

The Red Cross Red Crescent Research Network

Research Carnival: Learning from MHPSS in Climate Change, Conflict and Migration.

11th – 13th September 2023, Copenhagen

Summary Report

Introduction

Over the last decade conflicts, instability, and climate-related disasters such as those in Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, Central America and Ukraine have resulted in significant mass migration and have had profoundly negative impacts on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.

Different parts of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have responded along with other organizations. The Research Carnival brought together 18 presenters and 54 participants from across the world, who have been working in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to showcase and share their experiences of undertaking research, monitoring and evaluation in conflict and migration settings. The Research Carnival was framed by the recent publication of the Mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings: research priorities for 2021–30.

Together practitioners, academics and researchers highlighted key considerations in MHPSS programming to integrate evidence building tools and bridging the gap between research and practice. Key takeaways included that;

- Multiple sources of distress and stress need to be considered when identifying MHPSS needs and designing research.
- There is a need to invest in local partnerships and co-creation to enhance the scale up of MHPSS.
- Supervision and capacity building are integral to MHPSS programming.
- For MHPSS services: these need to be developed in partnership with target groups in iterative and participatory decision-processes.
- There is a need for longitudinal research and follow up of study participants, including consideration of the evidence on long term impacts.
- Researchers and practitioners must improve communication and work together to build the evidence around MHPSS.
- There are so many challenges that exist in understanding the application of evidence-based practice, in the community, amongst practitioners, researchers and in policy. If we don't involve one another, cooperate and partner, we won't know what exists.
- Useful to have evidence summaries and evidence building tool kits (how to conduct research, monitoring and evaluation – and which tools to use in which context) and advocacy tool kits.
- By sharing our failures we are better able to break through the protectiveness of our current silos and structures.

Summary from the Final Session of the Research Carnival

For the last session of the Research Carnival, all present broke into smaller groups to share their reflections, particularly about what they might take back to their work contexts and what they would recommend for the future. The following summarizes their feedback when we all reconvened for our final session.

Reflections

The importance of bridging the gap between humanitarian and academic. Organizations can be beacons in the field, fostering both the responsibility and power to facilitate stronger collaborations between the two; as well reporting, analyzing and learning units.

Climate change was missing in the Carnival (in part due to how little research connecting MHPSS and climate change has taken place within the Research Network) – as well as gender, diversity, older persons, research and more research from Asia-Pacific and Americas. Important for us to consider these topics from different MHPSS aspects. Also, anticipatory stress and preparedness.

Questions were raised;

1. how to measure “the good stuff” such as the impact of MHPSS services, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing concepts.
2. Mainstreaming MHPSS and the different sectors and how do you measure what makes a difference: the impacts.
3. Is there a contradiction between good research and good branding and marketing?

The gap in research related to community-based programming and approaches at the basic and focused psychosocial support levels of the IASC MHPSS Intervention Pyramid. There is a lot of data captured from these programming approaches, but little data analysis or research conducted uses approaches other than Random Control Trials. Diverse and creative research approaches are required if we wish to build the evidence base for basic and focused psychosocial support.

There are so many challenges that exist in understanding the application of evidence based practice, in the community, amongst practitioners, researchers and in policy. If we don't involve one another, cooperate, and partner, we won't know what exists.

Lack of capacity generally in terms of MHPSS providers (human resources for MHPSS). Research about what works well and programme/ service approaches in terms of human resources for MHPSS and capacity-building for MHPSS skills and competences. How do we further the learning to do more and whilst recognizing the reality on the ground – i.e., translate research into practice, make research recommendations feasible? How do we bring the resources together and where can we find them? How do we make more tools available and disseminate the information on the research priorities?

Key take aways

+ Getting feedback from our frontline staff and volunteers (community level service providers), establishing connections with already existing best practice groups, such as working groups, research networks and communities of practice and learning, new tools and the details about the studies presented.

- + The importance of dissemination and using the current platforms that we have access to and to connect and share the work. Disseminate knowledge with all the stakeholders and translate knowledge into different contexts.
- + Useful to have evidence summaries, recording the issues that we are interested in and sharing these in ways that are acceptable and adds to other research and practices. We should use MHPSS evidence as advocacy for MHPSS needs and services.
- + The significance of having a community of people with whom the failure of a project can be shared more openly, as a source of important learning. The point was made that in sharing our failures we are best able to break through the protectiveness of our current silos and structures.
- + Engage with the media and communication colleagues. Use infographics and disseminate findings to practitioners in digestible and informative ways.
- + The significance of ethical research, including how we gather the evidence. The research involving children with disabilities was a good example. We must research in ways that create a positive experience for all involved. Using the data and data collected more effectively. Often National Societies don't have the capacity to make the most of the data they have and should we be doing more from an ethical perspective.
- + There is a bridging issue between practice and research: how do we overcome this barrier? How do we translate our learning into practice and in general how do we support country-level to do this better and to make coalitions? We have these minutes to reflect but no/little time to integrate into practice. Also, we miss people in the room and how do we get their voices, their realities into policy and connect with more practitioners all with the same voice?

