

External Evaluation: Stress Reduction Training of Trainers in Lebanon 2019-2021

Finnish Psychologists for Social Responsibility
Beit Atfal Assumoud

Mental health for groups with complex needs: A
multidisciplinary model combining client centered and
community approaches. Project supported by the Ministry for
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INTRODUCTION

Stress Reduction ToT for Social Workers

The training plan was made by Kirsti Palonen and Nina Lyytinen during the year of 2018. They both had long experience working with social workers in Lebanon and they had led stress reduction workshops there for several years.

Based on the training plan Nina Lyytinen, Markku Andelin and Sirpa Partinen started the ToT in December 2019. The aim of the training was that after its completion, starting in 2021, the participants will be able to independently teach their clients methods of stress regulation and stabilization. Ten social workers who are themselves Palestinian refugees and work with refugees were selected for the training.

Original time schedule for the training: The training lasts 1,5 years and includes, in addition to three training periods, practical training and work guidance from Finnish trainers. The outbreak of Covid-19 influenced the organization and implementation of the training and the role of practical training was transferred to one of the participants, psychologist Maha Hodroj. Nina Lyytinen actively trained and supervised Maha Hodroj remotely. The training schedule was altered and modified several times due to Covid-19 restrictions in Lebanon.

The first phase of the training took place on 2.12- 6.12.2019, which included four teaching days and one day of practical training. In addition, a well-being day was organized as a pilot project for the managers of the centers in the Beirut region of BAS. The managers of the centers felt that the day was necessary for them and supported their means of recovery.

Second training 12/2020 and the third training in the spring 2021.

The second and third training period was conducted by Maha Hodroj with the help of remote counseling by Nina Lyytinen. Two other Finnish trainers Sirpa Partinen and Markku Andelin did not participate in the training after the pandemic started, so they took part in only the first training module.

Nina Lyytinen implemented the final seminar of the Stress Management trainer training in December 2021, when ten social workers received trainer diplomas.

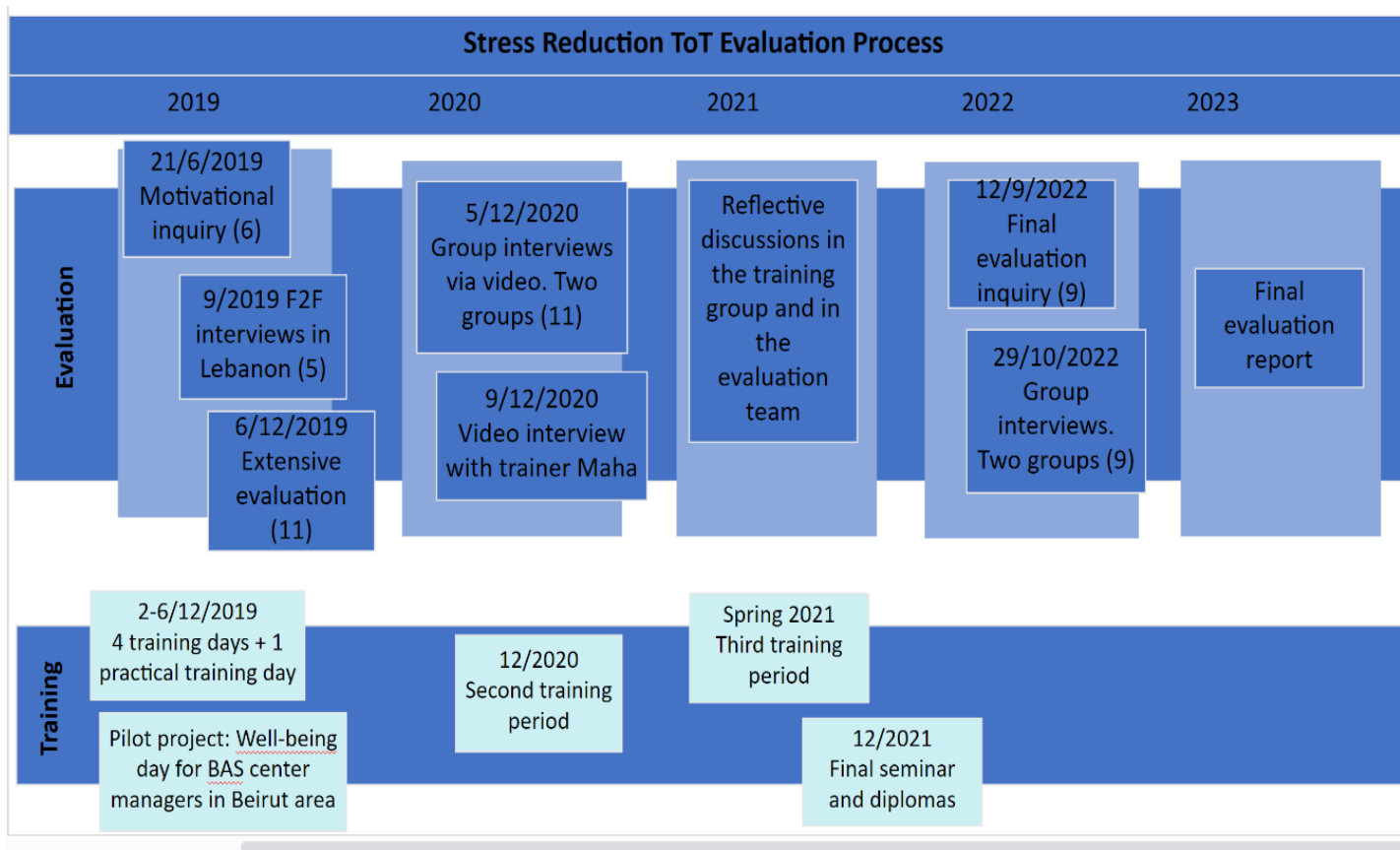
Kirsti Palonen was in the project as a mentor for Nina during the whole project. She participated in the planning and also in editing all the blog writings that were made to social media of the training. In these types of projects it is important that the trainer also has mentoring and work counseling. In Finland that is recommended for psychologists, because it supports wellbeing and professionalism at work. In this project educators received support during the project.

