



MAKING THE CASE FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL PEACEBUILDING: A NEW MODEL TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL FABRIC

INTRODUCTION

Over the last four years, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa has been leading a project aimed at narrowing the gap between the fields of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and peacebuilding (PB). This project is centred on the premise that war, conflict and oppression have a significant but often under-acknowledged impact on human beings which in turn weakens the social fabric that governs relationships, the capacity for recovery and the opportunities for reconciliation. In the aftermath of conflict, the causes of conflict often remain and continue to foster mistrust and fear. The work of both MHPSS professionals as well as peacebuilders aims ultimately to restore the social fabric that binds and supports people within their communities as a way of disrupting cycles of violence and building sustainable peace. While each field has different ways of achieving its goals; there exist significant overlaps. However, the two fields work mostly in isolation from one another. This project seeks to develop new and innovative ways of integrating MHPSS and PB to develop sustainable long-term solutions.

DEFINITIONS

Mental health and psycho-social support is defined in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines for MHPSS in Emergency Settings as “any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder”. The term ‘psychosocial’ emphasises the dynamic relationship between the psychological aspects of our experience and behaviour, and our relationships within a specific context. From this perspective, mental health can be understood as “a dimension of relations between persons and groups more than as an individual state” (Hamber & Gallagher, 2015, p. 3).

Peacebuilding consists of the range of interrelated processes, actions and tools used to promote just and sustainable social, economic and political structures and relationships – at all levels of society. It is concerned with short term responses to complex and violent conflicts and long-term responses to build the capacity of societies and the conditions that contribute to the prevention of further cycles of violence. Economically, politically, and socially stable societies are the foundation for justice and human flourishing and are built by addressing the intangible and tangible, psychological, relational, and structural factors which shape individuals and society (Hart, 2008).

PSYCHOSOCIAL PEACEBUILDING: WHAT?

The term *Psychosocial Peacebuilding* (PSPB) is being offered here to begin to define the rapprochement between the previously distinct and separate fields of MHPSS and PB. It is a holistic approach that integrates the theories and practices of MHPSS and PB for the purpose of laying a strong foundation for the attainment of sustainable PB outcomes in (post-) conflict settings (Hart & Colo, 2014). The composite term ‘MHPSS’ implies that interventions work on approaches to help people live with trauma while also addressing their psychosocial needs such as the impact of daily stressors and

other conflict-related challenges; a necessity for sustainable peace and political, economic and social development.

These practices enhance people's capacity to participate in society, they also help people improve their personal economic situation and increases people's ability to make informed choices (Hamber & Gallagher, 2014). Pursuing an integrated approach such as PSPB, requires the development of a close relationship between the fields of MHPSS and PB. To achieve this, MHPSS and PB practitioners need to be explicit about developing and using methodologies, where relevant, that build on commonalities that are based on joint decision making and resource management and that use a common language.

PSYCHOSOCIAL PEACEBUILDING: WHY?

A cursory view over the last 35 years shows that approximately 80% of countries that have emerged out of conflict worldwide have returned to conflict. This may be attributed to an insufficient reckoning with the past and the root causes of conflict, a lack of post-conflict justice and the failure to provide broad psycho-social and development support to affected communities. Research shows that post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression in conflict affected societies is more than double the mean prevalence estimated by the Global Burden of Disease Study. It further shows that 'wounded' individuals / families / communities who have not processed their responses to their traumatic experiences are less likely to be able to resist the political, economic, cultural and social pressures which can, in turn, result in further cycles of violence.

This underscores the importance of launching holistic and integrated reconciliation and healing processes that target all sectors of society in a post-

conflict country. Without addressing both the MHPSS and PB needs of conflict-affected individuals and communities in an integrated way; neither field is likely to stem the scourge of direct and indirect violence which continue to ravage the world.

In addition, conflictual relationships and people's inability to function optimally impacts their role in other sectors of society such as agriculture, education and general development programmes. Programmes fail due to trauma related psychological problems, high levels of mistrust, lack of participation and cooperation, and the interruption brought about by continued cycles of violence.

THE TRACK RECORD SO FAR

In 2015, IJR and War Trauma Foundation (Netherlands) co-hosted a seminal conference called 'Healing Communities, Transforming Society: Exploring the interconnectedness between psychosocial needs, practice and peacebuilding' which was attended by 50 practitioners and academics from 15 countries around the world. Since the conference, at which participants unanimously supported the need for [further research](#), interdisciplinary exchange and the development of an evidence base, the project has evolved rapidly producing a number of sought-after publications, well attended events and a constantly expanding international network.

'Mental health is an invisible barrier to building peace. If we are trying to create new patterns for how people from conflicting groups work together, we have to look at the full legacy of conflict, which includes mental health.'

