Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness for GBV first responders in humanitarian settings: qualitative evaluation across 7 countries.

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WHO ARE WE AND HOW THE PROJECT STARTED

GBV – AoR
• The GBV AoR brings together non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, academics and others under the shared objective of ensuring life-saving, predictable, accountable and effective GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response in emergencies, both natural disaster and conflict-related humanitarian contexts. (www.gbvaor.net)

Concern:
• GBV front line workers feeling exhaustion and burnout at work, mostly under COVID-19 response.
• The necessity to improve the quality of GBV services for survivors, taking into account and strengthening first responders self-care. (GBV Minimum Standard on self and staff care).
WHERE AND WHO

Groups of 20-25 GBV first responders from the GBV sub-clusters in:

- IRAQ
- BANGLADESH
- NIGERIA
- VENEZUELA
- COLOMBIA
- ECUADOR (plus in person training)
- HONDURAS
- YEMEN
- GBV AoR COORDINATION GROUP
- MYANMAR
- PAKISTAN
- AFGHANISTAN
- GBV CoP x 2

Groups on a second phase to apply basic restorative practices, taking into account a sensitive perspective.

After the second phase: weekly drop in sessions to share common concerns about work and personal matters and facilitate the restoration of the nervous system.
PROJECT BACKGROUND

• Traditional Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program (8 weeks):

  Practices/Experiments

  Circle: common humanity

  Topics
ADDED TRAUMA AND CULTURAL - SENSITIVE ADAPTATIONS

Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness (Somatic Experiencing, David Treleaven, BREATHE International work): To inviting the experience of the mind gently coming to the present and in the body.

- Titration and pendulation
- Invitational language
- Give choice to explore bodily autonomy: shared power
- Neuroception (Mostly as GBV humanitarian workers)
- Interoception
- Polyvagal component
- Window of Tolerance
- Dignity in being, non doing
- Underline of Individual and Collective/Cultural resources
AIM OF THE QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

• Developing a thematic analysis through focus group discussions, to give exploratory results of the relevance of this program in different contexts/cultures.

• Finding which are the main trauma and cultural sensitive aspects to keep in mind when implementing this program.

• Finding if it makes sense to go for a bigger trial that shows the impact of self-care in the quality of the work of first responders with survivors: linking self-care and first response quality.
MAIN FINDINGS - BARRIERS TO SELF CARE

- **Workload/Commitments** – “I feel under constant pressure, the list of things that I have to do between work, kids and just life is never ending” (Venezuela)

- **Feeling guilty** – “I knew that I needed it but didn’t want to come until a colleague recommended this to me. I can see how guilty I was feeling about coming to the sessions.” (Venezuela)

- **“Always good”** – “There’s this thick skin I´ve grown about always having to feel good. It has felt so violent against myself” (Colombia)

- **Facing one’s own issues** - “I´ve had so much fear in taking a look at myself. I feel fear to find myself broken” (Bangladesh)

- **Self-Care pressure** – “I started to feel guilty about not doing self-care. I now understand that self-care has nothing to do with “doing what is going to help me feel better”, but opening space in my nervous system” (Second Phase Group)
MAIN FINDINGS - WHAT WORKED?

- **Mind-Body connection / Practice & Theory** – “I really liked that it was not just a space "emotional" or spiritual, but there is a physiological component that allowed us to understand also what happens at the physical level when doing these practices” (Second Phase Group)

- **Cultural Sensitivity** – “Felt so close to everyone during Ramadan, I could feel in my body the importance of fasting, why we do it” (Yemen)

- **Trauma Sensitivity** – “Learning about the nervous system and the window of tolerance has been one of the most important things to slowly overcoming the fear I felt in being in my body” (Nigeria)

- **Calling to Autonomy** – “Having the constant invitation to be truly in myself has been of great support to understanding my autonomy and the knowing of I need moment to moment” (Bangladesh)

- **Identity** – “This process made me reflect on how much my identity was build around being a GBV worker. I´m ready to find myself again, my pleasure, my hands, my art!” (Ecuador)

- **Connection with others** – “It can be very lonely to do this work. I often feel attacked even by my own colleagues. It was so refreshing to feel safe in this group.” (Bangladesh)
MAIN FINDINGS - FACILITATOR ATTRIBUTES

- **Personal** – “I really loved her attention to detail… she memorized specific answers of each one of us or examples and that actually really brings makes me emotional because it is very personalized experience” (Iraq)

- **Follow-up/Check ins** – “One thing I love about the facilitator is she always reminds us before the training and also if you didn’t make it for the session, she’d try to give a recap” – (Second Phase Group)

- **Encouraging** – “[The facilitator was] very much motivated to provide courage to others and the translator, that's very important actually” (Yemen)

- **Warm Voice** – “The voice, so soothing and so refreshing that you feel like you want to do it” (Bangladesh)

- **Calling to Autonomy** – “Having the constant invitation to be in myself has been of great support to understanding my autonomy” (Bangladesh)
MAIN FINDINGS - IMPACTS ON FIRST RESPONSE WORK

- **Judgement Awareness** – “This training helped me realise how much I was judging myself and others, it has helped me have more compassion and understanding” (Second Phase Group)

- **Being Present/Mindful** – “I just feel that these sessions have been helpful for me to work with more attention to myself and others when delivering services” (Bangladesh)

- **Reduce Burnout** – “[I]needed a space to handle multiple stressors and not get to burnout as it was deeply affecting my work” (Venezuela)

- **Empathy** – “I was feeling frustrated with the thought of survivors not finding their agency, then I realized I didn´t know it for myself either, so how could I transmit something so important? (Second Phase Group)

- **Emotion Regulation** – “[we now] know that is not about another thing to do, I can access my emotional resources wherever I am with my awareness to face difficult situations with survivors” (Colombia)

- **Connection to PFA work** – “I could finally understand why I just need to give survivors space staying grounded in myself” (Ecuador)
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

• The program is made feasible in different countries and contexts by integrating the Trauma Sensitive and cultural modifications, it's worth exploring on a bigger trial.

• Groups in the second phase reported more in depth reflection about how the TS-MBSR had an impact on the way in which they relate with themselves and therefore with others and survivors.

• Trauma and cultural sensitive perspectives were well developed allowing people in the groups to feel comfortable and in their power.

• An evaluation of a ToT is highly recommended to measure the scalability of the work.
THANK YOU!

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