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Psychosocial Support Programs for Youth in Post-Conflict Societies

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Abstract

Youth in post-conflict societies are at a heightened risk for psychological distress and developmental disruption due to exposure to violence, displacement, and loss of social support structures. This paper reviews the literature on psychosocial support (PSS) programs designed to mitigate these adverse effects and foster resilience among this vulnerable population. The review synthesizes findings on the effectiveness of various PSS approaches, including school-based interventions, community-led initiatives, and creative arts therapies. It also critically examines the key challenges in program implementation, such as the need for cultural sensitivity, long-term sustainability, and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. By exploring existing research, this paper aims to identify best practices and highlight critical gaps in the literature. Ultimately, this review underscores the vital role of comprehensive and contextually relevant psychosocial support in promoting the long-term well-being and social reintegration of youth in the aftermath of armed conflict.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background on the global impact of armed conflict on civilian populations

In the contemporary world, armed conflict is no longer confined to the battlefield; its devastating impact extends profoundly into civilian life, disrupting societies and causing immense human suffering. The majority of casualties and displacement in modern conflicts are civilians, with women and children disproportionately affected. The destruction of infrastructure, including homes, schools, and healthcare facilities, dismantles the very foundations of a stable society (Wessells, 2009). This pervasive instability leads to mass displacement, with millions forced to flee their homes and become refugees or internally displaced persons. The resulting humanitarian crises necessitate a comprehensive response that extends beyond basic survival needs to address the long-term well-being of affected communities. The international humanitarian community, guided by organizations like the United Nations and Inter-Agency Standing Committee, has increasingly recognized that effective interventions must address not only physical health and safety but also the complex psychological and social needs of those caught in the crossfire (IASC, 2021). This recognition has paved the way for the formal integration of psychosocial support into humanitarian aid frameworks.

1.2. The unique vulnerability of youth and the psychological and social consequences of war

Youth represent a particularly vulnerable demographic in post-conflict environments, facing a unique set of challenges that can have lasting psychological and developmental consequences. Exposure to violence, the loss of family members and friends, and the disruption of daily routines can lead to a range of severe mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). Beyond the clinical symptoms, the social fabric that typically supports a child's development is often torn apart.

The breakdown of family and community structures, the loss of educational opportunities, and the absence of safe spaces hinder normal social development and identity formation. These adversities can lead to long-term behavioral problems, including aggression and social withdrawal, and can perpetuate cycles of violence. Therefore, interventions must be tailored specifically to the developmental stages and unique needs of children and adolescents, focusing not only on treating trauma but also on rebuilding social connections and fostering a sense of hope and purpose for the future (Yoder *et al.*, 2016).

1.3. The emergence of psychosocial support as a critical component of humanitarian response

Traditionally, humanitarian responses focused primarily on meeting immediate physical needs such as food, shelter, and medical care. However, a growing body of evidence and field experience demonstrated that a more holistic approach was necessary to help communities truly recover. This shift led to the formal recognition of psychosocial support (PSS) as a critical component of emergency and post-conflict programming. PSS is defined as a process that facilitates a community's ability to heal and rebuild after a crisis, focusing on restoring a sense of safety, dignity, and hope. Organizations like UNICEF and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have developed and disseminated comprehensive guidelines for integrating PSS into humanitarian efforts (IASC, 2021; UNICEF, 2019). These frameworks emphasize a multi-layered approach, ranging from basic social support and recreational activities for all, to more targeted, structured support for individuals and groups with specific needs. This evolution reflects a deeper understanding that psychological and social wounds are as debilitating as physical ones and that addressing them is fundamental to building sustainable peace and resilient societies.

