

Progress of the Pilot Psychosocial Support Programme of the Office for Reparations

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are linked to psychosocial consequences and can affect individuals and communities rupturing the entire social fabric, leaving behind immeasurable pain and suffering. The term 'psychosocial' refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimensions of an individual's life, as "psychological" and "social" processes in human beings are interrelated and interdependent. When one important need is met (or not), this can affect all other aspects of life. Psychosocial support is the process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families, and communities by addressing both their psychological and social needs.

"We were initially displaced. Living in the camp impacted us - financial difficulties, family status, life in the camp and a frustrated mindset has interrupted my participation in societal events. Thereafter, once my husband disappeared, I experienced extreme sadness and reduction in psychological and physical wellbeing. During the dire search for my missing husband, society would constantly state that he must have died. This made me hate society. I was not given any importance nor responsibilities at events merely because my husband was not with me."

– Wife of a Missing

"My son, not behaving in an appropriate manner as per the societal norms, due to consumption of drugs, has resulted in us being discriminated by society, friends and neighbors. As a mother, I am discriminated against for not raising my son the right way and I am blamed for his behavior. Trying to be a responsible mother is difficult."

- Wife of a Soldier Killed in Action

The Psychosocial Support intervention of the Office for Reparations

Psychosocial support to the aggrieved persons has been identified as one of the key interventions in the Reparations Policies and Guidelines of the Office for Reparations (OR), which was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in August 2021. The OR initiated its psychosocial support interventions even before the policy approval and initiated a pilot programme in April 2021 with a case management approach.

Case Management Approach

As a pilot psychosocial programme, the case management approach was considered to be the most appropriate methodology as the OR's response to meet the needs of the individual and family. It is an individualized approach allowing many vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities, women headed household, elderly/single households to participate, as home visits are an integral part of this mechanism¹. The Case Management approach is a process that includes steps such as: conducting an in-depth needs assessment (adapted version of the Psychosocial Assessment of

¹ Case Management Society of America (n.d). What Is a Case Manager? Available online: <https://www.cmsa.org/who-we-are/what-is-a-case-manager/> (Accessed: 13th December 2020)

Development and Humanitarian Interventions (PADHI) Framework²), developing a case plan together with the individual and the family based on the identified needs; and coordinating a comprehensive referral mechanism that may also entail a case conference for complex cases involving multiple stakeholders from different disciplines. This approach provides individual support to the ‘aggrieved person’ by providing emotional support through effective communication, and delivery of psychosocial skills such as active listening and empathy. It enables the ‘aggrieved person’ to express their emotions and discuss their evolving needs whilst identifying the resources available within them, in their family and the community to address their needs– promoting quality, cost effective outcomes and empowerment.

“I was in a lot of difficulty. I had applied for the compensation but didn’t know if I will get it or not. But with your support, our family has been doing well in the recent days. All this while, there was no one to guide us this way. I feel like I have some support now, someone to hear us, to guide us. I used to feel very lonely,” said the father of the missing to the Case Manager.

- Father of the Missing (Ampara)

THE PILOT PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAMME (APRIL 2021 TO JULY 2022)

The pilot psychosocial programme provided its support to one hundred and thirty-One (131) ‘aggrieved persons’ and their families identified through the OR’s database, and also through referrals from the Divisional Secretariats (DS) in five different divisions, namely: (i) Arayampathy (Manmunai Pattu) DS Division (Batticaloa District), (ii) Karachchi DS Division (Kilinochchi District), (iii) Kurunegala DS Division (Kurunegala District), (iv) Matara Four Gravets DS Division (Matara District) and (v) Navithanveli DS Division (Ampara District). For the purpose of the pilot psychosocial programme the Case Managers managed five (5) cases each.

Case Managers: The Divisional Secretariats of the five divisions nominated twenty (20) staff to be on boarded as case managers, and in addition, six (6) officers from the OR were also on boarded. The OR Case Managers were responsible for establishing and coordinating a peer-support system amongst the case managers.

The twenty-six (26) case managers were trained in delivering psychosocial support to ‘aggrieved persons’ using the Manual for Training of Case Managers Delivering Psychosocial Support³ prior to the implementation of the pilot programme in the field.

