

## Small Groups Lead to Big Transformations for Venezuelan Women in Colombia

### Increasing Access to Mental Health Support through a Group-Based Community-Delivered Intervention

Forced migration and displacement places individuals at-risk for mental health conditions with often limited access to care. In an effort to build capacity in Colombia for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, Venezuelan women were trained in a brief mental health intervention developed by the World Health Organization, called Problem Management Plus (Group PM+). Women who participated in Group PM+ reported a number of mental health benefits throughout the program.

The intervention also showed promise for sustainability and scalability as some of the women who were initially trained as facilitators, took on trainer and supervisory roles and many indicators of implementation quality were maintained.

### Methods

In Phase I of the study, Venezuelan women, who are not mental health specialists, were trained in Group PM+ by members of the research team. Group PM+ was then delivered to 68 women in small group. In Phase II of the study, a select group of women from Phase I were identified to serve as trainers for a second cohort of women who would be leading Group PM+ groups. The second cohort trainees then delivered Group PM+ to 59 women. Quantitative and qualitative measures were obtained before the intervention and then immediately after, 3 months, and 6 months after participation in Group PM+.

### Key Findings

Women with minimal prior experience in delivering mental health interventions were successfully trained in Group PM+. Preliminary analyses indicate that women who received Group PM+ found that interventions to be beneficial for their mental health and felt a strong sense of community with the other women in the group. This study showed promise for scalability as women who were initially trained in the intervention became trainers and supervisors for subsequent cohorts of trainees.

### Background

Due to a number of political, economic, and social factors there are now over six million Venezuelan refugees and migrants throughout the world with almost two million individuals currently living in Colombia. It has been well established that forced migration and displacement are associated with higher risk of mental health conditions and, in particular, this risk is further increased among the high risk of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and other social protection concerns for women. In an effort to build capacity and increase access to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for Venezuelan women in Colombia, Venezuelan women were trained in a brief group-based manualized intervention developed by the World Health Organization called Group Problem Management Plus (Group PM+). Although Group PM+ had been used in other countries, it had yet to be adapted to support Venezuelan women in this context. We examined the feasibility and sustainability of training non-mental health specialists as facilitators and, later, trainers in this intervention and whether those participating in this intervention would find the groups helpful in reducing distress.



*Women Trained in Group Problem Management Plus Holding up Their Certificates of Completion*

## Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

These findings add to a growing body of knowledge on the role of scalable mental health interventions delivered by non-mental health specialists as an important strategy for addressing gaps in mental health and psychosocial support for displaced and migrant populations. Additionally, the findings from this project point to the potential scalability and sustainability of this intervention. Over the course of the program, not only were individuals with minimal formal mental health training able to demonstrate their ability to deliver this intervention to women in their community, but a number of the women initially trained to facilitate groups, then successfully moved into trainer and supervisory roles. Therefore, these findings continue to underscore the important role of task-sharing strategies in response to providing mental health support in humanitarian contexts and provides emerging evidence that such programs can be sustained and scaled beyond the initial transfer of knowledge from specialists to non-specialists.

## Recommendations for the future research

Future research would benefit from a close examination of the resources and costs associated with sustainability and scalability when there is minimal support from NGO's and academic research partners. Additionally, future studies are needed to further consider the ways in which this intervention could be further integrated into other social services and sectors taking place in this community, such as security, healthcare, and economic wellbeing. Moreover, studies looking at the potential long-term benefit of Group PM+ would allow for the examination for longer term outcomes and the ways in which mental health strategies interact with other wellbeing indices such as nutrition, caregiving, and livelihood.

## About the study team

The study team was comprised of an interdisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners representing academic institutions, NGO's, and UN-agencies. Additionally, this study was supported by a Scientific Advisory Council and Community Council who provided guidance and input throughout different phase of this work. This brief is made possible by the support of the United States Agency for International Development

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## Keywords

Mental health; refugees; scalable mental health interventions; humanitarian response; gender based violence

**“Small Changes, Big Transformation”**  
a documentary by Marianne Amelinckx,  
a Venezuelan writer, producer, and storyteller based in  
Los Angeles focused on telling female driven stories.

This film portrays the story of how an international group came together to build mental health capacity and the transformative ways in which the women who participated in Group PM+ are now supporting each other.

<https://vimeo.com/kusalausa/smallchanges-laserpulse>



*First Group of Women Trained in Group Problem Management Plus Celebrating the Completion of their Training*