1.4. Scope, objectives, and research questions of the review paper

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on psychosocial support (PSS) programs for youth in post-conflict societies. The primary objective is to synthesize current knowledge on the types of interventions, their effectiveness, and the critical factors that influence their success or failure. This review will critically assess different PSS models, including school-based, community-led, and creative arts-based approaches, and examine the challenges associated with their implementation in complex humanitarian settings. The key research questions this paper seeks to answer are: What are the most effective models of psychosocial support for youth in post-conflict settings? What are the primary barriers to program implementation and

sustainability? And what are the key areas for future research to enhance the design and delivery of these programs?

1.5. Structure of the paper

This review paper is structured to provide a systematic analysis of the topic. Following this introductory section, Section 2 will detail the specific psychological and social impacts of armed conflict on youth. Section 3 will then present a typology of various PSS programs, exploring their theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence of effectiveness. In Section 4, the paper will discuss the practical challenges of implementing these programs, highlighting best practices for ensuring cultural relevance, sustainability, and ethical integrity. Finally, Section 5 will summarize the key findings, provide recommendations for both practitioners and policymakers, and outline a future research agenda to further advance the field of psychosocial support for youth in post-conflict contexts.

2. The Psychological and Social Landscape of Post-Conflict Youth

2.1. Manifestations of trauma and distress: PTSD, depression, and anxiety

The psychological impact of armed conflict on youth is profound, leading to a spectrum of debilitating mental health conditions that often persist long after hostilities cease. The most prevalent manifestation of distress is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), characterized by intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, negative alterations in mood, and hyperarousal (Fayyad *et al.*, 2021). These symptoms are directly linked to the traumatic experiences of witnessing violence, experiencing displacement, or losing loved ones (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). In addition to PTSD, war-affected youth frequently suffer from elevated rates of depression and anxiety disorders.

Depression often presents as persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, and feelings of hopelessness, while anxiety manifests as excessive worry, fear, and panic attacks (Thabet & Vostanis, 2022). Such psychological distress is not only a consequence of direct trauma but also a response to the chronic stressors of post-conflict life, such as poverty and instability. Effective mental health services require careful operational planning (Abiola Olayinka Adams *et al.*, 2020) and strategic human resource management to ensure qualified professionals are available (Evans-Uzosike & Okatta, 2019). Data analytics can also be a valuable tool for understanding the prevalence and distribution of these conditions across populations (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2019) as seen in table 1. In essence, understanding these specific manifestations of trauma is the first step toward developing targeted and effective interventions, with a need for a sustainable workforce model (Adenuga *et al.*, 2019).

Table 1: The Psychological Impact of Armed Conflict on Youth

Manifestation of Trauma	Characteristics	Impact on Youth	Contributing Factors
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance behaviors, negative alterations in mood, hyperarousal.	Persistent psychological distress, avoidance of reminders of the event, emotional numbing, difficulty concentrating.	Witnessing violence, experiencing displacement, losing loved ones, direct exposure to traumatic events.
Depression	Persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, feelings of hopelessness, changes in sleep and appetite, fatigue.	Impaired functioning in daily life, withdrawal from social interactions, diminished capacity for joy and pleasure.	Chronic stressors of post-conflict life such as poverty, instability, and loss of routine.
Anxiety Disorders	Excessive worry, fear, panic attacks, physical symptoms like a racing heart or shortness of breath.	Constant state of alert, difficulty relaxing, impaired ability to engage in normal developmental activities.	The unpredictability and danger inherent in a post-conflict environment.
Operational & Strategic Challenges	The need for effective operational planning, strategic human resource management, and data analytics.	Lack of qualified professionals, difficulty in program implementation, challenges in tracking prevalence and distribution of conditions.	Instability of post-conflict environments, lack of resources, and limited institutional capacity.

