

'Support to Children in War Areas: Development of a psychosocial care system'

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Worldwide, youth mental health issues are very common. These issues are an enormous burden on children and adolescents, their families and society, especially in conflict areas (often low- and middle- income countries) where violence, poverty and a multitude of social stressors contribute to an increased rate of problems. Worldwide there is a chronic and structural shortage of adequate mental health- and psychosocial care for children. Additionally, knowledge about effective and feasible treatment methods in non-Western contexts is limited. Jordans' dissertation presents a model to provide psychosocial care through a package of multiple interventions.

An epidemiological study of mental health problems of former child soldiers in Nepal is the first scientific study showing that child soldiers display more problems than their peers: a difference that cannot be explained exclusively by the differences in experienced traumatic occurrences. Further, a systematic literature review on possible interventions shows a structural lack of effective treatment modalities for children in areas disrupted by war. These two studies form the problem description and rationale for this dissertation. Subsequently, several validation studies show that the newly developed tool to identify psychosocial problems, the *Child Psychosocial Distress Screener*, is accurate and measures a stable theoretical concept in various countries. The instrument facilitates the identification of children who need mental health care. A study into the effectiveness of group interventions in schools demonstrates that the intervention is reasonably effective in Nepal. The treatment leads to a reduction of problems such as aggression, encourages pro-social behavior, and gives hope. Next, research on the applicability of individual psychosocial care (counseling) in non-western contexts shows that clients experience the counseling as supportive and sufficient, although it does not always fulfill expectations and requires adaptations to be made according to the cultural context. The decrease in disorders during counseling in Burundi can be reduced to five treatment elements, including a therapeutic relationship, involvement of family and a problem-solving attitude. This study provides practical guidelines for the improvement and theoretical underpinnings of individual care for children in extremely difficult circumstances.

In summary, Jordans' dissertation delivers a model to provide care to substantial groups of children through a package of multiple interventions. The study shows that such care appears to be feasible and effective in war areas and low-income countries. It also demonstrates the possibility of setting up and improving a healthcare system based on scientific research.

The study was conducted between 2004 and 2008 in Burundi, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Nepal. The central theme of this dissertation is the interplay between scientific research and intervention development. It aims to contribute to bridging the structural lack of psychosocial care for children through improved knowledge about which forms of treatment work, how they work and how they can best be delivered.

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