'I think that if the psychological drivers of conflict and the mind-sets and mental barriers to peace are not addressed, then peace will constantly be undermined.'
-2017 IJR Mapping Study respondents

To address conference participants recommendations, a comprehensive [literature review](#) and a [mapping study](#) of global practice were conducted in 2016. In the latter, 92% of respondents (representing 62 organizations in 25 countries) agreed that interventions aimed at building sustainable peace would benefit from linking PB and MHPSS. This was further underscored in the 2017 special issue of the [Journal Intervention](#) -commissioned by IJR- in which multiple articles explain that successful transformation requires an inclusive, socio-ecological approach. All these publications are available free of charge on line.

In 2018, IJR and [mhpss.net](#) co-hosted an international [webinar](#) aimed at disseminating existing research and generating a broader public discussion. Over 160 people registered to attend the event, 80 attended and a further 225 have watched the YouTube video recording.

In May 2017 a group of international experts began to draft a set of Psychosocial Peacebuilding Guidelines (PSPB GL) which outline why and how the two fields could be linked. The PSPB GL are a dynamic document which evolves as new research becomes available. At present the draft document awaits the inclusion of evidence-based research. IJR has formed an international reference group

'I am aware of and have enthusiastically followed the important work that the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation has been conducting - in particular, I have attended your recent webinar on peacebuilding and mental health and thought it was extremely interesting.'
-Costanza Torre, LSE PhD Student

consisting of representatives from 18 countries, to ensure that a consultative and inclusive process underpins the way forward. National co-creation workshops with local organizations from both fields have already been conducted in South Africa (in partnership with [CSVR](#) and [ICON](#)), Kenya (in partnership with [GIZ-Civil Peace Service](#)) and Zimbabwe (in partnership with [FELM](#)-forthcoming in September

2019) to jointly explore with partners how the fields of MHPSS and PB could practically work together in their respective contexts and organisations. Training and gaining an in-depth understanding of the theories and methodologies of both fields continues to be highlighted as an important step in ensuring effective and sustained integration.

STRATEGY

Anticipated outputs

The project seeks to develop a context sensitive model that integrates MHPSS and PB to increase psychosocial well-being and sustainable peace. It is anticipated that the model can be applied in new or existing programmes and that improved project outcomes will be attained, if implemented successfully. Critically, the model will embrace indigenous knowledge systems and aims to contribute to the development of an evidence base.

A multi-phase and multi-context training and research process will be implemented to generate qualitative and quantitative data. This process will consist of the following key elements:

- The development of an integrated and context-sensitive training curriculum outlining why and how to integrate MHPSS and PB, including a practical handbook containing case studies profiling a variety of contexts.
- The conducting of training workshops in at least three pilot countries using the training curriculum that reflects inclusive and participatory ways of capturing the needs of communities as end-users.

- Supporting and building the capacity of participating MHPSS and PB organizations to create sustainable national and regional coordination platforms that ensure take-up beyond IJR's involvement.
- An M&E process to track the training process and organizational uptake.
- Research on the level of changes occurring at community level to explore how an integrated PSPB approach effects the social fabric in order to support the building of sustainable peace.
- Taking back the research results to communities and implementing organisations in a form that is accessible (i.e. playback theatre/ drama).
- Develop policy guidelines and conduct advocacy on the importance of integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding.

The proposed theoretical framework for this project consists of a combination of the socio-ecological framework and the social capital framework and uses a multi-sectoral approach. A mixed methods participatory action approach will be used throughout. The aim is to give primacy to the importance of the research question while valuing objective and subjective knowledge.

Research informed

In order to work in an evidence-based way, we aim to explore how the integration of PB and MHPSS, through organizational collaboration and exchange as well as integration into new and existing programs, restores social fabric and contributes to building sustainable peace in conflict-affected communities. In addition to regular reports, webinars, meetings and publications, all emerging research results will be shared with beneficiaries throughout the process.

RESOURCES

The Coordination Team

Prof Yvonne Slipe is a critical community health specialist and Associate Professor of Psychology at UKZN. She has done extensive work in facilitating collective recovery within war-traumatized countries using Narrative Theatre to strengthen social fabric.

Dr Marian Tankink is a medical anthropologist and former community psychiatric nurse. Her specialisation is on the relationships between gender, violence, psychosocial wellbeing, mental health and reconciliation and peacebuilding in (post)conflict areas and among refugees. For five years, she was Editor in Chief of '*Intervention, Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas*', an international peer reviewed multidisciplinary journal.

Friederike Bubenzer is a peacebuilding practitioner from South Africa. She leads the project at the host organisation The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. She has worked with communities across Africa to develop inclusive and context-specific peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

The Reference Group

In order to ensure that the project progresses in a way that is consultative and ethically sound, a reference group has been formed which meets annually to review the project and give input into the way forward. The group consists of 18 experts representing leading international universities and organisations from 11 countries.

We are committed to developing this important work further. This requires collaboration and partnerships. We welcome suggestions, contributions and new ideas of how to scale up, expand and improve this work going forward. We look forward to hearing from you

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