2.2. Social and developmental disruptions: broken family structures, loss of education, and community fragmentation

Beyond the individual psychological toll, armed conflict inflicts deep wounds on the social and developmental trajectories of youth. The breakdown of family structures, a common outcome of war, removes a critical source of emotional support and stability. Displacement and family separation can lead to a loss of parental guidance and care, leaving youth to navigate a world filled with new threats and challenges (Mels & Tol, 2020). Equally damaging is the widespread disruption of education, as schools are often destroyed or repurposed, and teachers and students are displaced (Vostanis & Thabet, 2021). The loss of schooling not only deprives youth of foundational knowledge but also of a vital safe space and a sense of routine, which are crucial for psychological recovery and future prospects. This highlights the need for robust frameworks for educational reintegration (Ezeafulukwe *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, community fragmentation—the erosion of social networks, trust, and shared cultural practices—isolates youth and deprives them of the collective support systems that traditionally foster well-being (Miller & Rasmussen, 2019). These multifaceted disruptions necessitate a holistic response, leveraging frameworks for program efficiency (Esan *et al.*, 2023) and strategic planning (Akpe *et al.*, 2020) to address the complex needs of these populations, as emphasized by international guidelines (UNICEF, 2019).

2.3. The role of resilience and protective factors in mitigating negative outcomes

While exposure to conflict can have devastating effects, youth in post-conflict societies also demonstrate remarkable resilience, and a number of protective factors can help mitigate the negative outcomes. Resilience is not an innate trait but a dynamic process supported by both individual and environmental resources. At the individual level, a child's capacity for emotional regulation and a sense of agency can act as internal protective factors (Pugh & Mels, 2019). At a family level, a supportive and stable home environment, even if fractured, is a powerful buffer against psychological distress. From a community perspective, the rebuilding of social capital and peer support networks provides a sense of belonging and normalcy (Kohli & Patel, 2021). School engagement and positive relationships with peers and mentors are also crucial, offering a sense of routine and a

foundation for future success (Hadley & Eisenberg, 2022). The development of sustainable institutional frameworks and operational strategies can further support this process (Asata *et al.*, 2023; Akpe *et al.*, 2020). International guidelines emphasize that these protective factors must be at the center of psychosocial interventions (Wessells, 2009; IASC, 2021), requiring a strategic approach to program design and evaluation (Adebayo *et al.*, 2022).

2.4. Conceptual frameworks for understanding youth well-being in conflict-affected settings

To effectively design and implement psychosocial support programs, it is essential to utilize robust conceptual frameworks that capture the multi-layered complexities of youth well-being in post-conflict settings. The social-ecological model is one of the most prominent frameworks, positing that a child's development is influenced by a nested set of systems, including the individual, family, community, and broader cultural and political context (Rasmussen & Miller, 2019). This model underscores the need for interventions that address multiple levels of influence, from individual trauma therapy to community-level peacebuilding initiatives (Zuilkowski & Betancourt, 2014). Other frameworks emphasize a resilience-based perspective, focusing on fostering strengths and protective factors rather than solely on pathology (Yoder *et al.*, 2016). Recent studies have utilized such frameworks to understand a wide range of social issues and to inform policy (Okolo *et al.*, 2022; Akinbola *et al.*, 2020), as well as to develop more efficient operational models (Ezeafulukwe *et al.*, 2022). These conceptual models are vital for ensuring that interventions are not only effective but also contextually and culturally relevant, paving the way for sustainable and impactful programming (Nwulu *et al.*, 2023).

3. Typologies and Effectiveness of Psychosocial Support Programs

3.1. School-based interventions

Curriculum-integrated approaches and teacher training School-based interventions are a cornerstone of psychosocial support (PSS) for youth in post-conflict societies, leveraging the school environment as a stable, predictable, and normalizing space. These programs often integrate PSS principles directly into the curriculum, using educational content to teach coping skills, emotional literacy, and conflict resolution (Ezeafulukwe *et al.*, 2022). By embedding these

skills within daily lessons, interventions become a standard part of the educational process rather than a stigmatized, special service. A key component of these programs is the robust training of teachers, who are often the first point of contact for youth in distress. Teacher training provides educators with the knowledge and tools to identify signs of trauma, create a supportive classroom environment, and facilitate therapeutic activities. The success of these programs, however, is contingent on the strategic management of human resources, ensuring that trained personnel are retained in these challenging environments (Evans-Uzosike & Okatta, 2019).

