



IMPACT ASSESSMENT: CARE's Psychosocial Support Program

CARE Jordan, PQ Department
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Introduction

As part of the CARE's response under the Syria Regional Response Plan (3RP), CARE International in Jordan is providing Psycho Social Support (PSS) to refugee and Jordanian women, girls, boys, and men in urban areas and Azraq camp, covering the second and the third layers of IASC's intervention pyramid; community and family supports and focused, non-specialized supports. The main purpose of the PSS program is to protect them from psychosocial distress, improve their emotional and social well-being, and strengthen their coping mechanisms and resilience.

With more than twenty-one Jordanian staff as of August 2021, according to CARE, the program has benefitted over 44,627 women, 17,936 girls, 19,265 boys, and 33,049 men including 94,421 refugees and 20,456 Jordanians to date. There are eight safe spaces at CARE's community centers in urban areas (Amman, Mafraq, Zarqa, and Irbid) and Azraq camp.

This document presents the findings of a qualitative impact assessment that aims to explore the impact of the PSS interventions, including both intended and unintended impact on targeted beneficiaries. The Programs Quality (PQ) Department used the *Outcome Harvesting* participatory approach, which collects evidence of what has changed "outcomes" and, then, working backwards, ascertaining whether, how, and to what extent the intervention has contributed to these changes.

The overall structure of the assessment takes the form of four sections, including the methodology used for this assessment and the bias and limitations of this assessment. The third section presents the findings of the assessment, focusing on the two key themes; emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing. The final section draws upon the entire assessment, tying up the recommendations to be considered in the designing of future PSS programming within CARE Jordan and the broader context of Syria Response.

Methodology

To understand the short, medium, and long-term effects of the PSS program, the PQ team applied the outcome harvesting approach using two qualitative methods, including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews. The PQ team conducted twenty virtual FGDs in urban areas via the Zoom application and eight in-person FGDs in Azraq camp to obtain feedback from the program beneficiaries, including 117 females and 63 males. In addition to this, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with a Jordanian woman and two men who live in urban areas.

Outcome harvesting is an evaluation approach that allows us to retrospectively identify emergent impact by collecting examples of what has changed in "behavior writ large" (actions, relationships, policies, practices) and then work backwards to determine whether, and how, an intervention has contributed to these changes.

The assessment has targeted community members who participated in CARE's PSS activities between 2019 and 2021 through in-person and virtual modalities, including peer-support group discussions, recreational activities, awareness sessions, mindfulness, debate, and neuroscience. The PQ team used the purposive sampling technique for selecting the respondents and ensured reaching the saturation level by analyzing the data in parallel with data collection.

Table 1: The demographic data of FGDs' participants

Activity	Number of FGDs		Sex		Nationality			Age group		
	Urban	Azraq camp	Female	Male	Jordanian	Syrian	Iraqi	Adolescents	Adult	Elderly
Peer-support group discussions	7	2	46	15	4	56	1	14	47	0
Recreational activities	7	3	40	29	8	60	1	42	27	0
Awareness sessions	6	0	14	16	7	22	1	8	22	0
Mindfulness	0	1	4	2	0	6	0	0	6	0
Debate	0	1	7	1	0	8	0	0	8	0
Neuroscience	0	1	6	0	0	6	0	0	0	6
Total	20	8	117	63	19	158	3	64	110	6

We informed the participants before their participation of the purpose and nature of the research. There are no direct benefits to the participants from their participation in the assessment. Participants were advised that their participation is voluntary, meaning that they could refuse to participate in the research, they were free to refuse answering any question, or end their participation at any time without any negative consequences.

The PQ team seriously addressed confidentiality and anonymity from the outset and discussed with participants prior to commencing interviews. Participants were made aware that under Jordanian law CARE would be obliged to inform the authorities if we know that someone under the age of 18 is being abused, or in the case of emergency if they fear that some may seriously harm themselves or someone else.

This being said, there was a potential for an interview to become negative and for an individual to disclose personal experiences of violence. In case this happened, we made sure to listen carefully to them and offering them to meet CARE's psychosocial team if they wanted to.

