

Supporting children and families:

Prevention strategies for children and caregivers affected by war

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Section

A child's drawing in crayons and markers. On the left, a large white dove is shown in flight, carrying a family of three birds (two adults and one chick) on its back. The dove is flying over a town with several buildings. In the foreground, there is a tank and a smaller vehicle. The background is filled with colorful, abstract scribbles in shades of blue, yellow, and red, suggesting a sky or a battlefield. The overall scene depicts a message of peace amidst conflict.

Families are the front line of defence

Over 1.5 billion people in the world are experiencing conflict and humanitarian challenges

Primary caregiver - 'protective shield' or can further complicate war stress

Family interaction predictive of children's adjustment in conflict settings yet there's a significant lack of family skills programmes in such contexts

How does military conflict affect children?

Some common reactions

- Emotional distress, fearful, anxious, sad
- Behaviour changes, becoming shy, withdrawn or the opposite, unusually active or aggressive
- Physical changes, eg. stomach aches, headaches
- Trauma-specific reactions to stress, nightmares, difficulty sleeping
- Clinging, bedwetting, thumb sucking
- Difficulty concentrating

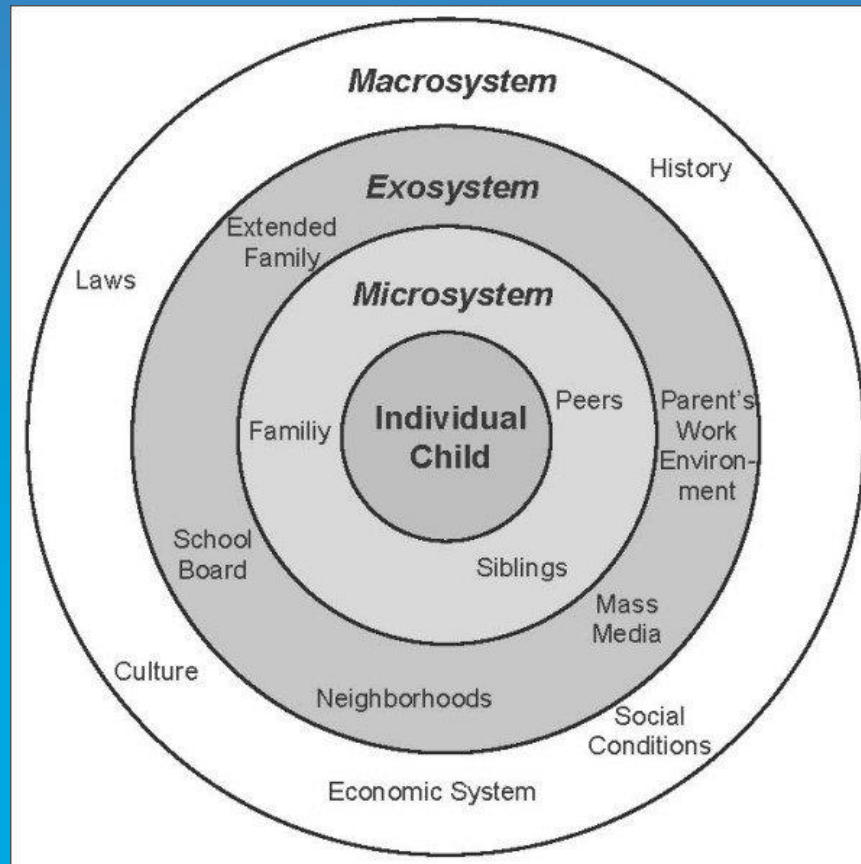
Healthy parenting is essential to early child development

- Parenting supports a child's adjustment beyond their own individual resilience (Betancourt & Khan, 2008)
- Harsh, inconsistent parenting predicts later poor outcomes: drug use, low school attainment, delinquency, poor mental health
- Parents need support in all contexts



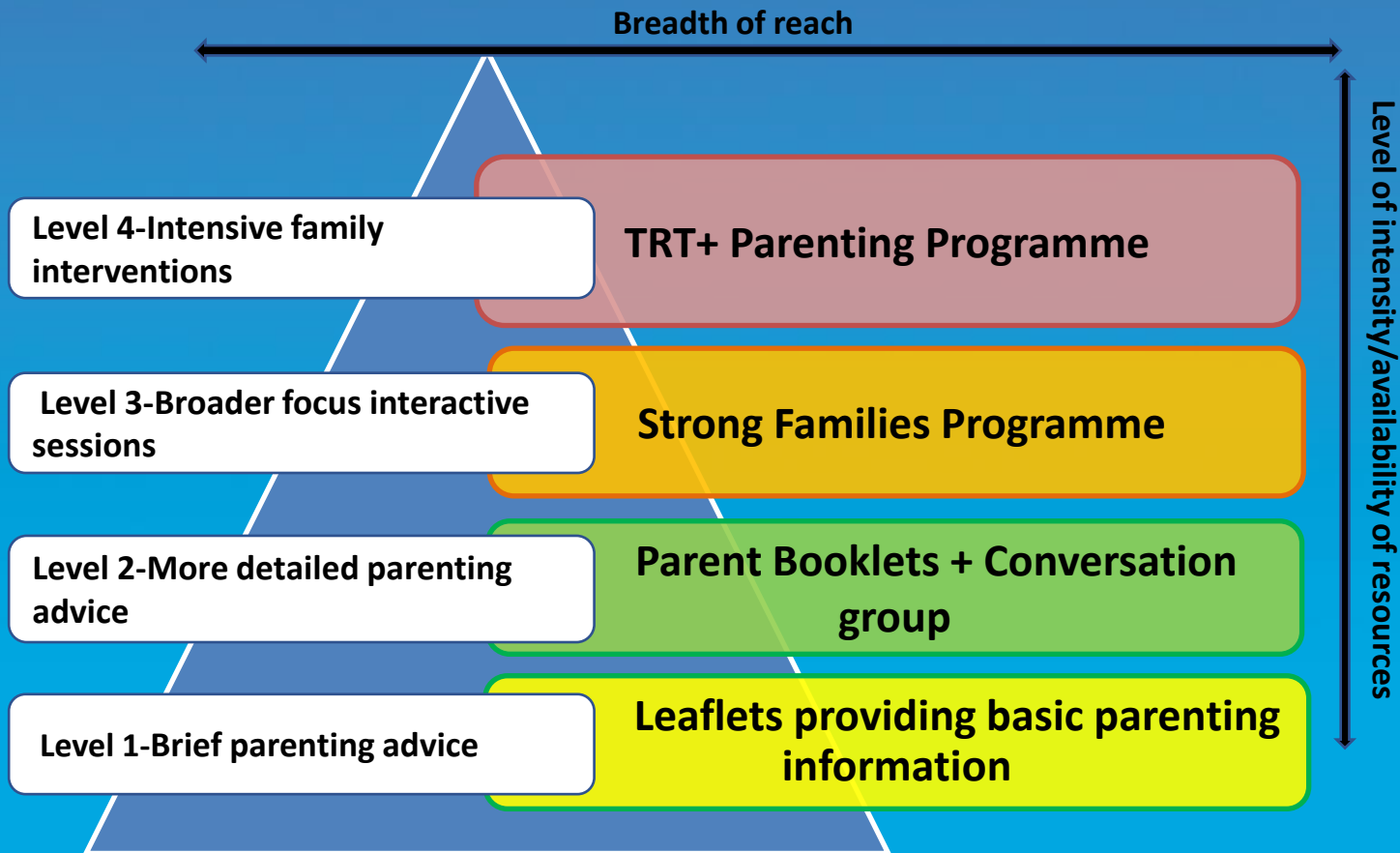
Ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979)

Dynamic; pre and post military conflict and its aftermath and into the future





A FAMILY MULTI-LEVEL PARENTING AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT DELIVERY MODEL FOR FAMILIES LIVING THROUGH CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT



Effective Family Skills Programmes: what are they?

