

Effect of mental health and psychosocial support on intermediate social cohesion outcomes

The Healing through Connection and Understanding Project (HCUP) shows a large positive effect on reducing trauma symptoms and improving reconciliation.

Geographic regions: Sub-Saharan Africa

Effect: Large effect ($g = 0.583$)

Confidence in study Findings: Low (1 study with 3 effect sizes)

Short summary

The evidence based on one study about Healing through Connection and Understanding Project (HCUP) in Rwanda aimed to promote healing and reconciliation post-genocide. A 9-day training equipped facilitators with psycho-educational and experiential techniques, which they applied in community work. Evidence from a quasi-experimental study with 194 participants indicates a large effect on reducing trauma symptoms and improving reconciliation. Integrated treatment groups, particularly those with a community focus, showed the most positive outcomes, though differences were observed between secular and religious participants.

Long summary

The Intervention

HCUP involved a 9-day training combining psycho-educational lectures, group discussions, and experiential activities. The program focused on understanding genocide, trauma processing, and fostering empathy. Facilitators were trained in active listening, coping mechanisms, and self-care to support trauma survivors and prevent vicarious trauma. Techniques were then integrated into ongoing community work to extend program impact.

How the Intervention is Expected to Work

The intervention seeks to reduce trauma and promote coexistence by providing a safe environment for storytelling, discussion, and shared reflection. By improving emotional regulation, fostering empathy, and encouraging positive engagement with other groups, participants develop a more constructive orientation toward reconciliation. Facilitators integrate these skills into community work, supporting sustainable improvements in social cohesion.

The evidence base

This cell includes **one primary study**. While findings consistently indicate improvements in trauma reduction and reconciliation, variations across religious and secular participants and between integrated and control groups suggest some contextual differences in effect.

Evidence findings:

Overall, HCUP demonstrated a large effect on intermediate social cohesion outcomes, reducing trauma symptoms and promoting reconciliation in conflict-affected communities.

Included study

This cell includes one study conducted in rural Rwanda. the detailed summary thus provided as below;

Staub (2005)

evaluated a community-based intervention in Rwanda called the Healing through Connection and Understanding Project (HCUP). This intervention aimed to promote healing and reconciliation after the genocide by training facilitators from local organizations. The 9-day training included psycho-educational lectures, group discussions, and experiential activities focused on understanding genocide, processing trauma, and fostering empathy. Trained facilitators then integrated these techniques into their community work. The study used a quasi-experimental $3 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed design with three groups: (1) an integrated (experimental) group, where facilitators incorporated the training into their approach; (2) a traditional (treatment control) group, where facilitators used their standard methods; and (3) a no-treatment control group, which only completed assessments. The study took place in rural Rwanda with 194 participants, 75% female, and a majority identifying as Tutsi (61%). Participants met twice a week for three weeks in two-hour sessions.

The study found significant treatment, focus, and goal orientation effects on participants' attitudes. Integrated treatment led to a more positive orientation towards the other group than traditional and control groups. Secular participants showed more positive attitudes than religious ones. Overall, the integrated treatment showed more positive outcomes, particularly for secular and religious community groups. The study is rated as a low confidence.

Confidence assessment:

Overall confidence is low, due to the limited number of studies, with the single included study also rated as low confidence.