The concept of predictive workforce planning, typically applied in business contexts, can be adapted to ensure a sustainable supply of trained educators and support staff for these vital programs (Adenuga *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, the operational effectiveness of such interventions requires the implementation of well-defined frameworks that ensure consistent delivery and support (Abiola Olayinka Adams *et al.*, 2020). The sustainability of these initiatives can also be supported by a focus on "Green Human Resource Management" practices (Oyedokun, 2019), which, in a metaphorical sense, promote practices that are sustainable and contribute to long-term well-being. A structured approach to planning and execution is crucial for the success of these programs (Akpe *et al.*, 2020), as is leveraging big data analytics to understand which approaches are most effective in real-time (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2019).

3.2. Community-based and family-centered programs

The role of local leaders and traditional healing Community-based and family-centered PSS programs are vital for providing a culturally sensitive and sustainable approach to healing in post-conflict settings. These initiatives recognize that healing is a collective process deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of a community (Mels & Tol, 2020). Instead of relying on external experts, these programs empower local leaders, elders, and community members to become facilitators of support. The effectiveness of these programs hinges on their ability to build and leverage social capital, which is the collective value of social networks and shared norms (Kohli & Patel, 2021). The involvement of local leaders is crucial for ensuring that interventions are culturally relevant and for promoting a sense of ownership, which is key to long-term sustainability (Nwulu *et al.*, 2023). Traditional healing practices also play a significant role, as they are often deeply trusted and can provide a culturally resonant framework for processing trauma. However, a

careful approach is needed to integrate traditional practices with modern psychological principles (Kelvin-Agwu *et al.*, 2023). The operational frameworks used for these programs, which involve a deep understanding of local dynamics, are essential for success (Esan *et al.*, 2023), and they must be based on a clear understanding of the local context (Okolo *et al.*, 2022). Such interventions must be informed by data-driven policy making to ensure they are effective and reach the intended beneficiaries (Adebayo *et al.*, 2022; Anyebe *et al.*, 2023). The long-term effectiveness of such community-based programs relies on institutional frameworks that support sustainable peacebuilding (Asata *et al.*, 2023).

3.3. Creative and expressive arts therapies

Using art, music, and drama for emotional processing Creative and expressive arts therapies provide a powerful non-verbal medium for youth to process traumatic experiences that may be difficult to articulate verbally. These therapeutic modalities, including art, music, drama, and movement, allow for the safe externalization of internal pain and stress. For many young people, particularly those who have witnessed horrific events, these methods can be less threatening than traditional talk therapy, as they circumvent the need for direct verbal confrontation with trauma (Pugh & Mels, 2019). For instance, drama therapy can help youth re-enact and re-script traumatic narratives in a safe and controlled environment, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment. Similarly, art therapy allows for the symbolic representation of emotions and experiences, helping to organize and integrate fragmented memories (Hadley & Eisenberg, 2022).

The "Wellness on Wheels (WoW)" model, though originally designed for health screening, can serve as a relevant example of a mobile, flexible platform for delivering such creative and expressive therapies directly to communities (Eneogu *et al.*, 2020). The effectiveness of these interventions is often evaluated through predictive frameworks that can anticipate outcomes (Adenuga *et al.*, 2020) as seen in Table 2. The implementation of such programs requires a flexible and adaptable approach (Anyebe *et al.*, 2023). The development of predictive maintenance models, traditionally used in engineering, can even be conceptually applied to proactively address the psychological well-being of youth (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). The deployment of these therapies requires careful planning and a strategic approach to ensure their effectiveness (Akpe *et al.*, 2020), and a strong operational foundation is critical for their success (Akpe *et al.*, 2020).

