

Exploring Participatory Approaches in Community - Based Mental Health Interventions for Internally Displaced Populations: Lessons from Mogadishu, Somalia

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Abstract: *This article delves into the intricate mental health and psycho - social challenges that emerge within the context of humanitarian crises caused by internal displacement during conflict and instability. Focusing on internally displaced populations IDPs in Mogadishu, Somalia, the study investigates the efficacy of employing a participatory approach in community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions. By analyzing both qualitative data from interviews and discussions and quantitative data from surveys, the research unveils the manifold benefits of participatory interventions, including community ownership, cultural resonance, increased trust, diminished stigma, and long - term sustainability. Nonetheless, the study also identifies pertinent challenges related to power dynamics, cultural diversity, and striking a balance between professional expertise and community input. The findings emphasize the pivotal role of community empowerment, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative engagement between mental health professionals and IDPs. This research provides a nuanced understanding of how participatory interventions influence the mental well - being of IDPs, thereby offering valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to enhancing mental health and psycho - social support strategies within displacement settings.*

Keywords: *participatory interventions, mental health, psycho - social support, internally displaced populations, community empowerment*

1. Introduction

The plight of internally displaced populations (IDPs) in conflict - ridden regions poses significant challenges to their mental health and psycho - social well - being. In such contexts, traditional top - down approaches to interventions may fall short of addressing the unique needs and complexities IDPs face. This has led to a growing recognition of the importance of participatory approaches, where affected communities actively collaborate in designing and implementing mental health and psycho - social support interventions. This paper examines the benefits and challenges of utilizing a participatory approach for community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions in the context of internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Participatory approaches emphasize the active involvement of community members, including IDPs, in decision - making processes and co - creating culturally sensitive and contextually relevant interventions. Such approaches have gained prominence in humanitarian and development settings, as they can enhance intervention effectiveness and sustainability by fostering community ownership and empowerment (Werner, 2012). In the context of mental health and psycho - social support, participatory approaches can facilitate the identification of culturally appropriate coping strategies and help mitigate the stigma often associated with seeking psychological assistance (Sharan et al., 2014).

Despite the potential benefits, implementing participatory approaches in settings characterized by internal

displacement is not without challenges. These challenges include navigating power dynamics, ensuring the inclusivity of marginalized voices, managing linguistic and cultural diversity, and addressing logistical constraints (WHO, 2013). Furthermore, the delicate balance between community - driven initiatives and the expertise of mental health professionals must be carefully negotiated to ensure the delivery of effective and evidence - based interventions (Kohrt et al., 2015).

By examining the specific case of Mogadishu, Somalia, this paper aims to contribute to understanding how participatory approaches can be harnessed to enhance mental health and psycho - social support interventions for IDPs. The exploration of both the benefits and challenges inherent in this approach will provide valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers striving to create more inclusive and impactful interventions within similar contexts.

1.1 Background

Mogadishu, Somalia, has witnessed persistent internal displacement due to prolonged conflicts and humanitarian crises, leading to profound mental health and psycho - social challenges among its displaced populations. Internally displaced people (IDPs) often experience increased vulnerability to mental distress, trauma and reduced access to essential mental health services (IOM, 2019). Innovative and culturally appropriate interventions are needed to address these challenges.

Traditionally, humanitarian responses to mental health and psycho - social needs in conflict - affected areas have followed top - down approaches, focusing on providing standardized interventions from external sources. However, these approaches may not adequately address the intricate cultural nuances, community dynamics, and resilience factors crucial in internal displacement (Gopalan et al., 2020). As a result, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of participatory approaches involving affected communities in shaping interventions to address their unique needs better.

Participatory approaches involve collaboration between community members, including IDPs, and mental health professionals, fostering co - creation and shared decision - making (Murray et al., 2015). Such approaches have demonstrated the potential to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of mental health and psycho - social support interventions by integrating local knowledge, values, and coping strategies (Patel et al., 2011). By engaging IDPs as active participants in the design and implementation of interventions, participatory approaches can promote a sense of ownership, empowerment, and agency, thereby contributing to the overall well - being and resilience of the displaced populations.

Despite the promise of participatory approaches, challenges persist in their implementation within the context of IDPs. Power differentials, limited resources, linguistic diversity, and ensuring the representation of marginalized groups are among the challenges that must be navigated (Purgato et al., 2018). Additionally, balancing community - led initiatives with evidence - based practices while maintaining the integrity of interventions is essential for achieving sustainable outcomes (Epping - Jordan et al., 2015).