- Programmes that aim to strengthen family protective factors such as **communication**, **trust**, **problem-solving skills** and **conflict resolution** that are relevant to their culture
- Often include opportunities for parents and children to spend positive time together, as ways to strengthen the relationship between the two
- Focus on relationships and behaviour change and PRACTICE
- Have a strong logic model



Qualitative exploration of the challenges of parenting children in refugee contexts

Recruitment areas: Syria and Turkey

Method: Interviews and Focus Groups

Sample: n=27, 8 interviews, 4 focus groups and 2 interviews with professional aid workers



El-Khani, A. *et al* (2018) Syria: Refugee parents' experiences and need for parenting support in camps and humanitarian settings. *Vulnerable Children & Youth Studies* 13(1)

El-Khani, A. *et al* (2017). Syria: coping mechanisms utilised by displaced refugee parents caring for their children in pre-settlement contexts. *Intervention*, 15(1), 34-50.

El-Khani, A. *et al* (2016). Syria: the challenges of parenting in refugee situations of immediate displacement. *Intervention*, 14(2), 99-113



Environmental challenges

- Camp/living condition stressors

“I don’t like them far, how do I know what they are doing? Everything is new here. How can I balance giving them freedom I know they need with keeping them safe? It’s very hard”

- Barriers to accessing support
- Lack of basic essential needs



Child specific challenges

- Behaviour changes
“They are spitting and hitting and shouting and using bad words. Sometimes I can’t believe these are my children, we all say this. They are very bad now”
- Emotional challenges and signs of trauma
“They cry at night, they scream a lot while they are sleeping. They are very angry. They have so many unanswered questions that I do not know how to answer”

Parent specific challenges

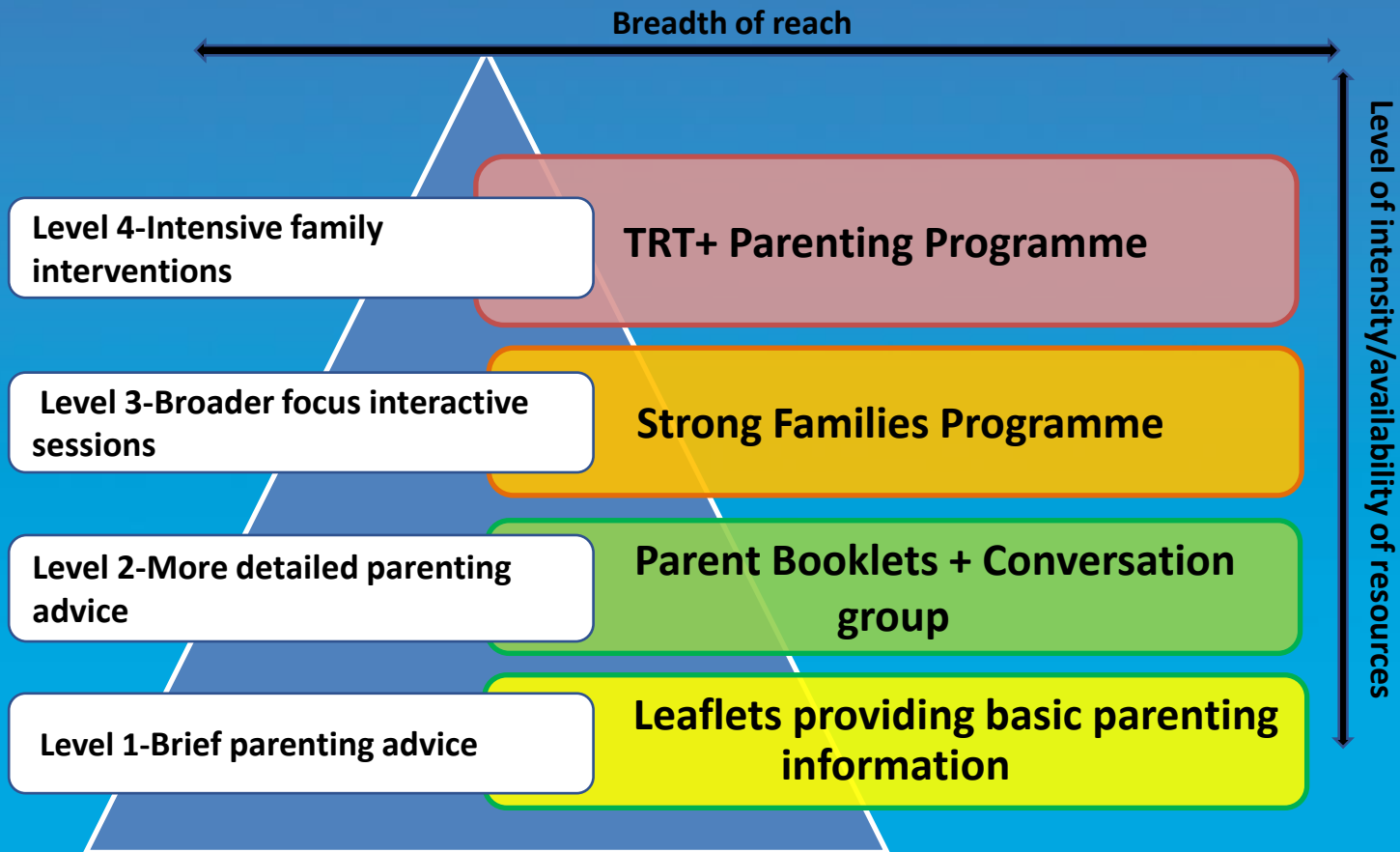
- Loss of control

“I can not control anything around me. We are living each second unaware of what’s coming next. You asked me what it’s like to be a mum now, well this is it, it’s like we are not mums, we are just keeping kids alive by feeding them and making sure they are alive and safe”

- Parents own emotional challenges

“I shout at him ‘enough! come on you must stop looking sad’. I know before you say that’s all wrong, what else can I do?”

A FAMILY MULTI-LEVEL PARENTING AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT DELIVERY MODEL FOR FAMILIES LIVING THROUGH CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT





INTERVENTIONS

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Daily bread: a novel vehicle for dissemination and evaluation of psychological first aid for families exposed to armed conflict in Syria

A. El-Khani*, K. Cartwright, A. Redmond and R. Calam

The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

Global Mental Health (2016), 3, e15, page 1 of 7. doi:10.1017/gmh.2016.9

Background. Risks to the mental health of children and families exposed to conflict in Syria are of such magnitude that research identifying how best to deliver psychological first aid is urgently required. This study tested the feasibility of a novel approach to large-scale distribution of information and data collection.

