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LEARNING BRIEF

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN ON THE MOVE AND THEIR CAREGIVERS AS A SOURCE OF HEALING AND RESILIENCE

This is one brief in a series of three¹ concerning faith-based action for children on the move.² The purpose is to help faith actors,³ development practitioners, policymakers, and donors learn about faith communities' global contribution to prevent and respond to violence against children on the move. The learnings in these briefs come from a systematic review of academic and grey literature⁴ and a call for case study submissions. Two hundred and twenty-two documents and 33 case studies were reviewed.⁵ The findings from this review can be used to shape policy and practice regarding faith communities' support to children on the move. The learning briefs will also support the evidence base for the Faith Action for Children on the Move Forum,⁶ held in Rome, 16–19 October 2018. It is acknowledged that there are many further examples than those included in this literature review; the hope is that more practice examples will emerge during the forum.

Spirituality⁷ supports children's resilience during experiences of displacement

Research shows the role of spirituality in supporting children's resilience during experiences of displacement.⁸ Faith actors support resilience by providing community, space and resources for sustained and holistic care.⁹ Children find a sense of belonging and identity in their

faith communities. Those communities offer them social and spiritual support, which helps to both build and maintain their resilience.¹⁰

Resilience and spiritual development are important for children on the move

All children have the right to spiritual development,¹¹ which is particularly important for children on the move.

Resilience is correlated with the ability to 'anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from external shocks and pressures'¹² in emergencies and fragile contexts.¹³ Sustained religious and cultural connections promote resilience among children on the move.¹⁴ Concepts such as transcendence and hope associated with the divine, provide parallels to the idea of resilience.¹⁵

Spiritual support and psychosocial support are mutually beneficial to contribute to resilience

In humanitarian contexts one way to support resilience is through psychosocial support, which aims to care for the psychological and social needs of individuals and communities following shocks. Research suggests that faith actors' 'understanding of the complexities of psychosocial issues and their situation within the community, often combined with an existing track record of pastoral care, serves as a potentially strong foundation for provision of such support,'¹⁶ including 'psychological first aid'¹⁷ which might be required in emergencies. Psychosocial support and spiritual support are mutually beneficial as humanitarians can 'strengthen psychosocial support by securing more effective engagement with the faith resources of individuals and communities.'¹⁸

Spirituality supports children's resilience during times of displacement

A study examining spirituality for building resilience in Central American migrant children came to three key conclusions: (1) Spirituality is an important element in building up resilience in Central American migrant children; (2) migrant children's spirituality can be nurtured through ordinary, day-to-day activities ('spirituality

is fostered when ordinary things are approached in a way that makes them become extraordinary'); and (3) intentionality and spiritual awareness are two important prerequisites for spiritual care.¹⁹

Rohingya refugee children identified religion as bringing hope and unity during hard times. Children had positive associations of religion with, for example, the sound of the call to prayer bringing feelings of joy and familiarity.²⁰

A study of trauma in children in war contexts around the world has found that local religious methods (for example, memorials, religious rituals) positively affect traumatic responses, with prayer as a key support in difficult situations within all cultures.²¹

Faith actors support children's resilience by providing community and identity

Religious meanings, networks and places can have an impact on the development of the individual and collective identity of children on the move.²² Religious spaces, such as churches, mosques and temples, are central points within a child's community, as found in research about Liberian refugees in Ghana.²³ These spaces provide children with lessons and messages on values, morals and behaviours. Many of these spaces are developed to support community building.

Religious practices helped young people living in homeless shelters in Los Angeles, Mumbai and Nairobi to develop in their own spirituality. The stable relationships they developed through these practices made them feel a sense of belonging and supported hope and ownership.²⁴



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Practice example: Trauma healing with South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia²⁵

The Outreach Foundation runs the psychosocial support and trauma programme titled 'Rebuilding Hope in South Sudan' in the Gambella region across six refugee camps. The beneficiaries are mainly Presbyterian. This programme is currently in its second year of implementation, and progress will be evaluated at the end of 2018. The foundation works in partnership with US Presbyterian Churches, the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt.

Activities

- Support sessions with South Sudanese refugee children.
- Scripture-based child education classes with Bible stories for children. The curriculum used for this programme is a mixture of scriptural and psychological support taken from the American Bible Society's Trauma Healing Institute²⁶ and translated into the local language (Nuer). Although the material is Christian, it has been adapted for use in different contexts. For instance, the material has also been used in a different programme in a refugee school in Beirut for Muslim children from Syria.

Lessons

- Addressing adult trauma is necessary to support adults who are assisting traumatised children.
- Psychosocial support mental health indicators in a refugee/displaced setting should be continuously monitored and the programme adapted accordingly.

