

PSYCHOSOCIAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACH OF INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN VALUES (IAHV) - NOW, THE FIRST STEP IS AVAILABLE ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the study is to provide an overview of online workshops of the International Association for Human Values (IAHV), Healing Resilience Empowerment (HRE), which can be the first stage of intervention in dealing with trauma in refugees, in the context of the uniquely integrated psychosocial approach implemented by IAHV in war zones, refugee camps, and refugee centres.

Methods. IAHV materials and resources available on the Internet, which constitute a repository of the actions of the European Union outside Europe have been searched concerning the resilience and peace-building initiatives of IAHV in Jordan and Lebanon. The method of critical literature analysis has been incorporated and a review of the scientific literature available in the English language has been used to present selected issues. For this purpose, scientific literature data-

bases accessible on the Internet have been searched, i.e. Google Scholar, Web Of Science, Ebsco, and Elsevier.

Results. The analysis shows that, nowadays, the use of online technologies in HRE workshops is recommended to the people affected by a crisis, i.e., a war, even in Afghanistan, Ukraine, or South Africa. HRE is the first/low threshold step of the psychosocial approach of IAHV towards trauma relief. It constitutes a low-cost program that transcends strictly cognitive effects into all the layers, from the physical to the deeply existential.

Conclusion. The study considers the pioneering online interventions by IAHV in the first stage of their unique, integrated, psychosocial, peacebuilding approach for refugees and victims of wars and conflicts. Thus, the HRE intervention can reach a large number of victimised individuals.

Keywords: trauma relief intervention, online workshop, conflict, violence, refugees, war zone

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, we have seen an increase in social radicalization across the world. From the perspective of global security, terrorist attacks or armed conflicts are considered the most significant threats; this goes beyond the situations that can be anticipated, as they have been smouldering with varying intensity for years. Thus, one should also consider the events that are unexpected in their occurrence and their unpredictably large scale (Bilak, Cardona-fox, & Ginnetti, 2016). Unfortunately, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the escalation of these tendencies. The uncertainty, as well as the contingency associated with the development of the pandemic, the change in operating rules, the restrictions, the isolation, the relatively high mortality rate in case of illness, the significant overload, and even inefficiency of health care systems, have resulted in an increase in fear on the one hand, but also in social aggression (Izak, 2020). Simultaneously, various institutions and international organizations around the world are engaging in social and humanitarian aid where it is required, while the general public, widely informed by the virtue of the media, is joining in far more efficiently and promptly or even self-organizing into action for those in need (Kaczmarek, 2019). We can currently observe this in Poland in the context of the war crisis in Ukraine. The efforts of the International Association for Human Values (IAHV) organization are of the most interesting and unique proposals (especially in terms of methodology,) for a highly effective aid and humanitarian action. Using a unique approach, the association has been carrying out peacekeeping and humanitarian missions for more than 20 years in areas affected by warfare or devastated by military conflicts, while also engaging in reconstruction efforts. They have also operated in places affected by the aftermath of terrorist attacks or natural disasters (IAHV, 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization additionally developed a flexible program, which enabled basic anti-crisis techniques to reach a wide range of frontline workers

through online tools, especially in the first stages of the crisis intervention for healthcare workers. This is the Healing, Resilience, Empowerment (HRE) workshop offered online. The organization then used its experience in trauma relief interventions among the refugees from Afghanistan, as well as during the time when successive waves of the pandemic were affecting almost every society. It does also apply its experience now, providing aid to the refugees from Ukraine (IAHV, 2021a; IAHV, 2022).

METHODS

The aim of the study is to provide an overview of online workshops of the International Association for Human Values (IAHV) and Healing Resilience Empowerment (HRE), which can be the first stage of intervention when dealing with trauma in refugees, especially in the context of the uniquely integrated psychosocial approach implemented by IAHV in war zones, refugee camps, and refugee centres, currently using the internet as a technological platform. IAHV materials, resources, interviews, and the repository of the actions of the European Union outside Europe have been searched concerning the resilience and peace-building initiatives of IAHV in Jordan and Lebanon. A review of scientific literature has been used in order to present the selected topic, as well as the scientific databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, Web Of Science, and Medline.