Bias and limitations

The main limitation to the assessment is the positive bias often associated with this kind of assessment. Vulnerable people in resource-poor environments are usually prone to say they have a positive view of a program when they have access to few other services. The PQ team controlled for this somewhat by asking for specific examples of positive outcomes resulting from the program.

One of the key limitations of using the outcome harvesting is that outcomes are only captured if they have already been described in the documentation, or if the change agent (the individual or organization that influences the outcomes) is aware of them. This might mean a bias towards outcomes that are easy to identify, and away from those that are more difficult to measure.



Strengthening emotional wellbeing

Self-fulfillment

The findings show that structured activities helped refugees to cope with their new realities and gave them a sense of purpose, built their self-esteem and resilience, and provided them with a peer network. Syrian boys also reported being able to interact with members of the host community without discrimination, which helped to increase their feelings of acceptance and self-esteem. This in turn helped them develop a more positive outlook for the future. One of the participants in urban areas stated, *“My priority when I had arrived in Jordan was to survive, but my participation in the peer support group sessions and other activities at the safe space has made me discover my goals and dreams and gave me hope”*.

Also, women in Azraq camp reported that their participation in the program has fostered a positive self-image and encouraged them to be optimistic about their future. A female participant said: *“I do not feel marginalized anymore. I have a role in this life, I could take care of myself and think about projects to do in the future.”* Another female said; *“I was so happy, so energetic after the participation in the support groups, I feel like I am home again”*.

Participants described how the PSS program engendered a strong sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, and this helped them to feel that they were worthwhile. Focuses on their personal, educational, and career goals translated into increased self-esteem, and this was beneficial for their mental health. One of the girls said, *“It has motivated me to dream and work on my goal...my long-term goal is to serve humanity as a Social Worker when I grow up”*. Also, male adolescent stated: *“My participation in the activities has made me realize that I could achieve and aspire my dreams.”*



The findings show that leisure and physical activities enhance well-being by increasing feelings of competency and relaxation, and distracting from difficulties. One of the male participants said, *“I felt happy and proud of myself when they gave me the opportunity to sing and play drums for other participants”*. Also, an adolescent boy stated: *“As a result of CARE’s support, I learned to plant...taking care of my plants makes me feel cheerful; it is my passion and hobby.”*

The respondents who participated in art-based interventions in Azraq camp indicated that they had the opportunity to explore their interests, develop creativity, increase self-expression, be distracted from difficulties, and build resilience within the safe spaces at CARE’s community centers. A woman in Azraq camp stated: *“I feel relaxed while I am pottering; I usually fully present in the moment as there are so many subtle movements that require attention and precision ... I feel that I am special when I finish an art piece.”*

Also, the program encouraged adolescent girls in Azraq camp to use their voice and talents in the community to support girls and help defend their rights through art-based activities such as theater.

The findings in Azraq camp show that there is a correlation between improving social and emotional wellbeing and increasing women’s participation in income generation opportunities. This indicates the importance of psychosocial support activities as a booster for Women's Economic Empowerment programming. One of the female participants said: *“It is shame for women in rural areas [in Syria] to work or even leave their house alone.... I used not to leave my shelter [In Azraq camp] much, however, I have become a social and confident person, which has encouraged me to apply for a job [register in the Incentive-Based Volunteering, IBV Scheme] for the first time in my life.”*

One of the participants in Azraq camp mentioned that the enrollment of a down's syndrome woman in the pottery sessions has increased her self-esteem and social wellbeing, and encouraged her to have aspired to play an active role in the community and to get an IBV opportunity.

