**Addressing mental health problems among forcibly displaced people: novel clinical and longitudinal evidence**

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**Insert abstract below (150 – 200 words for each author).** Note –no subheadings are required for abstracts, but please ensure you address the Aims, Method, Results and Discussion of your study/s

**Symposia Abstract**

The psychological presentation of refugee clients is often complex and challenging to treat, owing to their exposure to a constellation of traumatic experiences and displacement stressors. There is a critical need to identify clinical targets and develop tailored treatments to alleviate this mental health burden. The four presentations in this symposium provide novel clinical and longitudinal evidence informing efforts to promote psychological recovery among refugee communities globally. The first presentation presents findings from a large-cohort RCT on group-based Problem Management Plus for Syrian refugees in Türkiye. The second presentation shares findings from a multi-centre RCT on culturally adapted cognitive-behavioural group therapy plus problem-solving training among refugees in Germany. The third presentation outlines the development and use of a novel moral injury intervention tailored for refugee clients in Australia (the Moral Injury Treatment for Refugees; MIT-R). Finally, the fourth presentation explores the temporal relationship between social factors and psychological functioning of over 1,207 refugees in Indonesia. The symposium will end with a discussion on future directions for advancing the effectiveness and acceptability of psychological interventions for refugees.

**Abstract Author 1**

***Testing the effectiveness of a peer provided transdiagnostic psychological intervention among Syrian Refugees in Türkiye***

Gülşah Kurt, Zeynep Ilkkursun, Anne de Graaff, Pim Cuijpers, Daniela Fuhr, Marit Sijbrandij, Pieter Ventevogel, Ersin Uygun, & Ceren Acarturk

**Abstract:**

An unprecedented increase in forced displacement places additional pressure on the health systems of refugee-hosting countries. Despite the high prevalence of mental health problems, access to and utilization of mental health services remains minimal among forcibly displaced populations. Problem Management Plus (PM+), developed by the World Health Organization, is a non-specialist-delivered, transdiagnostic psychological intervention designed to alleviate common mental health problems in distressed populations. We conducted the first randomized controlled trial testing the effectiveness of group PM+ (gPM+) among urban settling refugees in Türkiye, a major refugee hosting country. 368 Syrian refugees (69.6% female) were randomly allocated to intervention (gPM+ and enhanced care as usual (ECAU) (n = 184) or control group (ECAU) (n= 184). Primary outcomes were the symptoms of depression and anxiety at 3-month follow-up assessment, and secondary outcomes were posttraumatic stress symptoms, functional impairment, and self-identified problems. There was a significant reduction in functional impairment in gPM+/ECAU compared to ECAU at 3-month follow-up. The findings highlight the potential of culturally adapted transdiagnostic intervention for refugees in resource-scare settings.

**Bio:** Gulsah Kurt is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Refugee Trauma and Recovery Program at the School of Psychology, UNSW, Sydney. Her research focuses on understanding the relationships between conflict and displacement related experiences, mental health, and social integration among forcibly displaced communities and ethical and quality delivery of psychological interventions in complex humanitarian settings.

**Abstract Author 2**

***Culturally adapted cognitive-behavioral group therapy plus problem-solving training for mental disorders in refugees: a multicenter randomized-controlled trial***

Ahlke Kip

**Abstract:**

In 2023, Germany ranked among the top five countries hosting the largest refugee populations and was the second-largest recipient of new asylum applications. Given the high prevalence of mental disorders among refugees, there is a need for transdiagnostic treatments addressing various symptoms. Culturally adapted cognitive-behavioral therapy combined with problem-solving training (CA-CBT+) emerges as a promising approach to enhance refugees’ coping mechanisms for psychosocial challenges. To evaluate the efficacy of CA-CBT+ against treatment as usual (TAU), a randomized-controlled multicenter trial was conducted in Germany with 130 adult refugees, primarily from Afghanistan (59%), Iran (20%), and Syria (9%). CA-CBT+ involved 12 weekly group sessions focusing on psychoeducation, emotional regulation, stretching, and problem-solving training. Post-treatment results showed 63% of CA-CBT+ participants achieved a clinically significant change in the General Health Questionnaire score compared to 40% in the TAU group (*p* = .014). The CA-CBT+ group experienced significantly greater reductions in depression and PTSD symptoms and improved quality of life, though not in somatic symptoms or post-migration living difficulties. Male refugees benefited significantly more than females. Follow-ups are scheduled for 3- and 9-months post-treatment. The findings will be evaluated for their implications on psychosocial care for refugees.

