

Psychosocial programmes for children in war-torn Sri Lanka show good results

April 10 2017

Different psychosocial rehabilitation programs for children have somewhat different results due to differences in resources, methodologies and objectives. But a much more significant difference appears when comparing rehabilitated children with children who have not undergone any rehabilitation at all. This is shown by a study from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

"Different programs for taking care of traumatised [children](#) have different effects. But the main difference is between putting any program into work and doing nothing at all." That is one conclusion Kumari Thoradeniya draws from her thesis study, in which she has compared three different psychosocial [rehabilitation](#) programs for war-affected children in war-torn Sri Lanka. Field studies for the thesis were undertaken in 2005, in which Kumari used interviews, questionnaires and observations to gather data.

The Muditha program, operated in a Sinhala village in Vavuniya district, is one of the three. This was initiated by a Buddhist monk when some children sought his protection and care. At the time of the study, there were nearly 80 children in this program, of whom 90 percent were Tamils from the Northern Province.

The Karuna program in the Batticaloa district of the Eastern Province, on the other hand, was started following requests by the government and non-government officials. In 2005, the program employed 46 staff members, all of whom had prior knowledge of conducting a

psychosocial rehabilitation program, for the 300 Tamil children in their care.

Lastly the Upeksha program – also in the Batticaloa district – was initiated by a Catholic priest living in the same war-torn area as the community he served. The program involved groups of 25 Tamil and 25 Muslim children, and equal numbers of boys and girls, for nine months. After nine months, another group with the same composition was selected.

The programs were also compared with a group of children who had not been subject to any rehabilitation at all.

"The impact levels of each of the programs were different because of their differences in objectives, approaches and methodologies, as well as varying levels of human and material resources," explains Kumari.

"However, when comparing the rehabilitated children with those who had not gone through any rehabilitation, there was a remarkable difference. The rehabilitated children showed a much higher possibility of becoming normal citizens compared to those who had not undergone any rehabilitation."

The results underscore the need to recognize requirements for psychosocial rehabilitation, as this is intrinsic to long-term personal as well as social development.

"Government policies should include psychosocial support for victims of war, and should take into account issues such as local human resources, building capacity, enhancing resilience, networking, advocacy and coordination with other actors when addressing the psychosocial well-being of a population."

More information: A Comparative Study of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Programmes of War-affected Children in War-torn Sri Lanka. hdl.handle.net/2077/51494

Provided by University of Gothenburg

Citation: Psychosocial programmes for children in war-torn Sri Lanka show good results (2017, April 10) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-psychosocial-programmes-children-war-torn-sri.html>

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