RESULTS

Investigating new solutions for trauma relief interventions

The professionals are still researching the way to effectively alleviate trauma and are attempting to rely on up-to-date and proven sources. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced them to address new technologies on a much larger scale than before. They are currently trying to utilise a number of modern digital tools, such as online platforms, apps, and games, to spread new solutions and support the people affected by various types of crisis. The use of modern technology in this field can be implemented on both individual and group levels. Group intervention can be conducted for participants in shelters or refugee camps away from the leading coaches. The tools are also valuable for individual interventions when the participants remain in the home environment and, if applicable, can access digital technologies (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2021; Masariková, Markovič, & Šrobárová, 2021; Reinhardt, Gouzoulis-Mayfrank, & Zielasek, 2019).

International Association for Human Values (IAHV), the methodology and approach

IAHV has extensive experience in working with traumatised individuals. In peacekeeping missions, it implemented large-scale post-trauma and psychosocial support programs in regions such as Kosovo, Lebanon, Iraq, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Ivory Coast, Israel, Palestine, India, and South Africa, with partners, including

the United Nations, the European Union, and the Red Cross. The association also implemented an anti-crisis intervention for healthcare workers during the pandemic. IAHV is an international non-governmental organization established in Geneva, Switzerland in 1997 and has around 25 branches worldwide. Its mission is to build sustainable cooperation and peacekeeping by developing human values on both individual and social levels. Globally, IAHV cooperates with other civil society organizations, international NGOs, governments, and donors. It is also a UN-affiliated organization with consultative status at ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council-UN) (IAHV, 2021b; UN. Secretary-General, 2021). The peacekeeping and humanitarian programs implemented by the association go beyond the realization of basic humanitarian activities. It also provides trauma relief programs for disaster victims, rehabilitation for violence victims, resocialization of perpetrators of violence, reintegration of former rebels, and specialised programs such as: Youth Leadership Training Programs (YLTP), Project Welcome Home for Troops (Trauma relief for Veterans and their families), Prison SMART program (rehabilitation, reintegration of inmates), development and empowerment programs for women, counter-radicalization, Transformational Leadership in Excellence (TLEX) or anti-aggression programs in schools (IAHV, 2015). These programs have a very secular, human-centred approach that allows the organization to work in multicultural, and sometimes very diverse communities torn by conflict, for example in the Middle East (Hertog, 2019). IAHV has conducted numerous trauma relief workshops and also implemented disaster relief projects, human rights and peacebuilding projects, free education for underprivileged children support projects, gender equality and female empowerment projects, sanitation and waste management projects, as well as social and ecological initiatives (Chandramana, 2010; IAHV, 2021c). In 2013, the organization, building on years of experience, launched an integrated IAHV Peacebuilding Program (IAHV, 2021d) dedicated specifically to refugees, whose numbers have been growing quite rapidly for several years (currently, according to The U.N. Refugee Agency, the number of refugees has exceeded 100 million worldwide (UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency, 2022a; UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, 2022b)). The strategic objectives of the Association's Peacebuilding Programs are to implement effective, sustainable training and peacebuilding programs in conflict zones, work towards the integration of effective psychosocial programming in mainstream peacebuilding, develop the programs and strengthen the organizational capacity needed to increase the reach of humanitarian actions (IAHV, 2016). IAHV Peacebuilding Program has focused on the following areas of work: preventing and transforming violent extremism, prisoner rehabilitation, capacity building and skills training for peacebuilders, psychosocial aspects of peacebuilding, trauma relief, and resilience, as well as professional care programs (IAHV, 2017). Katrien Hertog, a highly experienced peacebuilding specialist, is the director of the program in Europe. Her experience includes work in Russia/northern Caucasus, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, South Sudan, Ethiopia, India, Israel-Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, the United States, Europe, the Republic of Türkiye, Indonesia, South Africa, and the Philippines (IAHV, 2013a).

The IAHV Peacebuilding Program approach is based on an integrated intervention on three interrelated surfaces, in the absence of which no sustainable peacebuilding is possible. These surfaces are 1) the individual's level of mental health 2) the individual's immediate social network, as the first psychosocial reference surface, and 3) the national community, or international community involved in a particular conflict, as the second psychosocial reference surface (Hertog, 2017; IAHV, 2013b).