Methods. Routine humanitarian deliveries of bread by a bakery run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) were used to distribute parenting information leaflets and questionnaires to adults looking after children in conflict zones inside Syria. Study materials were emailed to a project worker in Turkey. Leaflets and questionnaires requesting feedback



Leaflets: The Bread Wrapper Study

The leaflet: Information for adults looking after a child or children through conflict and displacement

About you

- What might you be experiencing?
- What can you do to help yourself?

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-through-family-skills.html>

About your child

- What might your child be experiencing?
- What can you do to help your child?
 - Safety
 - Warmth and support
 - Giving praise
 - Spending time together and talking
 - Encouraging play
 - Maintaining a routine

Findings

- 3000 bags distributed in 2 days as part of routine deliveries by bakery staff and 200 volunteers
- **Caregiver leaflet & Questionnaire**
- Questionnaires were returned within 5 days to the bakeries
- Return rate: 1783 responses
- 59.5% return rate

NGO Watan suggested using their humanitarian supply routes into Syria

Bread delivered to everyone in the conflict area



What parents said:

I have been waiting for something useful like this after not finding anyone to answer my questions.

This is great if we follow it accordingly. It has relaxed us and shown us what to do. We can reduce anxiety and fears in our children and make them feel safer.



Share



Add to list



Like

Aala El-Khani | TEDxManchester

What it's like to be a parent in a war zone

▶ 14:17    

Details

About the talk

Transcript

22 languages

Footnotes

Notes + references

Comments

Join the conversation

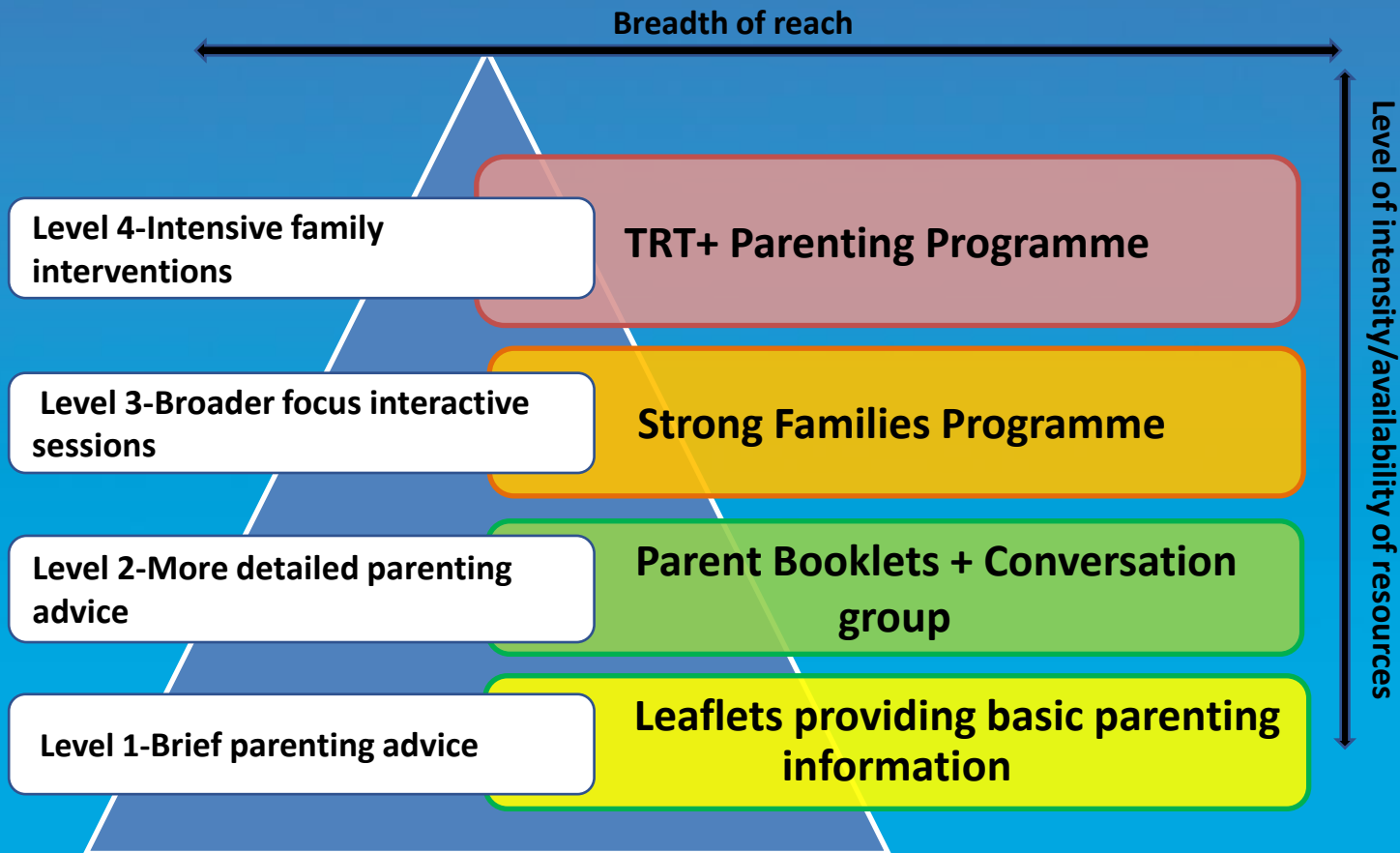
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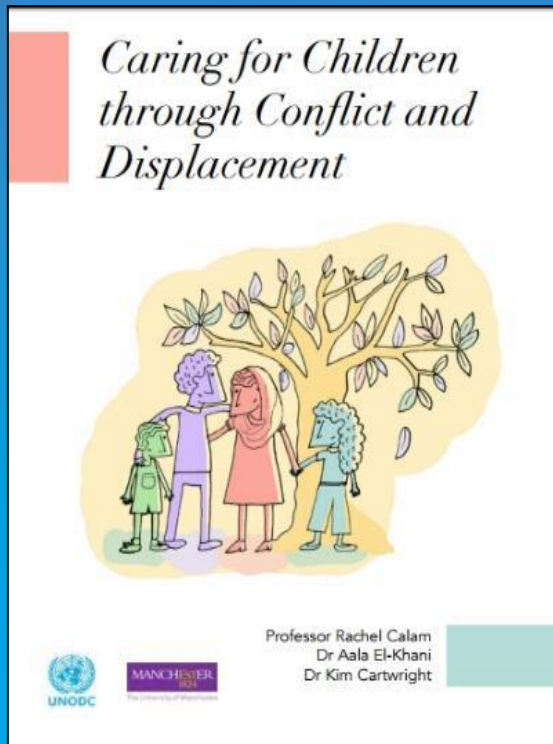
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A FAMILY MULTI-LEVEL PARENTING AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT DELIVERY MODEL FOR FAMILIES LIVING THROUGH CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT



Booklet and Conversation Group: ‘Caring for Children through Conflict and Displacement’



- No extensive training - for low resource settings
- 119 caregivers in Nablus
- Improvements in child behaviour and family functioning
- Open access

El-Khani, Maalouf, et al., 2019. Caregiving for Children through Conflict and Displacement; A pilot study testing the feasibility of delivering and evaluating a light touch parenting intervention for caregivers in the West Bank. *Journal of International Psychology*.