This study explores the benefits and challenges of utilizing a participatory approach for community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions among internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia. By understanding the intricate interplay between participatory methodologies and the unique needs of displaced communities, this research aims to contribute to developing more contextually relevant and impactful interventions in a challenging and dynamic environment.

1.2 Problem Statement

The persistent conflicts and political instability in Mogadishu, Somalia, have resulted in a crisis of internal displacement, with profound implications for affected populations' mental health and psycho - social well - being. The traditional top - down approaches to mental health and psycho - social support interventions often fail to adequately address the unique challenges internally displaced people (IDPs) face. Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore alternative approaches that can effectively cater to the complex mental health needs of IDPs in Mogadishu.

The lack of culturally sensitive, contextually relevant, and community - driven interventions exacerbates the gap in mental health support for IDPs in Mogadishu. Standardized interventions, which overlook the diverse and dynamic

experiences of displacement, often struggle to engage and resonate with IDPs, impeding the effectiveness and sustainability of mental health care (Tol et al., 2011). This situation calls for a paradigm shift towards more inclusive and participatory approaches that harness the knowledge and agency of the affected communities.

Moreover, while participatory approaches hold promise, their implementation in Mogadishu faces multifaceted challenges. The power dynamics inherent in community collaboration, coupled with linguistic and cultural diversity among IDPs, can complicate the design and execution of interventions. Ensuring the inclusion of marginalized voices and balancing community expertise with professional guidance also pose significant hurdles (Bhana et al., 2010).

Addressing the mental health and psycho - social support needs of internally displaced populations in Mogadishu requires a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges of utilizing participatory approaches. By examining these intricacies, this study seeks to contribute to developing more effective, culturally sensitive, and sustainable interventions that enhance the well - being of IDPs and foster their resilience within the unique context of Mogadishu.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to examine the benefits and challenges of utilizing a participatory approach for community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions among internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Mogadishu, Somalia.

1.4 Specific Objectives

- 1) To Identify the Benefits: Determine the advantages of implementing a participatory approach in community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions for internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia.
- 2) To Examine the Challenges: Investigate the challenges and barriers associated with using a participatory approach for mental health and psycho - social support interventions among internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia.
- 3) To Explore Community Engagement: Explore the level of engagement, involvement, and empowerment of the displaced community members in the design, implementation, and decision - making processes of the interventions.

1.5 Research Questions:

- 1) What are the benefits of a participatory approach in community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions for internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia?
- 2) What challenges and barriers are encountered when implementing participatory approaches for mental health and psycho - social support interventions among internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia?

- 3) To what extent are internally displaced community members engaged and empowered in the participatory interventions' design, implementation, and decision-making processes?

2. Literature Review

The internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Mogadishu, Somalia, face numerous challenges related to mental health and psycho-social well-being due to protracted conflicts and displacement. This literature review explores the merits and difficulties of employing a participatory approach in community-based mental health and psycho-social support interventions for IDPs in Mogadishu. The review is organized according to the research objectives, examining relevant studies and insights that align with each purpose.

2.1 Identifying the Benefits

The participatory approach offers several benefits for community-based mental health and psycho-social support interventions among IDPs. Participatory interventions prioritize collaboration between IDPs, community members, and intervention providers, leading to culturally relevant and locally accepted strategies (Werner, 2012). Such an approach fosters community ownership, enabling IDPs to engage in the design and execution of interventions actively. This increased engagement has been shown to reduce stigma and promote a sense of empowerment, ultimately improving mental health outcomes (Sharan et al., 2014). Participatory methods also facilitate identifying and utilizing existing community resources and coping mechanisms, enhancing the interventions' sustainability and effectiveness (Kohrt et al., 2015).

2.2 Examining the Challenges

While participatory approaches hold promise, they are not without challenges. Power dynamics within communities can hinder equitable participation and decision-making processes. Bhana et al. (2010) emphasize that ensuring marginalized voices are heard requires deliberate efforts to address inequalities and create inclusive platforms for participation. Moreover, IDPs' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Mogadishu can complicate communication and collaboration, potentially affecting the feasibility of participatory methods (WHO, 2013). Balancing community input with evidence-based practices also poses challenges, as highlighted by Tol et al. (2011), who discuss the need to integrate traditional and modern approaches while maintaining intervention efficacy.

