Psychosocial interventions for reducing the harmful effects of war and conflict-related violence on young children aged 0-11 years (Protocol)

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Psychosocial interventions
Psychosocial interventions to improve outcomes for young children living in a conflict-affected society require a Cochrane Systematic Review. Psychosocial interventions can be defined as any intervention offering psychological and/or social support that aims to help a child overcome challenges and attain or maintain good mental health. Crucially, psychosocial interventions do not use pharmacological interventions.

Psychosocial interventions can be categorised as falling under two general themes: prevention focused or treatment focused. Preventative interventions usually aim to improve or increase the supportive or protective factors a person needs to maintain good mental health. Treatment focused interventions are delivered to people diagnosed with a condition, for example, PTSD.

Both treatment and preventative interventions can be delivered in a multitude of settings and they can be very diverse in their form. Betancourt (2013a) provides a useful narrative overview of the four domains: at an individual level, a school level, a family level or at a community level.

Methods
Objective: To assess the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions to reduce the harmful effects of war and conflict-related violence on young children aged 0-11 years.

Secondary objectives:
1) To identify whether the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions are mediated by factors such as cultural context or family/community support.
2) To determine whether psychosocial interventions have differential effects on children depending upon their age and gender and, if so, whether these differential effects vary for type of intervention.

Inclusion criteria:
✓ RCT’s, quasi-RCT’s and non-RCT’s (interventions delivered in conflict-affected societies are unlikely to have access to resources and/or the stable and secure environment needed to carry out a rigorous randomised trial);
✓ children aged 0-11 (who are not refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced);
✓ living in a country presently or recently affected by war or conflict;
✓ any individual or group psychosocial intervention, delivered in any setting, to children (or their caregivers) compared with no intervention or a comparison with another relevant active intervention.

Outcome measures:
Acute stress reactions, internalising/externalising symptoms, resilience, pro-social behaviour and general psychosocial functionality.

Impact & Future Research
Children living in conflict-affected societies have unique needs for support and services. As such, any intervention delivered should be designed and implemented using the available best evidence. Professionals, policy makers and service providers will benefit from this review as to ‘what works’ for children living in these areas. Further exploration via doctoral research is planned to further extend the impact of this review. The aims are to:

- Further explore and increase our understanding of the most important outcomes of the systematic review using online survey analysis methods.
- Contribute to our understanding of the experiences of developing and delivering psychosocial interventions in conflict-affected areas (this will be achieved by selecting a sample of survey respondents to interview).
- Contribute to theoretical understandings of the impact of conflict on psychosocial outcomes amongst children.
- Inform the future development of interventions by considering the implications of the findings and making recommendations for policy and practice.

References

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