Caring for Children through Conflict and Displacement



Professor Rachel Calam
Dr Aala El-Khani
Dr Kim Cartwright



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COVID-19
RESPONSE



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CARING FOR YOUR CHILD DURING COVID-19



Now more than ever
Listening to children and youth
is the first step to help them
grow healthy and safe



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CARING FOR YOUR CHILD IN CRISIS SITUATIONS



Now more than ever
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International Journal of Psychology

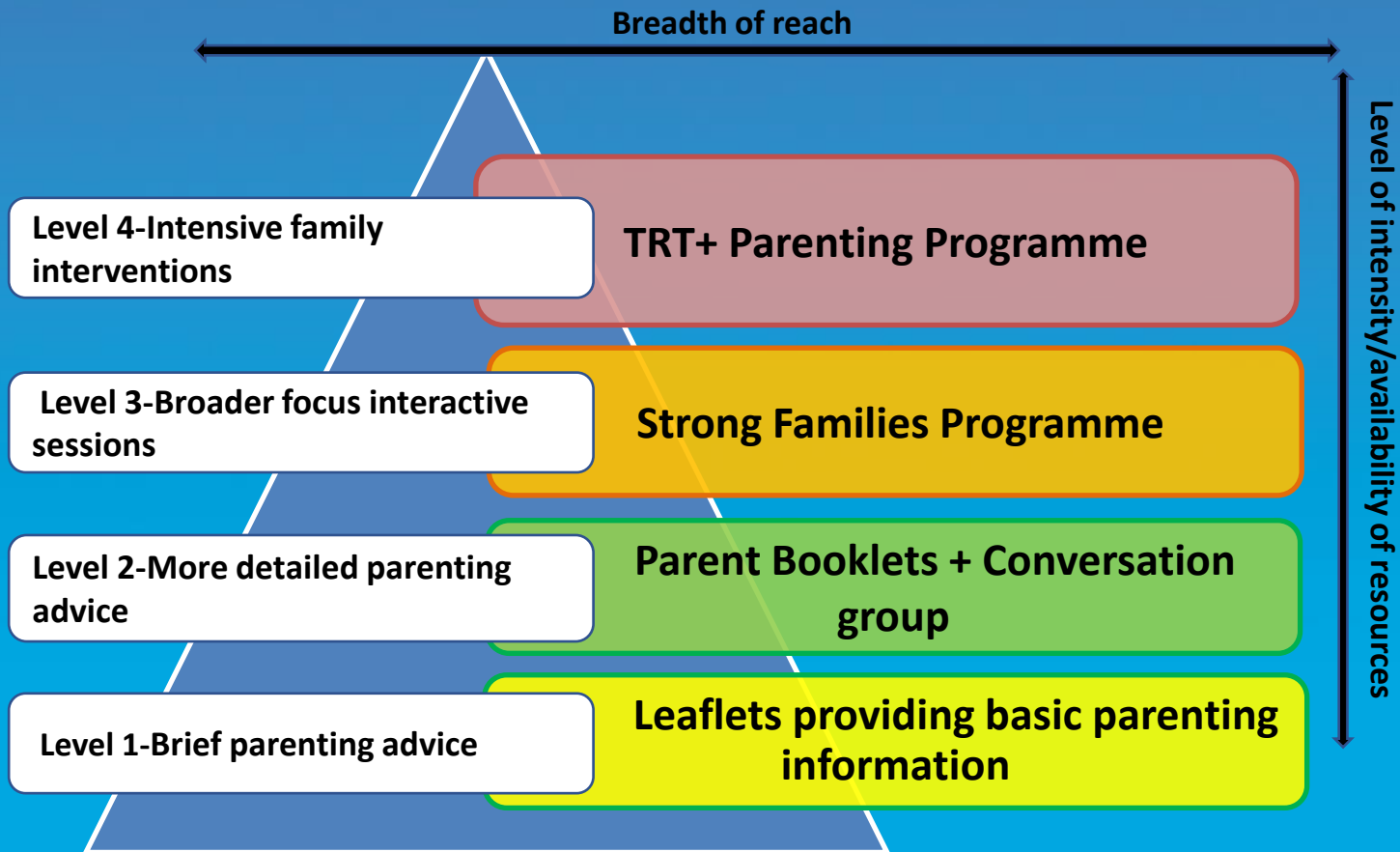
International Journal of Psychology, 2019

ISSN: 10.1002/ijop.12591

Caregiving for children through conflict and displacement: a pilot study testing the feasibility of delivering and evaluating a light touch parenting intervention for caregivers in the West Bank

Aala El-Khani¹, Wadiah Maalouf¹, Dania Abu Baker², Nosheen Zahra², Ali Noubani², and Kim Cartwright¹

A FAMILY MULTI-LEVEL PARENTING AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT DELIVERY MODEL FOR FAMILIES LIVING THROUGH CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT





STRONG
Families

Week 1	Week 2		Week 3	
Caregiver pre-session Understanding Strengths and Stresses	Caregiver session 1 Using love and limits	<i>In parallel</i>	Caregiver session 2 Teaching children what is right	<i>In parallel</i>
	Child session 1 Learning about stress		Child session 2 Following rules and appreciating parents	
	Family session 1 Learning about each other		Family session 2 Supporting values and dreams	

- For settings where families are under stress
- Brief
- Evidence-informed
- Suitable for low resource settings
- Open source (available to everyone without need to pay royalty or copyright fees)
- Cost effective
- Used in 20 countries so far



Haar et al. BMC Public Health (2020) 20:634
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08701-w>

BMC Public Health

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access

Strong families: a new family skills training programme for challenged and humanitarian settings: a single-arm intervention tested in Afghanistan