The participants who received diplomas:

Maha Hussein Hodroj
 Amal Hussein Ibrahim
 Nivin Bassam Al Murshed
 Ashwak Mahmoud Alshaabi
 Riham Hassan Mansour

Omaima Nazmi Elzaher
 Sonia Hasan Issa
 Siham Mohamad Abdel Hamid
 Hala Khalil Al Sayed
 Layla Ahmad El Jindawi

TIMELINE



Picture 1. Timeline for the training and evaluation processes

EVALUATION METHODS

Evaluation is based on three questionnaires and interviews before, during and after the training.

Before the training

Before the ToT-training started participants were interviewed and they answered a questionnaire about their motivation, expectations and former experience about stress reduction techniques. Evaluators also made interviews for the participants before the training started.

Six participants did answer the questionnaire before the training. All of them had previous experience about stress reduction techniques and they had taken part in stress management training before. They had also used techniques at work with clients individually and with groups, mostly with mothers and teenagers.

Based on the questionnaires, the participants were motivated to deepen their knowledge about stress reduction and also guide stress reduction groups in the future.

During the training

In the middle of the training there were changes made in the implementation. The trainers from Finland were not able to travel to Lebanon because of the pandemic and lockdown, so one of the participants took charge of the training. The original trainer from Finland was mentoring the local trainer before and after every training module and some of the training sessions were held online from Finland. Furthermore, the structure for modules changed from 4-day-long intensive modules to one day in a week, during one month.

Because of the changes in circumstances, evaluators scheduled two group interviews for the participants and also interviewed the new trainer. Interviews were held in December 2020. In the group interviews we asked their opinions about the changes and the feedback was positive or neutral. No negative feedback was received about the changes in the execution. Participants had been concerned about how to maintain the training process during the lockdown and accepted the changes as a necessary thing to do.

Participants also answered questionnaires after the third training module, since the trainer had been changed. Based on the questionnaire (n=11) the participants were pleased with training content and methods in the third module. They reported that they learned new techniques and awareness about mind and body connection.

Follow-up

After the ToT-training participants reported that they were using stress reduction techniques in various situations. Most of the participants did use learned techniques with themselves on a daily basis and at least once in a week with clients and colleagues at work and also with their own family.

Using stress reduction techniques with...	every day	at least once in a week	at least once in a month	less frequently
clients	11 %(1)	56%(5)	33 %(3)	0
oneself	67 %(6)	33%(3)	0	0
with colleagues	33,5% (3)	33,5 %(3)	22 %(2)	11%(1)
with own family	33,5 %(3)	44,5 %(4)	22 %(2)	0

n=9

Participants used various stress reduction techniques in different contexts. Most often they used breathing exercises. Relaxation techniques and focusing on the present moment were also common. Listening to music or wandering in nature were not that common but also used.