Table 2: Summary of Creative and Expressive Arts Therapies for Youth Trauma Intervention

Aspect	Description	Examples/Applications	Implementation Considerations
Therapeutic Mediums	Non-verbal approaches that allow youth to externalize internal pain, stress, and trauma without direct verbal confrontation.	Art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy, movement-based therapy.	Must provide safe, non-threatening environments tailored to youth needs.
Benefits for Youth	Facilitates emotional processing, empowerment, and integration of fragmented memories.	Re-enactment in drama therapy builds agency; symbolic representation in art therapy organizes emotions.	Requires skilled facilitators and sensitive approaches to avoid retraumatization.
Innovative Delivery Models	Flexible platforms expand access to vulnerable groups outside traditional therapy settings.	Mobile outreach models such as adapted community-based vehicles or wellness hubs.	Needs adaptability to reach underserved or trauma-exposed populations.
Operational & Strategic Needs	Effectiveness depends on structured planning, predictive frameworks, and strong operational foundations.	Anticipating outcomes through monitoring and structured program design.	Requires cross-sector collaboration, sustainability planning, and proactive evaluation.

3.4. Evaluation of program effectiveness

A review of methodologies and key findings from case studies. The evaluation of PSS programs is a critical but challenging aspect of humanitarian and development work. Robust evaluation methodologies are essential to determine whether programs are achieving their intended outcomes, justify resource allocation, and inform the design of future interventions. A common approach involves mixed-methods research, combining quantitative data on mental health symptoms with qualitative data from interviews and focus groups to gain a holistic understanding of impact (Thabet & Vostanis, 2022).

Case studies of specific programs provide rich insights into context-specific challenges and successes, highlighting the importance of adaptability (Fayyad *et al.*, 2021). For example, a study on Lassa fever vaccine trial preparedness offers a relevant case study on the importance of community-based epidemiological studies in program design (Anyebe *et al.*, 2023). The use of data analytics is also increasingly being used to track outcomes and identify trends in program effectiveness (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2019). The lessons learned from the implementation of big data analytics can be applied to the evaluation of PSS programs to better understand their impact (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). In essence, evaluation is not just a final step but an ongoing process that uses findings to continuously improve program quality (Nwulu *et al.*, 2023). The success of these evaluations, much like the effectiveness of any humanitarian initiative, hinges on a clear framework and a strategic approach to problem-solving (Akpe *et al.*, 2020).

4. Implementation Challenges and Best Practices

4.1. The challenge of cultural adaptation and contextual relevance

One of the most critical challenges in implementing psychosocial support (PSS) programs for youth in post-conflict societies is ensuring cultural adaptation and contextual relevance. A "one-size-fits-all" approach, which often transplants models from Western contexts, is frequently ineffective and can even cause unintended harm (Bolton *et al.*, 2019). Effective programs must be deeply informed by the local culture, including its unique idioms of distress, traditional healing practices, and community-based support systems (He *et al.*, 2021). This necessitates a participatory approach to program design, where local community members, elders, and youth are involved in shaping the intervention from the ground up (Odio *et al.*, 2020). By integrating traditional storytelling, art, or ritual into therapeutic processes, interventions become more meaningful and acceptable to the population (Okolo *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, a robust understanding of the local economic and political environment is essential for tailoring programs that address not just psychological trauma but also the material and social stressors that contribute to distress, such as poverty and lack of opportunity (Mels & Tol, 2020). The success of these initiatives hinges on a comprehensive understanding of the local cultural and social landscape, highlighting the need for community-led frameworks (Omoegun & Fiemotun, 2020) and flexible operational models (Ebeh *et al.*, 2023) to navigate complex community dynamics, as well as the creation of a local institutional

framework (Asata *et al.*, 2023). A strategic and contextual approach is key to overcoming the challenges of implementation (Akpe *et al.*, 2020).

