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Title

Piloting an Evidence Gap Map for Refugee Mental Health Interventions: The Healing Roots Project

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Abstract

Aims: Healing Roots is a collaborative initiative between Columbia University and University of Ioannina (both based in host destinations). The project aims to develop an open-access Evidence Gap Map (EGM) of mental health interventions targeting forcibly displaced populations.

Methods: Following the PICOT framework, we searched PubMed for articles published in English and describing mental health interventions implemented among displaced populations, yielding over 16,800 citations. After title and abstract screening, we selected 662 studies for full-text screening. 434 studies were eligible for data extraction. We created a data extraction form of 25 core variables and conducted pilot data extraction on 86 studies. Extracted data were synthesized to create a pilot EGM.

Results: The most commonly implemented interventions used cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and were implemented in group formats. Frequently evaluated outcomes included depression, PTSD, and anxiety. Few interventions focused on structural factors and digital tools. Many studies reached refugees of different nationalities. Most interventions were provided to adults and children after displacement, with fewer studies examining adolescents. There was a noticeable increase in relevant studies after 2015, following major global displacement events. The pilot EGM showed significant geographical disparities, with Europe significantly overrepresented, while South America, Australia, and South Asia were underrepresented. Stakeholders highlighted the need to move beyond symptom reduction, by promoting functioning, resilience, and empowerment and to address structural barriers, while accounting for the contextual complexity of refugees' lives.

Conclusion: This pilot study supported the feasibility and utility of an EGM for refugee mental health interventions. The Healing Roots EGM serves as a foundation for a publicly available

platform that supports decision-makers and practitioners in developing effective mental health interventions for displaced populations.

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Keywords: refugees, mental health, intervention, evidence gap map, CBT, PTSD, PM+, resilience, implementation, equity, anxiety, depression.