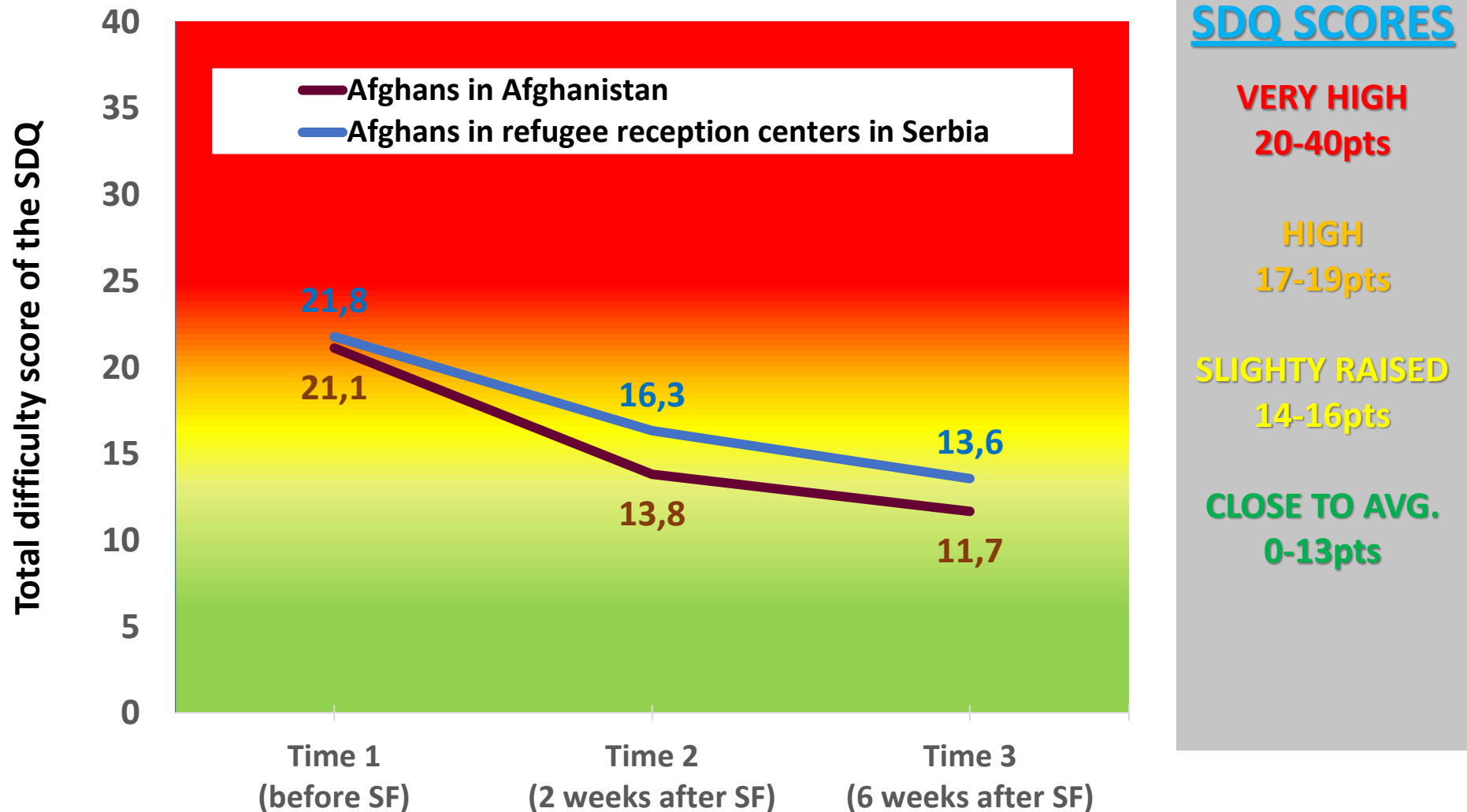
Karin Haar¹, Aala El-Khani¹, Virginia Molgaard², Wadih Maalouf^{1*} and the Afghanistan field implementation team



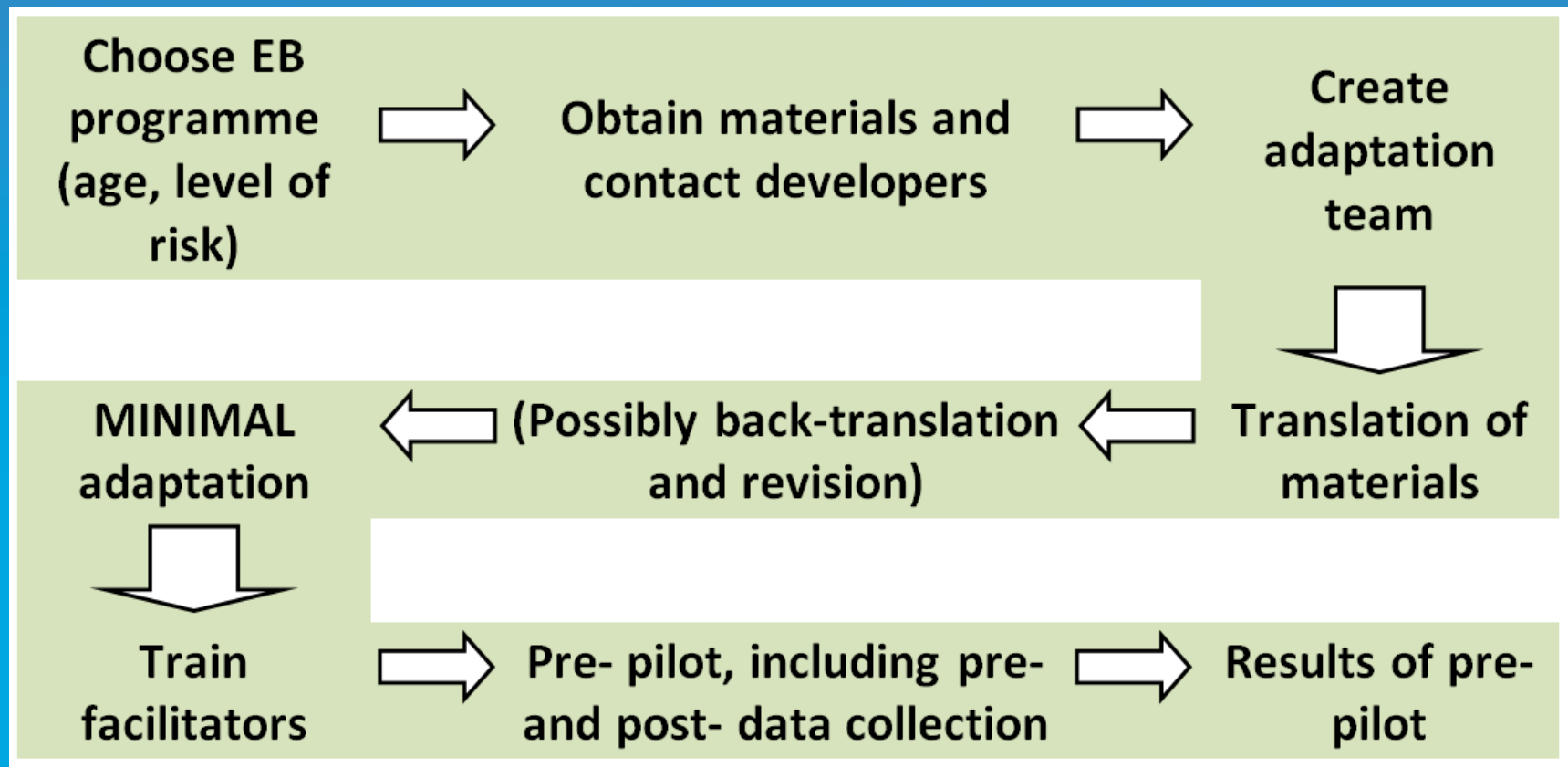
Global piloting of Strong Families



Strong Families: (SF) Change in Total Strengths and Difficulties scores for children in the very high or high category in Afghanistan (n=41) and in refugee reception centers in Serbia (n=9)