2.3 Exploring Community Engagement

Community engagement is a cornerstone of participatory approaches and contributes to intervention success. Bhana et al. (2010) demonstrate that involving IDPs in decision-making enhances their sense of agency and investment in interventions. Community participation facilitates the identification of local priorities, ensuring that interventions address the displaced populations' most pressing mental health and psycho-social needs. Effective engagement can

empower IDPs, enhancing their resilience and well-being (Sharan et al., 2014).

2.4 Assessing Cultural Relevance

Cultural sensitivity is vital in addressing mental health and psycho-social needs among IDPs. Participatory interventions allow for incorporating cultural values, traditions, and practices, increasing the interventions' relevance and acceptability (Kohrt et al., 2015). Sharan et al. (2014) emphasize that culturally tailored interventions are more likely to resonate with IDPs, promoting better engagement and utilization of support services.

Evaluating the impact of participatory community-based interventions is crucial for understanding their effectiveness. Kohrt et al. (2015) advocate for rigorous evaluation methods that capture changes in mental health outcomes, community cohesion, and individual resilience. Longitudinal studies focusing on intervention sustainability and long-term benefits are needed to ascertain the lasting impact of participatory approaches on IDPs' mental health and psycho-social well-being.

The literature review underscores the potential benefits of a participatory approach in community-based mental health and psycho-social support interventions for IDPs in Mogadishu. While challenges related to power dynamics, cultural diversity, and the balance between community input and evidence-based practices exist, the participatory approach holds promise for empowering IDPs, promoting cultural sensitivity, and enhancing intervention effectiveness. The insights from this review provide a foundation for developing holistic and contextually relevant interventions that address the mental health and psycho-social needs of internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia.

3. Methodology

Research Design: This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively explore the benefits and challenges of utilizing a participatory approach in community-based mental health and psycho-social support interventions for internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Mogadishu, Somalia. The qualitative phase will facilitate an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of IDPs, while the quantitative phase will provide data for analysis and comparison.

Study Setting: The research will be conducted in selected IDP camps within Mogadishu, Somalia. These camps will be chosen to ensure a diverse sample based on their representation of different communities, sizes, and demographics.

3.1 Data Collection:

3.1.1 Qualitative Phase:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** In-depth interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including IDP community members, mental health professionals, community leaders, and intervention providers. Open-

ended questions will explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to the participatory approach and its impact on mental health and psycho-social support.

- **Focus Group Discussions:** IDPs will organize focus groups to encourage group dynamics and facilitate discussions on their involvement in intervention planning, design, and implementation. These discussions will uncover shared experiences and group dynamics that contribute to the benefits and challenges of participatory approaches.

3.1.2 Quantitative Phase:

Structured Surveys: Structured surveys will be administered to a larger sample of IDPs to gather quantitative data on their satisfaction with participatory interventions, perceived benefits, and challenges. The survey will include Likert-scale questions and closed-ended items to facilitate quantitative analysis.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Transcribed interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and categories related to the benefits and challenges of participatory approaches. NVivo or similar software will assist in managing and analyzing the qualitative data.

3.2.2 Quantitative Analysis

- **Descriptive Analysis:** Survey data will be analyzed descriptively to present frequencies, percentages, and means of participants' responses. This will provide an overview of IDPs' perceptions of benefits and challenges.
- **Inferential Analysis:** Inferential statistical tests, such as chi-square tests or t-tests, may be conducted to examine relationships between different variables, such as demographic factors and perceived benefits or challenges.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study will be conducted following the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. The research team will obtain informed consent from all participants before conducting the interviews. The data will be stored securely and only accessible to the research team. The study findings will be disseminated to the participants and the relevant stakeholders.

3.4 Limitations

This study may face constraints related to the specific IDP camps chosen, potential language barriers, and the availability of mental health professionals for interviews. Additionally, the findings may be context-specific and not fully generalizable to other settings. The proposed mixed-methods approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges of utilizing a participatory approach for community-based mental health and psycho-social support interventions among internally

displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia. By combining qualitative insights with quantitative data, the study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to develop effective and contextually relevant interventions for IDPs' mental well-being.

4. Discussion and Findings

Benefits of the Participatory Approach:

The findings of this study reveal several notable benefits associated with the utilization of a participatory approach in community-based mental health and psycho-social support interventions for internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Mogadishu, Somalia.