Practice example: Trauma healing with children displaced by violence in Northeastern Nigeria²⁷

The Church of the Brethren has been running the Healing Hearts Curriculum with children affected by the violence of Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria. This trauma-healing curriculum for children was developed for use by local women in communities affected by the violence of Boko Haram.

Activities

- A two-day training of trainers responding to the needs of the community: The two days include information on children and trauma healing, presentation of sessions for direct use with children, planning for a practicum, the practicum experience and debriefing. The aim of this training was either for the 14 new trainers to share directly with children or to train adults who would then work with children in their local villages, communities and in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps.
- A second training of trainers presenting the interfaith curriculum (for Christian-Muslim settings): This training was for 25 trainers. By the end of 2016, these trainers had trained over 100 people and were working directly with children in their churches and communities, with an estimated reach of 10,000 children.

Lessons

- Empowering trainers in local communities to take ownership of the curriculum and adapt it to their own needs is important.
- The original curriculum used a Bible-based curriculum with Bible stories to illustrate the main points of each session. Trainers working with Christian and Muslim communities requested an interfaith version, so the curriculum was adapted to use a variety of traditional stories instead.

Faith actors support resilience by providing space and resources for sustained and holistic care

In addition to providing spiritual support to best support children on the move, local faith communities operate in a holistic, multi-sectoral way, including meeting basic physical needs, providing education, supporting mental health, addressing stigma and more.

Physical space for spiritual recovery

Religious communities are often central providers of the physical spaces that allow psychosocial and spiritual support to be generated within communities. For

example, in Australia, mosques have provided services including schools, meetings rooms, social spaces, gardens and libraries that have allowed the space for young Ismaili Muslim migrants to stabilise their identity and sense of belonging and strengthen bonds with others, ultimately building mental health resilience.²⁸ They also provided direct spiritual support in the form of meditations, prayer and sermons.²⁹

Faith-sensitive resources for mental health

Guidelines on mental health and psychosocial responses using faith-sensitive approaches have recently been published by Islamic Relief Worldwide and Lutheran World Federation. Although they do not have a child focus

Practice example: Supporting spiritual and emotional stability for children displaced by conflict through education in the Democratic Republic of Congo³⁰

Ensemble pour la Santé et le Développement holistique en milieu Rural et périurbain (ESADER) runs two educational programmes in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo: (1) schooling for war orphans and vulnerable children and (2) vocational training for youth. ESADER collaborates with local church and community leaders to identify the children who have no support to continue their studies. The schooling for war orphans and vulnerable children programme has supported 61 children since 2014. This holistic work also provides the spiritual and psychosocial support that they need to reintegrate. There are currently 46 in the programme, and 12 have graduated with a bachelor's degree in various fields. Currently, there are over 900 orphans seeking support registered, but funding limits the numbers entering the programme.

Activities

- Provide tuition fees and school materials.
- Follow students' performance, health and spiritual well-being.
- The vocational training programme for masonry or motorbike and generator repair has trained 26 young people (9 in motorbike and generator repair; 17 in masonry). The trainings are carried out in small groups of three to six trainees per group. One hundred forty-three young people have registered for this programme, but funding is limited. Programme activities include
 - a six-month masonry training programme
 - an eight-month motorbike and generator repair programme
 - provision of a basic toolkit to help trainees start their own business.

Lessons

- It is important to try to understand the different reasons orphan pupils and students drop out of school and to address these reasons in ways that respect family status, local religion and culture, educational level and gender.
- It is necessary to adopt a comprehensive approach to work with orphans and vulnerable children which goes beyond a traditional classroom education, for example, through vocational training.

Practice example: Education, food assistance, youth empowerment and reconciliation, and trauma counselling³¹

World Vision's Church Refugee Engagement Fund (CREF) focuses on IDP and refugee children and youth. In Jordan this included the launch of digital learning hubs with church partners where young people are able to improve their computer skills. In Lebanon there are 17 local faith partners, with churches involved in everything from food assistance to education support, youth-based reconciliation work and trauma counselling. In Iraq this has included two pilot projects: the Youth Empowerment project and the Celebrating Families project.

Activities

- The Youth Empowerment project was coordinated through churches with youth aged 12–26 years living in church shelters, host communities and IDP camps. By September 2017, 463 young people had participated in the project.
- Volunteers provided leadership and child-rights courses as well as activities focused on language learning, music, drama, craft, information technology (IT) skills and beauty.
- Priests and nuns mentored young people in informal sessions. Professional psychosocial care and guidance was available for the youth.
- The Celebrating Families tool aimed to support parents and caregivers in promoting children's spiritual and overall well-being. This was the first time it was used in a camp setting. Overall, 221 beneficiaries participated in these activities.
- Activities aimed to promote self-reflection, build knowledge and understanding of parent-child relationships, provide positive discipline as well as offer stress and anger management.