**Bio:** Ahlke Kip is a research fellow at the University of Münster, Germany. She has earned her PhD focusing on the efficacy of PTSD treatments. Her research interests include trauma-related guilt, forced displacement, and natural hazards’ mental health impacts. Since 2019, she coordinates the ReCAP trial on refugee care: <https://www.mentalhealth4refugees.de/en/recap>

**Abstract Author 3**

***A case study on a novel moral injury treatment for chronic and severe PTSD in refugees.***

Sarah Funnell, Philippa Specker, Joel Hoffman, Casey Willoughby, Gheed Al-Damook, Fariba Mozayani, Angela Nickerson

**Abstract:**

Refugees report a diverse array of psychological responses following exposure to war, persecution, torture, and sexual violence. Moral injury can also be a debilitating component of post-traumatic reactions amongst refugees. Interventions that target moral injury have been found to be effective in helping individuals with PTSD following a history of interpersonal trauma. However, at present, these interventions have not been trialed with refugee populations. This presentation will detail the use of a novel moral injury intervention - Moral Injury Treatment for Refugees (MIT-R) - that was combined with Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) to treat PTSD, negative moral emotions (i.e., anger, guilt and shame) and social dysfunction in refugees. A case study of a refugee client who presented with severe PTSD and strong negative moral emotions following exposure to ongoing conflict-related traumas will be presented to demonstrate the application of MIT-R. Following treatment, this client no longer met diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Moreover, the client reported meaningful changes in negative emotions such as anger and shame during treatment. The implications for this treatment as a new clinical avenue to improve psychological and social functioning for refugees exposed to moral transgressions will be discussed.

**Bio:** Sarah Funnell is a Senior Clinical Psychologist at the Refugee Trauma and Recovery Program (RTRP) at the School of Psychology, UNSW. She has a special interest in working with survivors of trauma and those from diverse and marginalised populations.

**Abstract Author 4**

***A longitudinal investigation of the relationship between social support, community connectedness and trauma-related psychopathology among displaced refugee communities***

Philippa Specker, David Keegan, Dessy Susanty, Joel Hoffman, Shraddha Kashyap, Diah Tricesaria, Zico Pestalozzi, Rizka Argadianti, Randy Nandyatama, Nindita Nilasari, Belinda Liddell, Angela Nickerson

**Abstract:**

Refugee experiences of trauma and displacementsignificantly disrupt established networks of social support and community connectedness. While social factors have been routinely associated with mental health, to our knowledge, no study has used longitudinal methodology to test the direction of influence between social and psychological functioning within displaced refugee communities. Understanding the impact of social factors on refugee mental health is of critical importance to guide the provision of effective and tailored interventions for refugees living in displacement contexts. This study investigated the temporal association between psychological symptoms (PTSD, depression, anger), community connectedness, positive social support and negative social support. A culturally diverse sample of refugees (N=1,207) displaced in Indonesia completed an online survey at four time-points, six months apart. A random-intercept cross-lagged-panel model was used to investigate the temporal ordering between variables. Findings revealed that symptoms of psychopathology were associated with a subsequent deterioration in social functioning, while positive social support and community connectedness were bi-directionally associated over-time. These findings highlight the potential utility of mental health interventions for displaced refugees as means to improve social functioning and inclusion with host communities. Findings will be discussed in the context of evidence-based interventions to improve refugee mental health.

**Bio:** Philippa Specker is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow and Clinical Psychologist at the Refugee Trauma and Recovery Program (RTRP), in the School of Psychology at the University of New South Wales. She conducts research investigating the mechanisms underlying refugee mental health and service delivery for refugee clients, with the ultimate goal of informing policy and clinical interventions for refugees.