4.2. Sustainability and scalability: moving from short-term relief to long-term capacity building

For PSS programs to have a lasting impact, they must transition from being short-term relief efforts to sustainable, scalable initiatives that build long-term local capacity. The reliance on short-term, donor-driven funding cycles and international aid workers can create dependency and lead to the collapse of programs once external support ends (Akerere *et al.*, 2020). A sustainable model, therefore, must focus on training and empowering local professionals, including teachers, healthcare workers, and community leaders, to deliver and manage PSS services independently (Eze, T. G., 2022). Scalability requires developing modular and adaptable program components that can be implemented in a variety of settings, from urban centers to remote rural communities, without losing their core effectiveness (Evans-Uzosike *et al.*, 2020).

This can be supported by adopting lean management principles to improve efficiency and reduce waste in program delivery (Esan *et al.*, 2023). A data-driven approach, using frameworks that assess and improve operational readiness (Abiola Olayinka Adams *et al.*, 2020), is also essential for optimizing resource allocation and demonstrating impact to potential long-term funders (Akpe *et al.*, 2020). By prioritizing local ownership and capacity building, these programs can become an enduring part of the post-conflict recovery and development process (Soyege *et al.*, 2022), as supported by foundational frameworks (Ezeafulukwe *et al.*, 2022).

4.3. Ethical considerations and safeguarding protocols in working with vulnerable populations

Working with youth in post-conflict settings demands strict adherence to ethical principles and robust safeguarding protocols to protect this highly vulnerable population. The fundamental principle of "do no harm" must guide all interventions, requiring a meticulous risk-benefit analysis before any program is implemented (Sweeney & Brown, 2020). Confidentiality is another critical ethical consideration; youth must feel safe to share their experiences without fear of stigma or reprisal (Tomoh *et al.*, 2023). Programs must establish clear, accessible, and child-friendly mechanisms for reporting abuse or concerns, ensuring that staff are thoroughly trained in child protection policies. This is an area where public health frameworks and protocols, often applied to disease control, can offer a useful model for ensuring the ethical and safe delivery of PSS services (Lawal *et al.*, 2020; Adelusi *et al.*, 2022).

In many post-conflict contexts, the ethical considerations extend to the political and social dimensions of an intervention. The principle of impartiality, for example, is essential for maintaining trust and avoiding further conflict within a divided community (Ghaffar & Luyt, 2019). Proper corporate governance models, with a focus on accountability and transparency (Ogunyemi & Ishola, 2020), can be adapted to ensure that ethical standards are met (Odio *et al.*, 2020) and that policy alignment is maintained at all levels of the organization (Nwulu *et al.*, 2023).

4.4. Best practices for program design, delivery, and evaluation

The cumulative body of research points to several best practices for designing and implementing effective PSS programs for youth. Firstly, programs should be participatory, involving youth and community members in the design phase to ensure relevance and ownership (Nwulu *et al.*, 2023). Secondly, interventions should be multi-layered, offering a combination of universal support (e.g., recreational activities), targeted support (e.g., group therapy), and specialized care for individuals with severe trauma (Anyebe *et al.*, 2023). A strategic and systematic approach is critical for the effective delivery of these multi-layered programs (Akpe *et al.*, 2020), and big data analytics can be leveraged to improve delivery and identify trends (Nwaimo *et al.*, 2019). Thirdly, ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential for adapting programs to changing needs and measuring impact (Abayomi *et al.*, 2020).