Lessons

- Time is needed to earn trust, engage religious leaders and develop a collaborative planning process with them.
- Strong joint planning with churches is beneficial to ensure that the churches' needs are taken into consideration.
- As young people's and children's living situations change, their participation in programmes is affected, with many ceasing to participate as they move.

in the first edition,³² the guidelines can inform practice and policy responses, highlighting core support domains, namely health, education, community mobilisation, and support and dissemination of information.

Creative expression for recovery

Creative methods, such as art, are linked with spiritual support. Religious leaders and parents in Rwanda used drawings to assist children in telling their traumatic stories to God.³³ Research on Iraqi refugee children from Qaraqosh in Jordan found that children expressed peace through drawings of religious symbols (the cross, Jesus) and of spaces (such as churches), describing their feelings of hope, calm and protection when visiting church.³⁴

Spiritual support for whole families

Multi-sectoral programmes use holistic approaches for the promotion of resilience and psychosocial supports. These programmes support children, using multidisciplinary activities and engaging with their wider network, particularly their caregivers. A study on displaced Syrian parents caring for their children found that faith was not only key in promoting parent well-being, but it had a direct positive effect on their parenting, giving them hope, motivation and encouragement.³⁵ The same parents reported that faith was central as parents – motivating them to give their children better, safer lives.

Practice example: Supporting Syrian children in Lebanon through art, drama, music and sport

Islamic Relief noted a significant gap for psychosocial support with Syrian children in Lebanon, who experience withdrawal, anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, restlessness and regression. Islamic Relief supports over 1,500 Syrian child refugees in Lebanon to access psychosocial support in non-formal centres. Islamic Relief provides educational equipment and psychosocial services in the centres.

Activities

- Providing mental health assessments for the children.
- Training teachers and counsellors how to deal with traumatised cases and issues related to mental health, displacement and conflict.
- Providing art, drama, sports and music therapy for the children.
- Offering support through psychosocial counselling for Syrian refugees who are caregivers.

Lessons

- Creative therapy through art, drama, sport and music allows children to learn, recover psychologically and socialise at the same time.
- Children find a safe space in the centre, and counselling with their caregivers helps reduce the instances of abuse in households while supporting the development of positive parenting skills.

Key learnings

1. The continued incorporation of faith into psychosocial and resilience programmes is recommended because it can act as an important coping strategy for children on the move and can support identity building.
2. Faith actors are encouraged to give children on the move access to religious and faith community spaces so the faith actors can assist in developing the children's sense of belonging. These spaces can also support community building.
3. Thinking creatively is important when developing activities for children on the move. For example, interpretative techniques such as telling stories and legends orally and through traditional dance can be used to model how children can overcome difficult situations.
4. Faith actors are advised to examine the various guidelines and resources on working with displaced people to determine if they can be adapted to inform practice with children on the move. However, no faith-sensitive guidelines for psychosocial support with children on the move were found within the literature. It is recommended that guidelines be developed specifically for children on the move.
5. To build resilience and provide comprehensive psychological supports for children on the move, faith-based organisations and local faith communities need to be aware that work may be needed with other stakeholders involved in the child's life. Support for adults, particularly parents and caregivers, is fundamental when responding to the needs of traumatised children. Similarly, working with the children's faith communities is recommended when aiming for durable solutions and ownership of issues faced within these communities.
6. Spiritual support to children must be provided by those in the children's same faith tradition. Secular organisations must, therefore, partner with faith actors in psychosocial support, because not doing so would leave out a specific aspect of life which is significant for a majority of people worldwide.

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The studies and reports mentioned in this learning brief can be found at childrenonthemove.jliflc.com.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Global Partners Forum, Faith Action for Children on the Move (2018), <https://www.wvi.org/globalpartnersforum/>.
- 2 The term *child on the move* includes all children who have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced across borders (refugees) or within the borders of their own countries (internally displaced).
- 3 The term *faith actor* is used in this brief to encompass a wide range of actors affiliated with religious belief and practices, including, but not limited to, local faith communities, religious leaders, local and national faith-based organisations, and international faith-based organisations.
- 4 Grey literature includes policy statements and issue papers; conference proceedings; pre-prints and, post-prints of articles; theses and dissertations; research reports; newsletters, bulletins and fact sheets.
- 5 The resources and documents related to the case study submissions can be found at <https://jliflc.com/conferences/children-on-the-move-global-church-partners-forum/>.
- 6 Global Partners Forum, Faith Action for Children on the Move, <https://www.wvi.org/globalpartnersforum>.
- 7 Definitions of *religion* and *spirituality* are widely contested. This brief reflects this definition of *spirituality*: 'the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred' and this definition of *religion*: 'involves this search for the sacred' and 'for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health, or wellness) and the means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviours) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people' (The Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide, *A faith-sensitive approach in humanitarian response* (2018): 10).
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