“A lady (76 yrs.) who was sexually abused nearly four decades ago reached out to me when visiting her neighbor’s house (aggrieved person) wanting to share her story in confidence. She felt that she could finally speak about the incident with a trusted person who will not judge her for what happened.”

- Case Manager

² Psychosocial Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Intervention, A Tool, a Guide and a Framework: Introduction to a Psychosocial Approach to Development, SPARC, University of Colombo, 2009.

³ Ganesan, M., Fernando, S. & Akuretiya, S. (2021), Manual for training of Case Managers delivering psychosocial support. Colombo: Office for Reparations. Retrieved from http://reparations.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=127&Itemid=283&lang=en

Selection Criteria: The cases for the pilot psychosocial programme were selected from a criteria of: (i) Death of loved ones, (ii) Families of Missing Persons, (iii) Injured persons, (iv) General Property Damage (e.g., houses, business establishment, places of worship etc.) and (v) Loss of employment; whilst prioritizing women headed households with young children and with low income, families of the disappeared persons and persons with disabilities and their families.

“I re-married after the death of my husband. My sister and mother did not like this. Therefore, there is no peace in the family.”

– Wife of a husband who died in conflict

DOCUMENTATION OF FINDINGS

Database

A psychosocial database was developed for the purpose of documenting the needs of the ‘aggrieved persons’ identified through the needs assessments conducted by the case managers, the developed case plans and the referrals made. It is also a tool that produces information to analyze the gathered data.

Preliminary Qualitative Report of the Pilot Psychosocial Programme⁴

For the purpose of a preliminary qualitative report, data from a selected sample of ‘aggrieved persons’ of the pilot psychosocial programme were analyzed, where needs for psychological, economic, legal and administrative support were highlighted. Furthermore, it was identified that resilience of most individuals was obtained from the family and community support systems. The findings of this report were in line with other research and highlights the importance for a community based psychosocial support programme to address the psychosocial well-being of the individual, family and community.

Evaluation and Recommendations⁵

An external evaluation was conducted on the dimensions of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, to measure the achievements of the psychosocial support programme of the OR. The report highlighted insights to the programme and also provided recommendations for the way forward. Case Managers, ‘aggrieved persons’ and their families who participated in the psychosocial support programme, trainers, DS officers and senior staff of OR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – who provided technical support, were interviewed for this purpose.

“Often, we had to go to Government Offices for official matters and had to spend hours without receiving any attention or concern from the Officials. But, now a Government Officer comes to our door-step and spend hours listening to us and helping us. This is unbelievable and very much appreciated.”

-Evaluation Report

⁴ Ganesan, M., Chandramohan, J.A. & Akuretiya, S. (2022), Report on the Qualitative Analysis of the Pilot Psychosocial Programme of the Office for Reparations. Colombo: Office for Reparations.

⁵ The Report on Evaluating the Pilot Psychosocial Programme. The Office for Reparations (OR) Supported by International Organisation for Migration (IOM). July 2022.

Highlights of the Pilot Psychosocial Programme

1. The Pilot Psychosocial Programme was welcomed and accepted by approximately 90% of the beneficiaries.
2. The needs of the aggrieved persons and their families, and the way they have coped thus far was unique to the type of impact of war or other incidence (such as: family having lost a loved one or a family of missing persons, seemed to require more psychosocial support as opposed to an aggrieved person who had experienced property damage or had requested for a loan for self-employment).
3. The beneficiaries were identified to have a positive attitudinal change regarding the support and services provided by the State.
4. According to the case managers, even though some have progressed in their life with regards to financial stability and social support, most of them still require support to cope with their past memories and the impact it has had on their wellbeing.
5. Some beneficiaries have been motivated to initiate social change such as advocating for better facilities for persons with disability etc.
6. Support at the Divisional level has contributed immensely for the success of the implementation.
7. The manuals and handbooks developed and the trainings conducted by the OR has been identified as effective and beneficial for the implementation of the programme.
8. The peer support system facilitated among the team of case managers has also contributed positively towards better supporting the aggrieved persons.
9. The referral system has helped address many of the legal, administrative and other needs of the families whilst there have been a few specialized mental health referrals as well.

