

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 779255



In this newsletter, our project workers and facilitators of SH+ group intervention, Yasir, Sohil, and Mohammed, will share their experiences about the RE-DEFINE-project.

REFUGEE EMERGENCY - DEFINING AND IMPLEMENTING NOVEL EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS

Dear Reader,

This newsletter (1/2020) 'RE-DEFINE Finland' deals with the European Commission funded project. The aim of the project is to evaluate the efficacy of a new psychological intervention for preventing the onset of mental disorders in asylum seekers and refugees.

The newsletter aims to share the progress of the project. It will be delivered every 3 months with the co-operation sites in Finland.

The project studies the effectiveness of the *Self Help Plus (SH+)*, developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). SH+ is a guided self-help intervention developed to respond to the humanitarian crises.

The project funded by EU commission is realized at the same time in six different countries. Other participating countries besides Finland are Italy, Austria, UK, Germany, and Turkey.



The realisation of the study

The project started in 9/2018 after the preliminary phases and piloting. **The recruitment finished in 11/2019 when we reached the aimed 100 eligible participants from Finland.**

We recruited Arabic speaking adult refugees and asylum seekers from Helsinki Metropolitan Area, South-West Finland, and Tavastia Proper. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were interviewed about her/his current situation. Then s/he was randomized either to the group that was invited to SH+ intervention or to the group that received usual social and health care services.

Currently, we are running the seventh and the last SH+ group, consisting of 5 sessions. The study will go on until the end of the year 2020 by doing the follow-up interviews with all the participants. All the participants are invited to the follow-up interviews at the end of SH+ groups, at 6 months and 12 months from their randomization.

More information about the study:

<http://re-defineproject.eu/>

Warm thanks to all who have participated in the study!

Experiences of SH+ facilitators

Conversations and learning something new

Running the SH+ groups have been fruitful and rewarding experience for the facilitators (persons trained for implementing SH+ group intervention). Especially conversations with participants and sharing experiences have felt meaningful. Similar cultural background between participants and facilitators has strengthened mutual understanding.

Facilitators considered that group sessions may help participants to adopt new knowledge and vocabulary to describe emotions and psychological reactions. Several participants have expressed their gratefulness for the possibility to attend the SH+ group. The facilitators have also found the exercises of the SH+ intervention useful. For them it has been easy to combine exercises with the audios' of the intervention.

Facilitators have learned a lot during the RE-DEFINE- project. They have gained knowledge from e.g. mental health and its problems. In addition, facilitators described development in their interaction skills. It is now easier for them to discuss with unknown people, how to meet people with difficulties in their life, listen to them and give them space.

Organizing SH+ groups

Facilitators have felt that organizing SH+ group sessions are worthwhile. All the practical issues have worked well but it has required flexibility from both facilitators and SH+ participants, for example regarding schedules of the sessions. SH+ groups have gathered on both weekends and workdays based on participants' wishes. Facilitators have also guided the SH+ in another city, which has caused long working days.

Facilitators found it workable that they manage SH+ sessions as a pair. In addition, they felt that they had received a lot of support from the research group for realising both the intervention and the sessions. Clear tasks and responsibilities have eased their work.

A feasible method

Facilitators considered that SH+ group intervention is a feasible method to promote mental health. They felt that SH+ may provide preventive support so that it is not the only option to seek professional healthcare services when symptoms exacerbate. However, facilitators recognized that it can be challenging to market the group intervention so that the possible participants realize the value of the intervention. According to facilitators, the SH+ intervention could be a valuable adjunct to immigrant services for those who are interested in group activities and able to be committed to it.

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RE-DEFINE Partners

All involved partners have a strong track record in mental health and psychosocial support in the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, it is important for the success of this project that the consortium partners not only be leading experts in their field but also cover key positions in countries where the scaling-up is carried out. This will facilitate relationships with stakeholders and end-users and dissemination.

