

Horizontal vs. Vertical Scaling

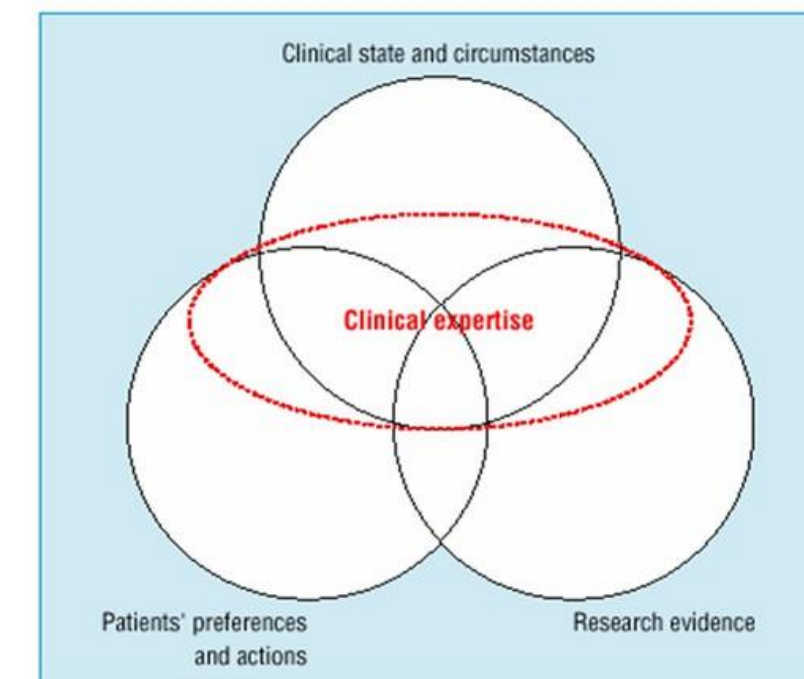
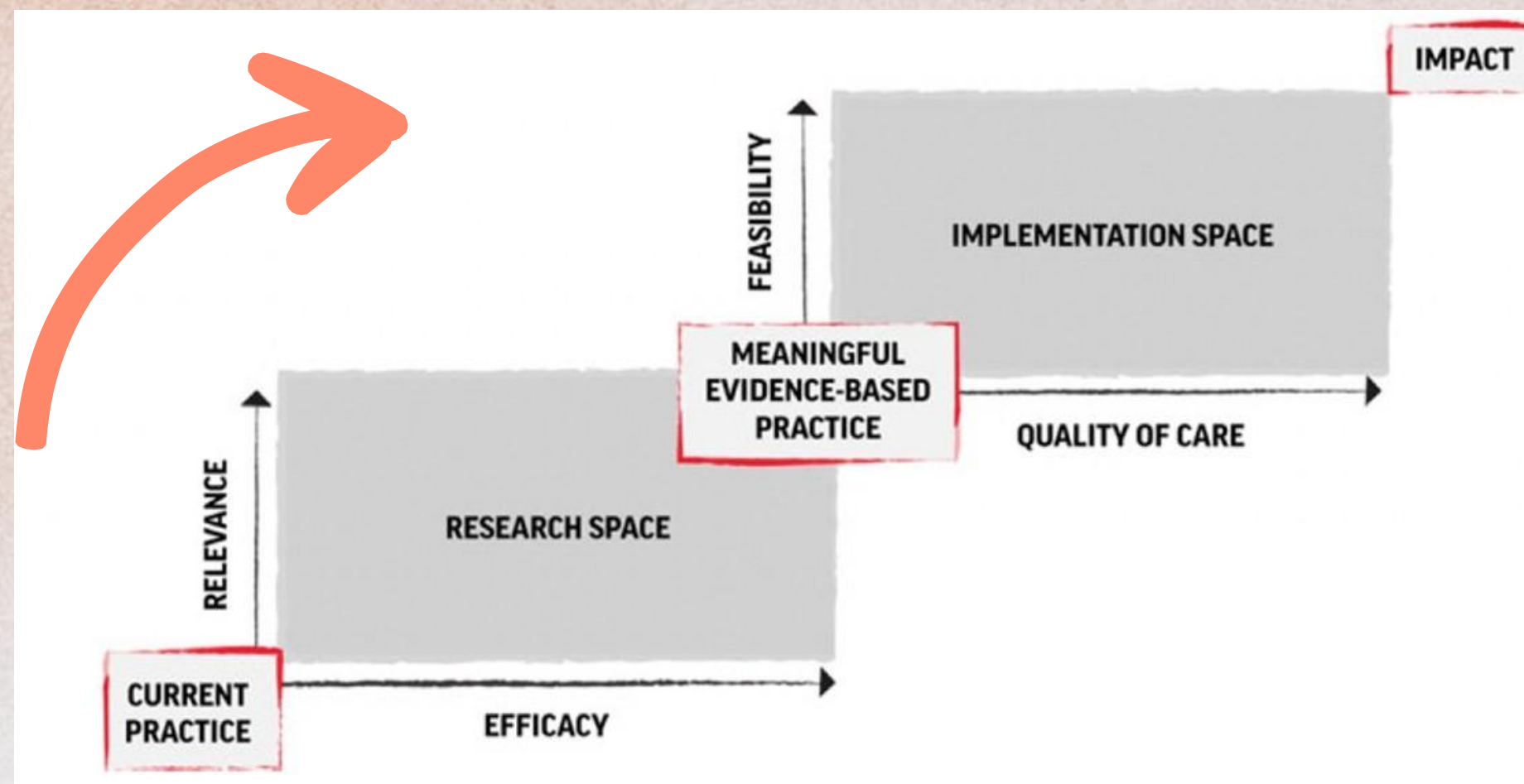
***Tension:** Rapid horizontal expansion may not be sustainable without supporting policy and infrastructure (vertical gains) while policy changes can be lengthy and alone don't guarantee community-level access*

***Way Forward:** Expand services on the ground (horizontal) while simultaneously engaging and advocating for system integration, government funding, and supportive policies (vertical)*

Conclusions

A roadmap to Scale : Building the Evidence Base During Scaling

Scaling is rarely linear or a one-off project; it's an iterative process of expansion, evaluation, and refinement



An updated model for evidence based clinical decisions¹

BMJ 2002;324:1350

THANK YOU

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