“In public spaces there are no consideration for disabled persons. Once, in a hospital there was a notice indicating individuals to remove their footwear when entering the doctor’s room. When it was my turn to see the Doctor, I was asked to do the same. If I do that, I would need a wheel chair as I cannot walk without my custom-made shoes. What I preferred was to go to the doctor walking. But there was no choice. As a country that went through three decades of war leaving many persons with disability, it should be more sensitive to such issues and give consideration to people with special needs, rather than expecting them to adhere to such rules so strictly. As a human, I prefer to live a normal life facing each day as any other normal person would and do not wish to see notices that makes me feel helpless.”
- Injured Soldier (Matara)

“This injured soldier is now seeking for positive social change and has been actively getting involved in such social activities. They should be given recognition and treated as role-models for others, more than treating them as persons who need support.”
- Evaluation Report

“My mother died recently and the compensation money that was received in the name of her missing son (my brother) was used to pay for her last rites and also settle the loan that was taken by her for medical expenses. It almost felt like my brother was back to take care of our mother’s last rites – a ritual done by the male children in our culture.”

- Sister of the Missing (Batticaloa)

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) STRATEGY (2022 – 2024)⁶

Building on the pilot psychosocial programme and based on the recommendations of the evaluation of the programme, the MHPSS strategy (2022-2024) of the OR was developed to continue providing MHPSS to ‘aggrieved persons’ and their families in Sri Lanka as highlighted in The Office for Reparations Act No. 34 of 2018⁷ and new Policies and Guidelines⁸. The strategy entails building capacity of existing resources at divisional and district level, establishing a Psychosocial Support (PSS) unit, developing a comprehensive referral mechanism with available state and non-state organizations, and delivering psychosocial support through a case management approach and community-based support groups to ‘aggrieved persons’ and their families. In addition, the strategy emphasizes that MHPSS can be incorporated in the designing and development of initiatives in the seven other policy areas. In conclusion, further to the implementation of the pilot psychosocial programme, the OR is taking necessary steps to begin the implementation of the MHPSS strategy.

Implementation of the MHPSS Strategy (2022 – 2024) as of July 2022 – in progress

A trainer’s handbook for delivering psychosocial support⁹ was designed, incorporating the lessons learned from the Pilot Psychosocial Programme and has been translated to all three languages (English, Sinhala and Tamil). Selected case managers from the pilot phase, co-facilitated the psychosocial training for the second batch of twenty-four (24) case managers who were selected from a pool of National Integration Coordinators (NIC) suggested by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), field Reparations Officers (ROs) and officers from the respective Divisional Secretariats (DS). With the addition of the newly identified case managers, the OR to date has trained fifty (50) Case Managers from twenty-one (21) districts (Gampaha, Hambantota, Matale, Monaragala, Polonnaruwa, Puttalam, Trincomalee, Galle, Anuradhapura, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Kegalle, Kandy, Kurunegala, Matara, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Ampara, Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mannar).

In addition, the OR is currently in the process of establishing its Psychosocial Support (PSS) Unit in order to promote the sustainability of the psychosocial support programme and to build capacity within the OR.

⁶ Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Strategy of the Office for Reparations (2022 -2024). The Office for Reparations (OR) Supported by International Organisation for Migration (IOM). July 2022.

⁷ Section 27 of the Act has been formulated in terms of the guidelines of the Supreme Court in its determination dated 26th July, 2018 on the Constitutionality of the Office for Reparations Bill - SC Application No. 19/2018 & 20/2018

⁸ The Office for Reparations (2021). Reparations Policies and Guidelines formulated by the Office for Reparations in compliance with Section 2(a) read with Section 11(1)(g) of the Office for Reparations Act, No. 34 of 2018. Available at http://www.reparations.gov.lk/web/images/2021/Policy_and_Guidelines_final.pdf

⁹ Ganesan, M., Chandramohan, J.A. & Akuretiya, S. (2022), Trainer’s Handbook for delivering psychosocial support. Colombo: Office for Reparations. Available at http://www.reparations.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=127&Itemid=283&lang=en