Healing, Resilience, and Empowerment (HRE) workshop

As stated above, the first step of trauma relief intervention is Healing, Resilience, and Empowerment workshop (HRE). 'The workshop is a low threshold, low cost, highly effective way that addresses the physical up to deeply existential layers, transcending the strictly cognitive effects. The workshop program consists of physical, breathing, and cognitive exercises, variations of mindfulness practices, and relaxation. The tools/techniques that the participants become familiar with during the workshop increase the chance of effectively dealing with difficult emotions and the aftermath of critical stress that they may experience as a result of traumatic events. These skills also enhance the likelihood of modifying cognitive distortions. Training boosts emotion regulation skills, increases levels of resilience, and assists regaining a sense of self-efficacy and control over one's life (Hertog, 2019). The participants can feel the effects of the training on a physiological level, therefore the IAHV approach can be referred to as a bio-psycho-social approach. After the workshop, the participants can practice the techniques they have learned on their own, as well as participate in regular group sessions (follow-up sessions) (IAHV, 2013c).

The HRE workshop was the first phase of IAHV's intervention in a project funded by the European Union in Jordan and Lebanon, which have experienced a major inflow of Syrian refugees due to the war in Syria. Over the 18 months of the project, it reached over 10000 people, the majority of whom were children and youth at risk of extremism and mental illness in the aftermath of the war. Parents, caregivers, teachers, NGOs, humanitarian, or state welfare administration staff were also participants in the training and coaching sessions. Workshops in the residential format were conducted by trained instructors in refugee camps, schools, and residential child care communities. Local instructors and leaders were similarly trained, allowing these activities to progress (they are long-term projects that will continue to be carried out in the future). IAHV worked in Jordan in the following locations: Zaatari Refugee Camp, Azraq Refugee Camp, Ramtha, East Amman, Amman, Irbid, Al Huson, Mafrq, Rusaifeh, Tabarbour, Baqa, Jerash, and Zarqa among many others. In Lebanon, they worked in Tripoli. The first phase of activities was the Trauma Relief, Resilience and Empowerment (now HRE) workshop, followed by Preventing and Transforming Violent Extremism-Mobilising Youth for Peace, Bridging Divided Communities, Dialogue and Reconciliation, as well as Training Professional Peacebuilding and Development Agencies (IAHV UK, 2019; EU. Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, 2020a; EU. Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, 2020b).

Drawing on these experiences, IAHV specialists sought new forms of contact with groups in need of support after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as

the situation required adapting to a radically different reality in human contact. At the same time, many observations pointed to an increased need for intervention programs, if only for health workers who were on the front line of the fight against the pandemic (Vassen, 2020). IAHV adapted the HRE workshop to the new reality and designed an online version of it. As a result, the first stage of interventions could still be implemented. This proved immensely useful in the subsequent challenges of the crisis in Afghanistan or the war in Ukraine. This form of online contact made it possible to reach significantly more people in need. Currently, still under supervision, highly trained HRE facilitators are conducting these workshops online for the Afghans each week. The workshops are being conducted in English but can be translated to Dari or other languages on request. Further workshop groups are offered to Venezuelan refugees. Other workshops are those provided to South African victims of crisis and Ukrainians, both outside and in Ukraine.

Currently, refugees constitute the majority of the participants of HRE workshops. Since the beginning of the crisis, Polish IAHV's volunteers have been concentrating their efforts on humanitarian support for the Ukrainians. Now, it is time to conduct the HRE workshops that the instructors have been preparing for. It may prove to be a highly effective way to find solutions in such a difficult time for the victims of the war, taking into account that more than three million Ukrainian refugees have come to Poland and are scattered across many parts of the country. It is also crucial that the online version of HRE allows for conducting the workshops for the participants who still reside in their country and are able to join the workshops whenever possible. According to UN data, Ukraine is experiencing seven million internally displaced persons due to the war (UNHCR, 2022).

CONCLUSION

According to the observations, the use of modern technology in alleviating trauma at a crucial time for the wider trauma-affected population is irreplaceable. Such interventions are commonly considered to be challenging but they are possible and necessary. IAHV is implementing an effective and unique approach in the field, using digital technologies at the first stage (HRE workshops). The use of technology can accelerate the intervention to alleviate trauma for more people in need.

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