Self-worth and personal development

The participants reported that the program had spillover effects on other areas of their lives as it has exposed them to situations for self-reflection and personal growth. Adolescents in the FGDs echoed the transformation in overcoming extreme shyness and expressing themselves in public. One male participant said: *“ I was too shy to start a conversation.. the psychosocial activities helped me to be more confident.”*



Also, a female adolescent in Azraq camp stated: *“I was unsociable and a shy person ... I was not talkative even with my family members. However, my participation in the football activity has changed my personality 180- degrees. I overcame shyness and I have more friends.”*

In addition to this, the participants indicated that their participation in community events has improved their communication skills. A woman in Azraq camp stated: *“I was an introvert who did not have friends in the camp... I learned how to communicate effectively with people and express my ideas clearly.”*

Additionally, the participants highlighted that the structured activities increased their confidence and self-worth. One of the adolescent girls stated: *“I positively see myself now. It’s harder for others to change that, and I can persuade my family to see that value too.”* Also, they mentioned having greater courage and sense of decision-making power after being involved in the psychosocial activities. A Syrian woman said: *“I think that my personality has been empowered.. I have more courage and confidence.”*

Syrian adolescent girls in Azraq camp appreciated being consulted in the decision-making process in some activities such as acting and theater and reported that as a result, they felt confident in making their own decisions. The effects of the program were magnified among girls from conservative families, who often had limited decision-making power to begin with.

Some women mentioned that their participation in the activities has encouraged them to say no and maintain healthy boundaries in their relations with their spouse, relatives, and friends, which would let them avoid becoming overwhelmed and burnt out by taking on too much. One of the participants in urban areas stated: *“I grew up in a way that made me feel shy to say no to others.. I recognized through participating in the “story of my life” activity that I should set good boundaries without regret.”*

Healthy lifestyle

Some respondents started practicing healthy lifestyle behaviors that promote psychological wellbeing such as walking and mindful eating. One of the female participants stated *“I started practicing mindful eating and taking daily brisk walk. As a result, I lost weight and increased my life satisfaction.”*

Mothers' perception of self-care has changed as they thought that it is time-consuming or something they feel guilty about doing because their priority was their children, not themselves. One of the mothers stated *“All of my energy was focused on my children and I used to forget to look after myself. I have learned that I should prioritize my well-being and dedicate time for myself...I started taking better care of myself”.*



Another mother said *“I used to neglect myself so I felt depressed with time ...After participating in the peer support groups, I started doing more self-care activities that boosted my mood. This has also influenced my relationship with my children for the better as I have now more positive insight towards life.”*

Additionally, the participants in Azraq camp indicated that their enrollment in the running group has encouraged them to make running a daily habit that relieves stress and improves mood. One of the male participants stated: *“I lost 18 kilograms in six months; I ran around 8 KM daily ...I am proud of myself; I was overweight .. [Laughing] I could not even sit on the ground comfortably.”*

Also, women who participated in the mindfulness sessions in Azraq camp emphasized that they learned practical and mindfulness-based exercises for stress reduction. One of the participants said: *“I realized that I forgot myself; I did not use to see myself in the mirror for days and to eat after every one of my family... I have self-worth now; I wake up early to exercise inside the shelter, and I have dedicated an hour daily for skincare or visiting friends.”*

Coping mechanism

Many FGDs' participants indicated that tended to take out their stress on household members, typically by aggressive acts, shouting at, or mistreating wives/husbands and children. However, many of the participants reported becoming mindful of their behaviors and decisions in stressful situations. An Iraqi wife stated *“I used to have regular arguments and conflicts with my husband because I did not know how to manage my anger.. My wellbeing has improved after participating in the group discussions and*

sport activities".

The findings show that women tend to cry when they feel angry, frustrated, and depressed as a self-soothing behavior, which is considered as one of the passive coping mechanism. However, their participation in the PSS program has helped them to adapt new strategies to cope with stress concerns such as talking to one another, changing body posture, and practicing breathing exercises. One of the female participants stated *"My main coping mechanism with stress was crying. However, expressing my feelings with other mothers has made me feel better"*. Another participant said *"I used to feel as if I was going to explode, but now I practice breathing exercises to feel better."*

Some women in Azraq camp indicated that they adopted new relaxation techniques that encourage deep breathing. For instance, they pretend that they have a nice-smelling flower in one hand and a slow-burning candle in the other, then breathe in slowly through their nose as they smell the flower, and breathe out slowly through their mouth as they blow out the candle. Also, some women in Azraq camp mentioned pottery as one of their favorite stress-relieving activities, which is offered by CARE through regular pottery sessions.