Adaptation process



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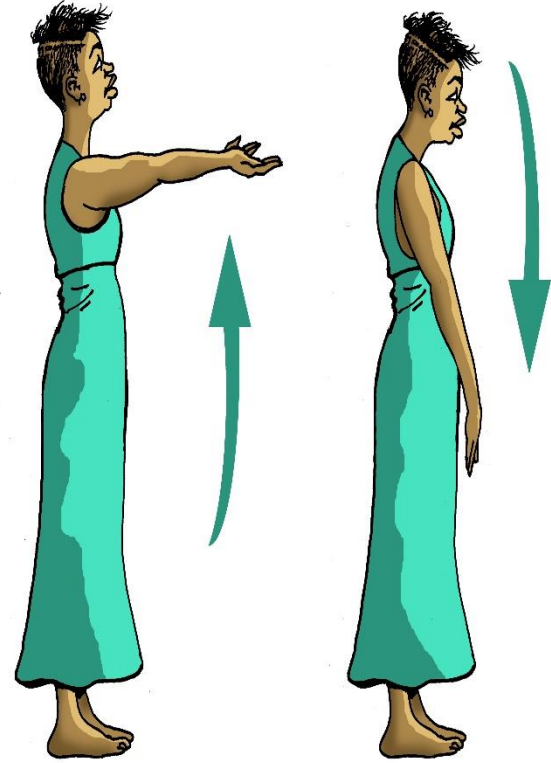
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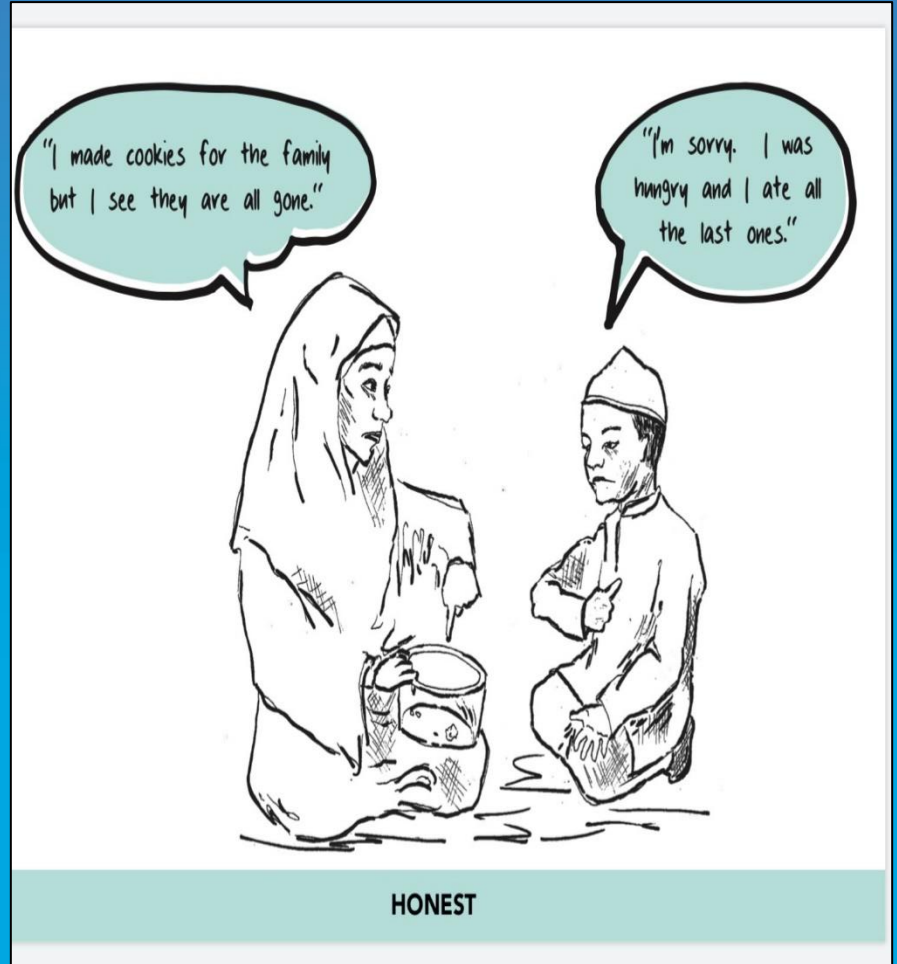


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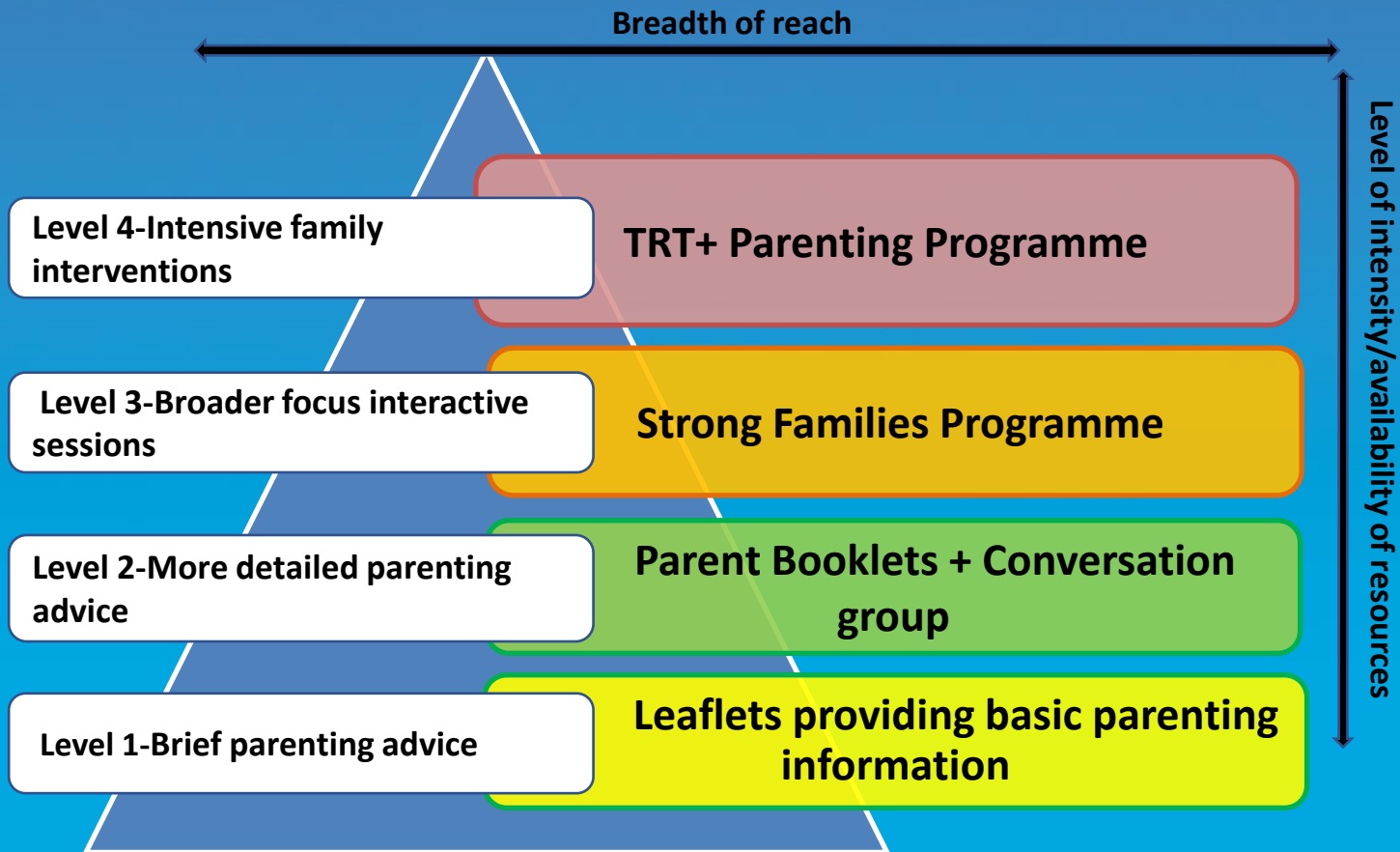


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Honest



A FAMILY MULTI-LEVEL PARENTING AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT DELIVERY MODEL FOR FAMILIES LIVING THROUGH CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT



Teaching Recovery Techniques plus Parenting (TRT+)

- Original programme:

Teaching Recovery Techniques (TRT)

5 child sessions and 2 parent sessions

- Enhanced programme:

Teaching Recovery Techniques Plus Parenting (TRT+)

5 children sessions and 5 parent sessions



Teaching Recovery Techniques Plus Parenting (TRT+)

A child trauma recovery programme enhanced with caregiver sessions for children experiencing post-traumatic stress



Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology
2018, Vol. 24, No. 2, 188–200

© 2018 American Psychological Association
1078-1919/18/\$12.00 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pac0000287>

 International Journal of
*Environmental Research
and Public Health*



Testing the Feasibility of Delivering and Evaluating a Child Mental Health Recovery Program Enhanced With Additional Parenting Sessions for Families Displaced by the Syrian Conflict: A Pilot Study

Aala El-Khani and Kim Cartwright
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Cheryl Ang
University of Bath

Elizabeth Henshaw, Mishaal Tanveer, and Rachel Calam
University of Manchester

Article

Enhancing Teaching Recovery Techniques (TRT) with Parenting Skills: RCT of TRT + Parenting with Trauma-Affected Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Utilising Remote Training with Implications for Insecure Contexts and COVID-19 †

Aala El-Khani ^{1,2,*}, Kim Cartwright ³, Wadih Maalouf ¹, Karin Haar ¹, Nosheen Zehra ⁴, Gökçe Çokamay-Yılmaz ⁵ and Rachel Calam ²

TRT Plus Parenting

Original programme:

Teaching Recovery Techniques (TRT) Children and War Foundation

5 child sessions and 2 parent sessions

Trauma-focussed cognitive behaviour therapy techniques

Enhanced programme:

Teaching Recovery Techniques plus Parenting (TRT+)

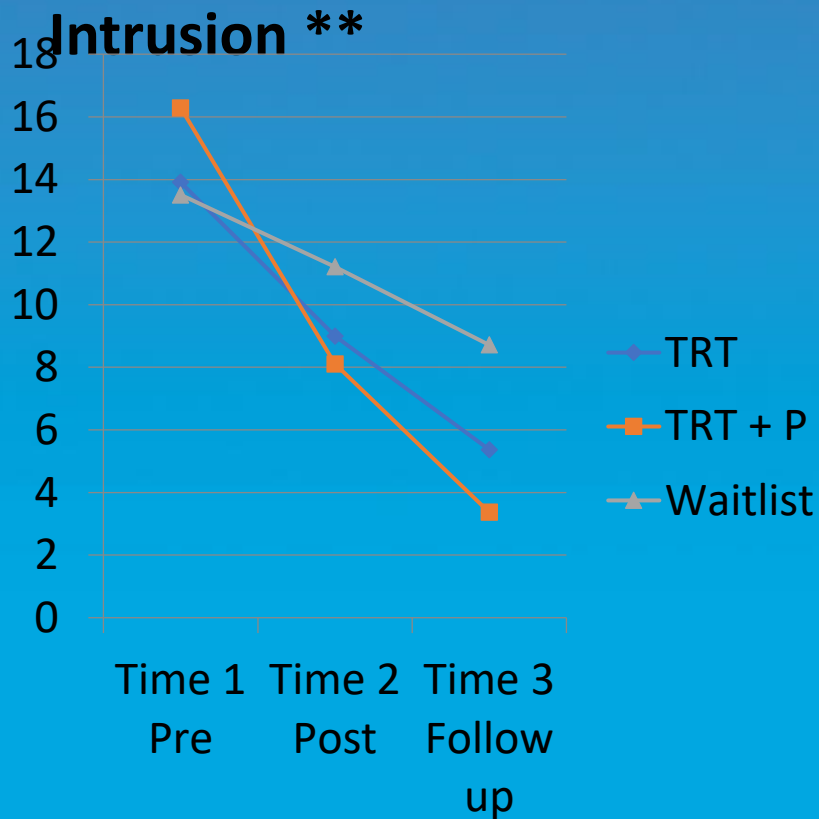
5 child sessions and 5 parent sessions

RCT in Lebanon

Enhanced, significant additional improvements for both children and caregivers across a range of measures with the Plus Parenting component, including parental depression, anxiety and stress

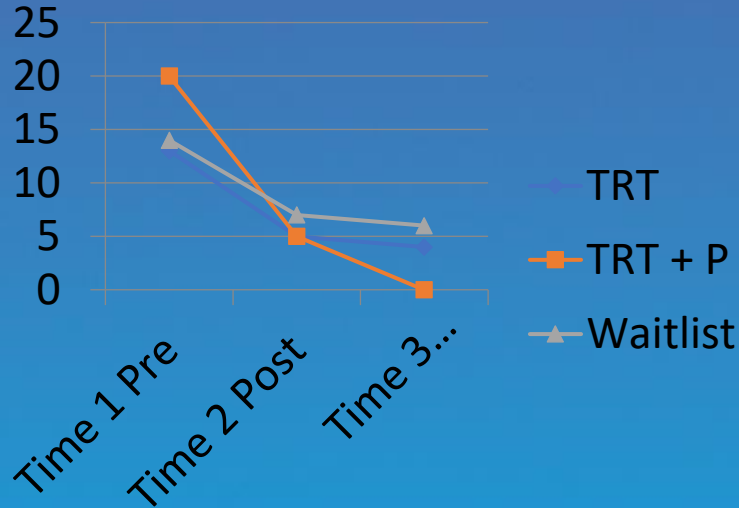
El-Khani et al (2021) Enhancing Teaching Recovery Techniques (TRT) with Parenting Skills: RCT of TRT + Parenting with Trauma-Affected Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Utilising Remote Training with Implications for Insecure Contexts and COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* doi:10.3390/ijerph18168652

Child measures



- CRIES: Intrusion, Avoidance and Arousal
- All three showed significant reductions, with significant effects of time
- Also significant reductions in anxiety and depression
- Greatest reductions were in the TRT + Parenting group

DASS Stress **



Parent measures

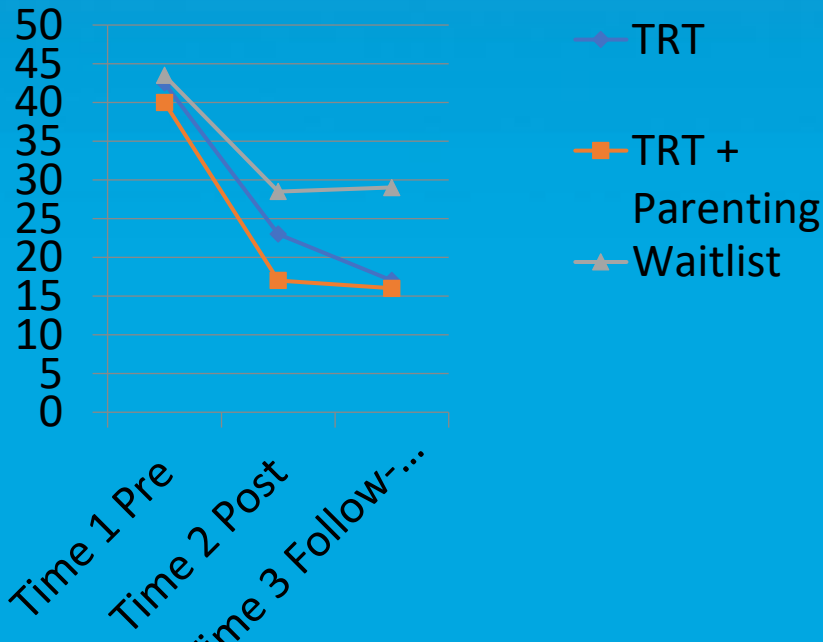
Parents reported significantly lower Parenting Scale scores, particularly Over-Reactivity