Based on the final questionnaire, participants used plenty of different relaxation techniques. Most common were exercises called four elements, body map, traffic lights and window of tolerance. All of these techniques are focused on bodily sensations and their aim is to recognize and regulate emotions.

Participants also reported many other techniques and doings that they had found useful for stress reduction, for example self-compassion, creating something new or making art, social interactions with friends and family and physical exercises.

Participants evaluated the whole training in scale 0-10 (lowest to highest). The average was 8.9, while the range was from 7 to 10.

Based on the questionnaire and group interviews, participants felt a huge need for stress reduction in the current situation in Lebanon. At the time when training went by, Lebanon faced multiple crises: economic crash, Covid-19 pandemic and also a major explosion in Beirut. Participants told that many palestinian families in Lebanon were facing even more distress and hard times than before and the need for psychological help was increased.

Most of the participants reported some struggle and hesitation while applying learned skills and information in practice, but mentioned that it was part of the learning process. Participants were asked if there were some dissatisfaction or improvements to be made in the training, but none were expressed in the questionnaires or interviews.

Overall participants felt satisfied about the training and found its content very useful on a professional and personal level. They hoped that follow-up and support for ToT-training continues and they were interested to see which approaches are most useful in practice in the long term.

Recurring theme in the interviews

Recurring expressions in the interviews were the extended chaos and trauma on the national level in Lebanon at the moment. The participants were thinking that the training had specially good timing to truly understand the value of self help. Stress management techniques has become more important also in supporting suicidal clients in the challenging situation of every day life in current Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

Training of Trainers- stress reduction training main goal was, that after the training participants will be able to independently teach their clients methods of stress regulation and stabilization. Participants expected to gain more knowledge and tools for stress reduction.

After the training all participants reported that stress management has become a part of everyday life personally and at work. Most of them used stress regulation and stabilization methods with themselves, clients, colleagues and with their own family at least once in a week.

It seems that the training was successful to implement stress management skills, knowledge and techniques on an individual and professional level. Both levels are important because participants were social workers and their emotional strain at work is

heavy. Many of them are also refugees themselves and facing partially the same challenges as their clients.

There were a lot of societal and global crises going on during the training, which forced the organizer to make some arrangements to the implementation. Participants did not give any negative feedback about the changes. Instead, they were pleased that the training was arranged despite the challenges. They felt that the transfer of the trainer's role from Nina Lyytinen to one of the participants, psychologist Maha Hodroj, was done smoothly. Nina Lyytinen and Maha Hodroj themselves assess the transfer of the role and responsibilities to be successful with the help of active remote counseling. Participants told that because of increased uncertainty and distress in Lebanon, the training was more needed than ever. They reported the importance of the ability to calm oneself in stressful situations when clients have more and more problems. Participants felt that stress management helps them to keep up the work ability in challenging situations which is a significant benefit from the training.

SUGGESTIONS

However, it takes time to grow as a trainer and maintain and develop learned skills. Participants felt that they talk and share ideas and experiences with closest colleagues and it is important, but there is no structure that would enable them to talk with colleagues about this work at other camps. Participants wished for some kind of follow-up or update and further training of more advanced stress management techniques and more knowledge on how to train others.

Based on the evaluation, we recommend to consider some kind of structured support for the trainers in the future. Mentoring each other regularly and teaching the knowledge for other social workers is a good way to support implementation to the field in practice.

Research of this topic is ongoing and knowledge and new information increases all the time. Also when participants apply stress reduction skills in practice with their clients in the long run, they will find out which approaches are most useful in those circumstances. Participants' request for updating and sharing knowledge in the future is very relevant.

There are several projects and training going on at participants' employer, Beit Atfal Assumoud (BAS) with different partners. In the future it is important to map out if there are some other projects about this theme going on at BAS and perhaps possibility to cooperate or synchronize update-trainings and future improvements.

ABOUT THE EVALUATORS

Evaluation was executed by two Finnish psychologists Anna Tienhaara and Reetta Puuronen. They both are working in the field of organizational and occupational psychology and visited Lebanon in September 2019.

Reference

Stress Reduction Training of Trainers (ToT) in Lebanon 2019-2021. External evaluation by Puuronen, Reetta and Tienhaara, Anna. ToT in the project Mental health for groups with complex needs: A multidisciplinary model combining client centered and community approaches. Project of Finnish Psychologists for Social Responsibility, supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (85202503)

ATTACHMENTS

1. Preliminary Inquiry
2. Mid-term Inquiry
3. Follow-up Inquiry
4. Evaluation Interview Questions
5. ToT- frame and publications

Photo: Nina Lyytinen