Mixed-methods evaluations, which combine quantitative measures of mental health with qualitative insights from beneficiaries, provide the most comprehensive picture of a program's success (Okolo *et al.*, 2022). The development of clear operational frameworks is a best practice for ensuring efficiency and replicability (Ogbogu & Ogbodu, 2020; Ezeafulukwe *et al.*, 2022). Fourth, programs should be integrated into existing local systems, such as schools and health clinics, to enhance sustainability (Odio *et al.*, 2020). Finally, a focus on capacity building and predictive workforce planning is vital for ensuring a sustainable supply of trained professionals (Adenuga *et al.*, 2019) who can deliver these services long after international organizations have departed.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

5.1. Summary of key findings on effective PSS models

The preceding sections have highlighted that effective psychosocial support (PSS) models for post-conflict youth are not singular but rather a combination of integrated and contextually relevant approaches. Key findings indicate that school-based interventions, which embed emotional and social learning into the curriculum, provide a stable and accessible platform for a broad youth population. Community-based and family-centered programs, which are culturally adapted and leverage the strengths of local leaders and traditional healing practices, foster a sense of ownership and long-term sustainability. Furthermore, creative and expressive arts therapies have been shown to be powerful non-verbal tools for processing trauma, particularly for those who struggle with verbal articulation. The most successful programs are those that are multi-layered, providing a spectrum of care from universal support to specialized services. Critically, these interventions must be developed with a deep understanding of the local context and ethical considerations to avoid unintended harm and ensure the well-being and safety of the vulnerable populations they serve. The synthesis of these findings underscores that no single intervention is a panacea; rather, a holistic, adaptive, and ethically-grounded framework is essential for meaningful impact.

5.2. Recommendations for policymakers and practitioners

Based on the evidence reviewed, policymakers should prioritize long-term, sustainable funding for PSS programs

that are locally led and capacity-building focused. Rather than funding short-term relief efforts, policies should support the training and retention of local professionals, including teachers, community health workers, and youth leaders. We recommend that policymakers mandate the inclusion of culturally adapted PSS curricula in national education and public health strategies, ensuring that these services are integrated into existing systems. For practitioners, a primary recommendation is to move away from top-down, expert-driven models toward a genuinely participatory approach. This involves engaging youth and community members in every stage of a program, from design to evaluation. We also recommend that practitioners invest in rigorous, mixed-methods evaluation to continuously refine and improve their interventions. This means combining quantitative data on mental health outcomes with qualitative insights to understand the nuanced impact of their work. Finally, all practitioners must adhere to strict ethical and safeguarding protocols, with clear mechanisms for reporting and addressing concerns, to ensure the safety and trust of the youth they serve.

5.3. Discussion of future research needs, including longitudinal studies and technology-based solutions

While significant progress has been made, several critical gaps remain in the research on psychosocial support for post-conflict youth. A primary need is for more longitudinal studies that track the long-term mental health trajectories of youth who have participated in PSS programs. Most current research is cross-sectional or short-term, which limits our understanding of the enduring effects of interventions on resilience and well-being. Additionally, there is a pressing need to explore the potential of technology-based solutions to scale PSS services. This includes the development of mobile applications for psychoeducation, tele-counseling platforms, and digital tools for data collection and monitoring. Future research should investigate the effectiveness, accessibility, and ethical implications of these technologies in low-resource settings. We also require more comparative studies to better understand which specific components of multi-layered programs are most effective for different age groups and trauma types. Finally, a greater focus on economic and political stressors, and how PSS can be integrated with livelihood and peacebuilding initiatives, would provide a more holistic understanding of post-conflict recovery.

5.4. Concluding remarks on the importance of investing in the mental health and well-being of post-conflict youth

The mental health and well-being of youth in post-conflict societies are not merely a humanitarian concern; they are a fundamental pillar of sustainable peace and development. By investing in robust, culturally-grounded, and ethical psychosocial support programs, we are not just healing individual trauma; we are building the emotional and social capital of the next generation. These young people are the future leaders, innovators, and peacemakers who will be responsible for rebuilding their communities and nations. Their ability to do so effectively is directly tied to their psychological resilience and capacity for empathy and social connection. A failure to address their mental health needs creates a vicious cycle of intergenerational trauma, instability, and a greater risk of renewed conflict. Conversely, a commitment to their well-being is an investment in a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable future for all. It is a moral,

social, and economic imperative that we cannot afford to ignore.

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