TRT Plus Parenting helped parents feel significantly less depressed, anxious and stressed

Impact of Events – Revised Total score significantly reduced

Conclusion: Enhancing parenting skills has value, and can be achieved even in challenged contexts

Impact of Events - R **



Evaluating resources and programmes

- Range available, eg: <https://ukraineparenting.web.ox.ac.uk/eng>

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-through-family-skills.html>

- Consider age of children, context, nature of experiences, how settled
- Design and feasibility
- Evidence base of interventions
- Training requirements
- Infrastructure



Key messages

- There is a crucial need for family skills training and support for families that have experienced conflict and multiple challenges
- Invest in the careful adaptation of an evidence-based programme
- The heart and mind are a powerful combination – find what stimulates you and allows you to make a difference

With particular thanks to the families, facilitators, humanitarian agencies and all who have helped with development and implementation

Karin Haar

Wadih Maalouf

Virginia Molgaard

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-through-family-skills.html>

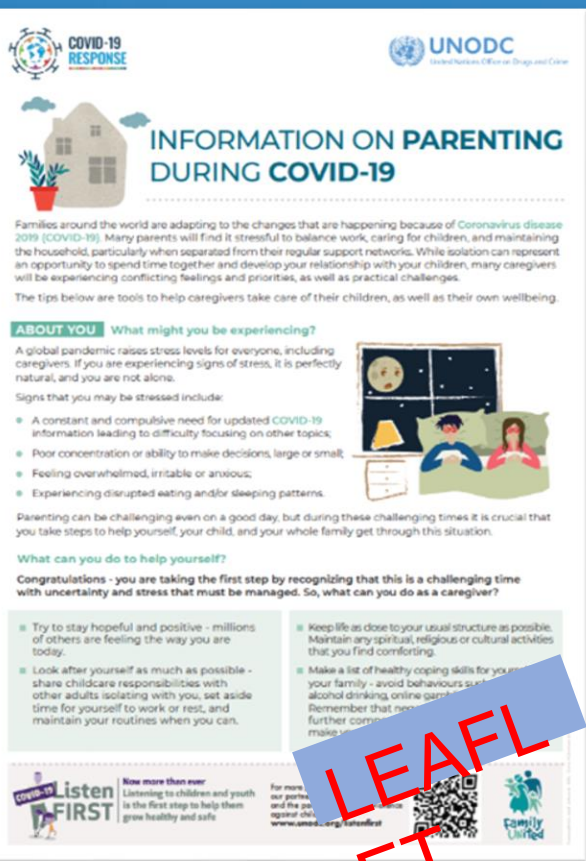
How Covid-19 may affect caregiving

- COVID-19 is associated with **parenting stress** and, in turn, **increased risk of harsh parenting**
- COVID-19 has led to **serious mental health** burden with the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and sleep problems
- Parents with elevated stress and co-occurring **anxiety and depressive symptoms** have been shown to be **less responsive** to their children's needs, which in turn is a strong predictor of **child abuse potential**.



Parenting under COVID-19

www.unodc.org/listenfirst



COVID-19 RESPONSE

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INFORMATION ON PARENTING DURING COVID-19

Families around the world are adapting to the changes that are happening because of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Many parents will find it stressful to balance work, caring for children, and maintaining the household, particularly when separated from their regular support networks. While isolation can represent an opportunity to spend time together and develop your relationship with your children, many caregivers will be experiencing conflicting feelings and priorities, as well as practical challenges.

The tips below are tools to help caregivers take care of their children, as well as their own wellbeing.

ABOUT YOU What might you be experiencing?

A global pandemic raises stress levels for everyone, including caregivers. If you are experiencing signs of stress, it is perfectly natural, and you are not alone.

Signs that you may be stressed include:

- A constant and compulsive need for updated COVID-19 information leading to difficulty focusing on other topics;
- Poor concentration or ability to make decisions, large or small;
- Feeling overwhelmed, irritable or anxious;
- Experiencing disrupted eating and/or sleeping patterns.

Parenting can be challenging even on a good day, but during these challenging times it is crucial that you take steps to help yourself, your child, and your whole family get through this situation.

What can you do to help yourself?

Congratulations - you are taking the first step by recognizing that this is a challenging time with uncertainty and stress that must be managed. So, what can you do as a caregiver?



- Try to stay hopeful and positive - millions of others are feeling the way you are today.
- Look after yourself as much as possible - share childcare responsibilities with other adults isolating with you, set aside time for yourself to work or rest, and maintain your routines when you can.
- Keep life as close to your usual structure as possible. Maintain any spiritual, religious or cultural activities that you find comforting.
- Make a list of healthy coping skills for you and your family - avoid behaviours such as alcohol drinking, online gambling.

Remember that new coping skills can be learned. Remember that new coping skills can be learned. Remember that new coping skills can be learned.

Now more than ever
Listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe

For more information, visit our portal and the partner checklist at www.unodc.org/listenfirst

Listen FIRST

LEAFLET



COVID-19 RESPONSE

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OR OTHER CAREGIVERS IN CROWDED COMMUNITIES OR REFUGEE SETTINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Adapting to the difficulties of keeping your family safe and well during the spread of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can feel challenging. Here are some tips to help you through.

What might you be experiencing?

- A constant need for updated information related to the COVID-19 situation.
- Feeling overwhelmed, irritable or anxious.

You are not alone! Remember that many people feel the way you do today and are trying to keep their family healthy and safe while caring for children.

Staying healthy and safe!

- Teach all family members to wash hands frequently with water and soap, especially before handling food, after toilet use, and when hands look dirty.
- Water left over from washing clothes or utensils can be used. Handwashing water does not have to be as clean as drinking water.
- Dry your hands very well after you wash. Shake your hands dry, or wipe on a clean cloth.
- Preferably, avoid sharing utensils with anyone not already sharing your living space.
- Prioritize water for hand washing. Washing hands might be hard due to limited supplies, but just try your best. Teach your child not to touch their face and to avoid dirty areas.
- Preferably, avoid sharing or reusing used handwashing water.
- Limit the number of children entering the home if any of the members feel unwell.

Now more than ever
Listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe

For more parenting tips, visit our partners in **Listen FIRST** and the partnership checklist for caregiver children at www.unodc.org/listenfirst

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COVID-19 RESPONSE

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CARING FOR YOUR CHILD DURING COVID-19



Now more than ever
Listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe

Listen FIRST




BOOKLET

Supplementary materials

- https://www.ted.com/speakers/aala_el_khani
- https://www.unodc.org/listenfirst/en/covid_parents.html
- El-Khani, A., Ulph, F., Peters, S., & Calam, R. (2018). Syria: Refugee parents' experiences and need for parenting support in camps and humanitarian settings. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 13(1), 19-29.