Recommendations

- We need to train practitioners more on monitoring and evaluation, as well as research and empower them to do this as part of their work.
- We need to value the coproduction of knowledge as important evidence.
- We also need to acknowledge different motivations and approaches across various practices, and to acknowledge those who are the end users.
- More information sharing – peer reviewed and open access: [Sci-Hub \(hkvisa.net\)](https://www.hkvisa.net).
- Establish an open hub for people to come together, like a dating site – bringing academic and practitioners (and many of the various resources) together. This would be useful for so much, including rapid reviews and to be able to match resources with needs. It was suggested that the MHPSS Collaborative might create this.

Resources to access

- There are so many resources and toolkits available. How do we get better in an informal way – to be able to remember them, use and refer to them in our trainings? It still feels a very inaccessible world.
- Intervention journal as a place to publish in for those who would like to share their thoughts and get their voices out there, including those who are good at interventions. The journal enables our work to be shared and reach others.
- Inter-agency MHPSS Monitoring and Evaluation Help Desk can be shared to help people.

- Working Groups one and four from the work on implementing the Movement's Policy and Resolution on MHPSS are looking for members from this group. Working Group One looks at how to integrate MHPSS across all services and resources (especially basic psychosocial support training, basic M&E and preparedness tools and those that challenge mental health stigma). Working Group Four focus on building the evidence and the impact of MHPSS and how to enable more M&E (at all levels) and research to take place across the Movement and external to the Movement.
- Newsletter from the MHPSS Collaborative



Annex 1

Report on Feedback received

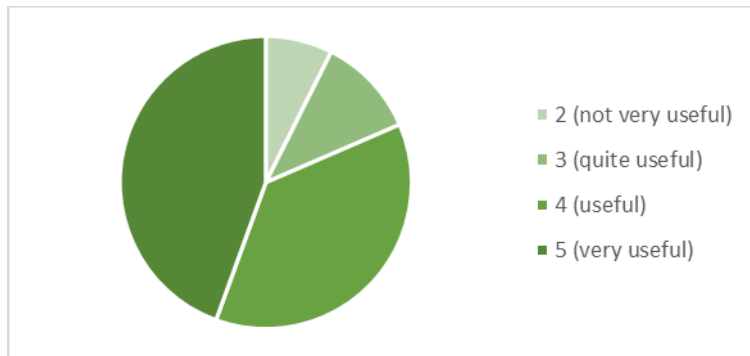
The Research Carnival was organized by the Red Cross Red Crescent Research Network co-chairs, the IFRC PS Centre and the British Red Cross, in Copenhagen on 11th-13th September 2023. The programme included 18 presentations and the event welcomed 54 attendees. A survey was shared after the conclusion to gather feedback from all participants. A summary of the answers received is presented below.

Affiliation of the respondents: A total of 27 individuals completed the survey and shared their opinions and suggestions. Among them, 19 reported their main affiliation being with a Red Cross Red Crescent Movement actor, 5 with an academic entity, 3 with a different institution (eg. NGOs, private individuals, etc).

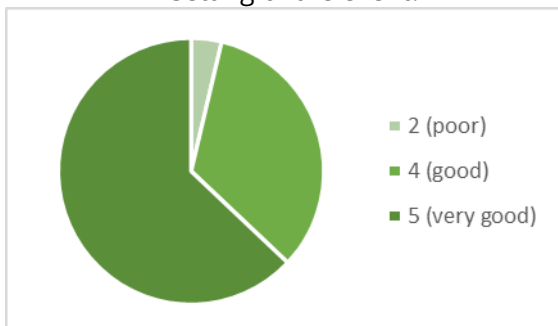
Quality and usefulness of the sessions: Out of 27 respondents, 15 described the sessions as very useful, 11 as useful, and 1 as not very useful. Overall, this shows very positive feedback on the sessions and the event programme. When asked which session(s) was particularly useful or interesting, 15 of them mentioned one or more individual session, 4 explained that all sessions were interesting, 4 mentioned the final plenary discussion, 3 highlighted opportunities for coming together of researchers and practitioners and 2 favoured the discussions throughout the event.