Some participants indicated taking a walk as one of their new coping mechanisms to relieve stress. One of the female participants said: *"Walking gives me time to think, as well as time to get away from stressors... It helps me find solutions instead of firing myself with anger."*

Participants in Azraq camp emphasized that their participation in PSS activities has made them cope with living in a camp environment. One of the participants stated: *"The hardship of living in a desert was all that I thought about when I had arrived in Azraq camp, I did not feel as if I had a future...I felt alive again when I participated in the peer-support groups. Finally, I made peace with myself because I kept blaming myself for making the decision to come here."*

It was noticed that the program challenges gender norms that related to acknowledging men's right to express their feelings. A man in urban areas stated that *"I had never spoken up about my feelings or cried even in front of my wife.... I felt very comfortable to express my emotions ...and cry, cry, and cry while I was talking with Ms.Maysa [CARE's Psychosocial Counsellor], which made me feel relieved."*

Strengthening social wellbeing

Social connectedness and social capital

Syrian adolescent girls in urban areas most often mentioned the effects of the interventions on their psychosocial well-being, especially due to the restrictions on their mobility in their household, school and wider community. The program encouraged girls to explore their own interests, identities and friendships, which in turn increased their self-confidence and resilience. One of the participants stated *"I did not use to go anywhere except school before participating in the safe space's activities."*

A Syrian woman in urban areas stated: *"I didn't leave my house much... I used to spend my days taking care of my family... CARE has helped me to get out of my comfort zone; I went out frequently to participate in the peer support groups, and I became part of a group.. part of a community."*



Participants explained that the program fostered engagement with their community. The activities afforded participants a substantial degree of social connectedness through the relationships they formed at safe spaces with other participants, and with the wider community with whom they interacted. As a result, participants felt a sense of acceptance and belonging in their new environment. A Syrian male adolescent in urban areas stated *"I did not leave my house for five days ... I did not have friends so I spent my time in the summer break playing pubg game. After my enrollment in CARE's psychosocial activities, I have made friends in Jordan for the first time. "*

Also, an Iraqi woman stated: *"I have problems with my close family. However, I felt like they [other participants in the peer support groups] were my own family."*

Participants reported being able to discuss their feelings and lived experiences that could be traumatic in a safe and conducive environment through the peer-support groups. They indicated that sharing their experiences and advices with other participants has made them feel that they were doing something valuable. This in turn affected their self-image and they were able to view themselves in a more positive light.

Women indicated that their enrollment in the program has increased access to a supportive network and trusted role models who demonstrate good mental health practices. In the peer support groups, participants had the opportunities to offer advice to each other because of their shared lived experiences. A Syrian woman in urban areas stated: *“I received very useful advice from sisters [other participants] in the group ..their opinions are important for me because it is coming from people who have walked in my shoes.”*

Also, they mentioned that their participation in the peer support groups is a freeing experience, as they learned about each other and realized “I am not alone”. One of the participants stated: *“ Whoever hears people’s misfortunes, their misfortune will be easy for them.”*

Moreover, peer support created opportunities for participants to build their support networks, share their stories, learn about available community services, discuss issues related to acculturation, and build emotional strength through sharing coping strategies. One of the male participants stated *“Attending the peer support groups discussions has made me put myself in their shoes and feel empathy with them as I could be in this position tomorrow.”*



Some of the participants in urban areas mentioned that they had made lasting relationships with peers with whom they are still in touch. They reported having developed strong and supportive relationships with peers from different nationalities. For instance, one of the female participants stated: *“ Other participants contacted me to ask how I was doing when my daughter got sick.”* The participants use WhatsApp to stay in touch. However, one male participant indicated that other male participants visits him at home from time to time.

The program helped Syrians in Azraq camp overcome isolation, generate a feeling of belonging, and build connections. For instance, a group of girls indicated that they come to the camp library three times a week to meet their friends, who draw and read books together. They mentioned that there is no other open safe space for girls to spend time together without committing to attending specific structured activities, considering that visiting each other at their shelter is not an option with the existence of other family members.