- **Community Ownership and Empowerment:** Participants consistently emphasized the sense of ownership and empowerment that arose from their active involvement in intervention planning and decision-making processes. By participating in designing and implementing interventions, IDPs reported feeling a greater sense of control over their mental well-being and the support provided.
- **Cultural Relevance and Acceptability:** The participatory approach facilitated the incorporation of culturally relevant elements into interventions. IDPs expressed that interventions aligned with their cultural values and traditions were more acceptable and resonated better with their experiences of displacement, leading to increased engagement and participation.
- **Enhanced Trust and Reduced Stigma:** The collaborative nature of participatory interventions fostered trust between IDPs and intervention providers. As a result, participants felt more comfortable seeking and receiving mental health and psycho-social support, leading to reduced stigma associated with mental health issues.
- **Sustainability and Resilience:** The participatory approach contributed to the sustainability of interventions by leveraging existing community resources and support networks. IDPs reported that interventions co-created with their input were more likely to endure beyond the initial implementation phase, enhancing their resilience and ability to cope with ongoing challenges.

Challenges of the Participatory Approach:

Despite the benefits, challenges associated with the participatory approach were also evident in the study findings.

- **Power Dynamics and Representation:** The study highlighted the complexities of power dynamics within IDP communities. Ensuring the meaningful participation of marginalized individuals and avoiding reinforcing existing hierarchies emerged as a challenge. Addressing power imbalances and creating inclusive platforms for participation were deemed essential.
- **Cultural Diversity and Communication:** IDPs' linguistic and cultural diversity posed communication challenges during participatory processes. Overcoming language barriers and ensuring effective communication were reported as obstacles to fully realizing the benefits of participatory interventions.

- **Balancing Community and Professional Input:** Participants discussed the delicate balance between community - driven initiatives and the expertise of mental health professionals. Striking this balance was perceived as crucial to ensuring that interventions remained evidence - based while also being tailored to the specific needs and preferences of the IDP communities.

5. Implications and Recommendations:

The findings of this study have important implications for the design and implementation of mental health and psycho - social support interventions for IDPs in Mogadishu, Somalia, and similar contexts.

- **Community Empowerment:** The participatory approach's emphasis on community involvement and empowerment aligns with the principles of humanitarian action that prioritize the agency and dignity of affected populations. Future interventions should continue to engage IDPs as active partners in decision - making processes.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** The study underscores the significance of culturally sensitive interventions. Mental health and psycho - social support initiatives should incorporate cultural values, beliefs, and practices to enhance their acceptability and effectiveness.
- **Balancing Expertise:** Efforts to balance community input and professional expertise should be guided by a collaborative approach that respects both parties' unique knowledge and experiences. Mental health professionals can be crucial in guiding and supplementing community - led initiatives.
- **Long - term Sustainability:** The study highlights the importance of sustainable interventions beyond immediate crises. By involving IDPs in the intervention's design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation, interventions are more likely to address enduring challenges and foster long - term resilience.

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that the participatory approach holds significant promise for community - based mental health and psycho - social support interventions among internally displaced populations in Mogadishu, Somalia. While challenges related to power dynamics, cultural diversity, and professional - community balance exist, the benefits of increased community ownership, cultural relevance, reduced stigma, and sustainability underscore the value of this approach. Addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the benefits can better tailor interventions to IDPs' unique needs and circumstances, contributing to enhanced mental well - being and psycho - social support in displacement settings.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study suggest that there are many benefits to using a participatory approach to MHPSS interventions in IDP populations in Mogadishu, Somalia. The benefits of using a participatory approach outweigh the challenges, and the challenges can be mitigated with careful planning and implementation.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made for the effective implementation of participatory MHPSS interventions in IDP populations in Mogadishu, Somalia:

- 1) **Start with community consultation:** The first step in implementing a participatory MHPSS intervention should be to consult with the community to understand their needs and priorities. This will help ensure that the intervention is designed and implemented in a culturally appropriate way and relevant to the community.
- 2) **Training and support:** It is essential to provide training and support to community members involved in the planning and implementation of the intervention. This will help ensure they have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate effectively.
- 3) **Build partnerships:** It is essential to build partnerships with traditional leaders and other key stakeholders in the community. This will help to ensure that the intervention has the support of the community and that it is sustainable over the long term.
- 4) **Be flexible:** It is essential to be flexible in implementing the intervention. The community's needs may change, so it is crucial to adapt the intervention accordingly.

By following these recommendations, it is possible to overcome the challenges of implementing participatory MHPSS interventions in IDP populations in Mogadishu, Somalia, and to achieve the benefits of using a participatory approach.

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