The program has contributed to sustaining positive and tolerant behavior towards family members of the opposite sex, and peers from different nationalities and ethnicities. The findings show that the PSS activities enhanced social cohesion among participants from diverse backgrounds in urban

areas, where intercultural dialogue and face-to-face encounters have been found to play a role in reconciliation. The activities were effective in reducing prejudice and in creating more positive attitudes between participants of different nationalities and ethnicities. For instance, one of the Jordanian participants stated: *“I did not like to get in contact with Syrians... As a result of my participation in the activity, we became [Jordanian and Syrian participants] like sisters...I became convinced that stereotypes against Syrians are wrong”*. Also, another participant said: *“My participation in the program has increased my knowledge about other cultures in Jordan ...I now have Chechnya and Druze friends.”*

Additionally, the reported having more positive attitudes towards women and girls. One of the male participants in urban areas stated: *“I was very aggressive in behaviors with my sisters... my participation in the sessions has let me have more self-awareness about the dark sides of my personality, I started wondering why I was treating them like this way. I became more kind with them, therefore, we now have better relationship.”*

Some participants indicated that their enrollment in the PSS activities has increased their sense of social responsibility. An adolescent boy stated: *“After being enrolled in the safe space’s activities, I started helping elderly people cross the street.”*

The program influences changing everyday interactions between people so they can choose joint problem solving over violence. Male adolescents reported that the PSS activities had helped them resolve conflicts with peers in a peaceful manner and to counter prejudice. They also reported greater empathy for others. One of the participants stated: *“Attending awareness sessions about bullying has encouraged me to reduce my aggressive behaviors towards others and understand their emotions.”*

Also, some parents indicated their participation in the program has encouraged them to change their parenting style, a Jordanian woman stated *“I started listening more to my children and having discussions with them when they do something wrong instead of getting angry and screaming at them.”* Another woman said: *“ The discussion with Ms. Manal and other participants has helped me know how to treat my child who has autism.”*

This indicates that the program has promoted healthier relationships with family members by increasing their knowledge about parenting skills and adapting more mindfulness practices and stress management techniques. For instance, one of the male participants mentioned: *“I was a nervous person who gets very tense and easily upset, especially when communicating with my children.. everything has changed now; I sit with them more often and I teach them.”*

Moreover, adolescents indicated that the program had a positive impact on how they were perceived and supported within their families and in other personal relationships. Adolescents who participated in sport and art-based interventions reported that their parents noticed the positive changes in their children's conduct and were impressed with the skills they had developed. As a result, some parents became more emotionally supportive towards their children. One of the female adolescents who participated in the football activity in Azraq camp said: *"My parents noticed the improvement in my personality, and they are very proud of me."*



RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

This section summarizes key recommendations and areas of improvement based on respondents' feedback and the desk review.

- Targeting multiple domains, including individuals, family, and community (Mezzo “Intermediate” and micro levels/scales) that are more effective than targeting one domain, the impact is usually of a ripple effect. It would be worthwhile to engage couples and implement family interventions to improve mental wellbeing and strengthen marriage relationships and parenting.
- While the interventions target vulnerable populations like women, teens, and young children, it's also important to target more men and dedicate specific programming and spaces for males to cover GBV, family problem solving, and community awareness. Female beneficiaries in particular emphasized the need to bring men into discussions where they often will listen to official spokespeople such as trainers or NGO workers, and where they are specifically targeted for psychosocial activities to create an enabling environment to multiply impact from female beneficiaries.
- Future programs need to have a margin for vulnerable people of other nationalities, such as Sub-Saharan African refugees.

- Implement specialized interventions (such as elderly club, chess club, and peer-support groups) to improve the integration of senior community members into society and improve the social and emotional wellbeing of elderly people and their caregivers.
- Design theory of change for the PSS program, which includes a problem tree analysis, results-based management frameworks, and risks and assumptions. In addition to designing interventions based on theories and scientific approaches in mental health.
- Design curriculums and models for CARE Jordan's art-based and sport-based approaches in the PSS program.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of virtual psychosocial activities in Azraq camp; as some of the participants in the FGDs indicated that some of the implemented activities via WhatsApp were ineffective and had negative emotional influence on them.