Overall feedback on the event:

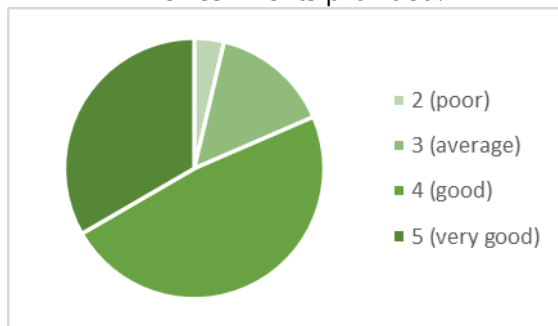
How useful did you find the Research Carnival overall to your area of practice?



How would you rate the organization and setting of the event?

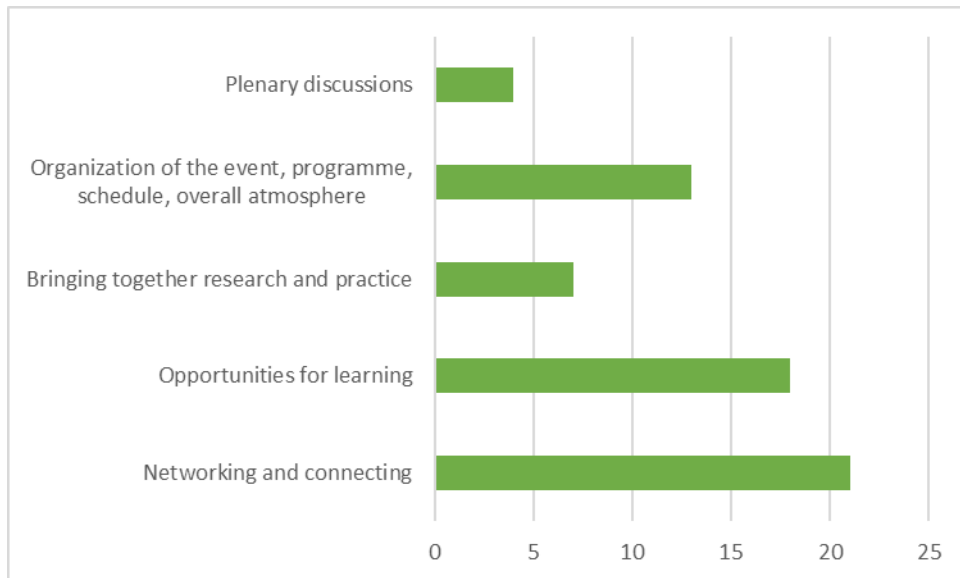


How would you rate the food and refreshments provided?

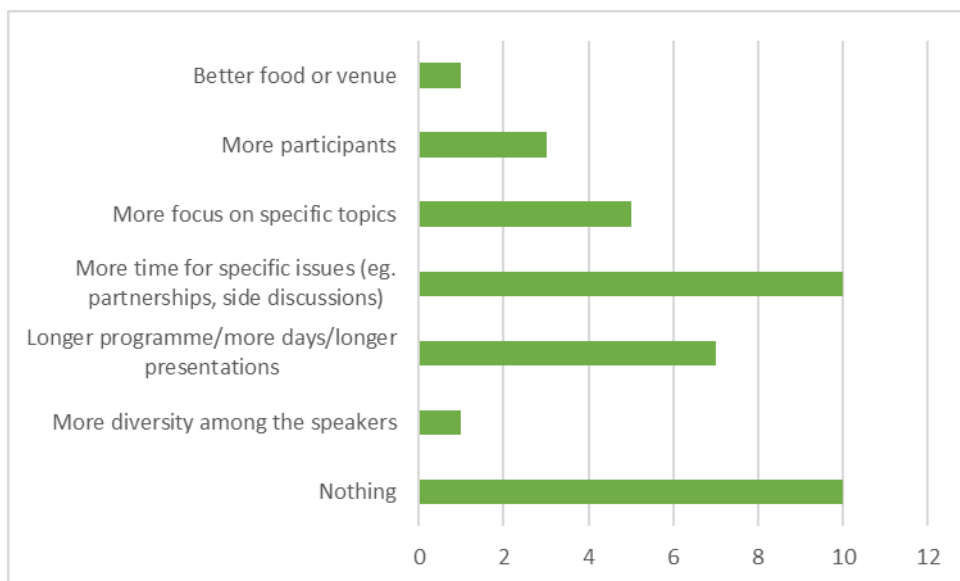


Open questions:

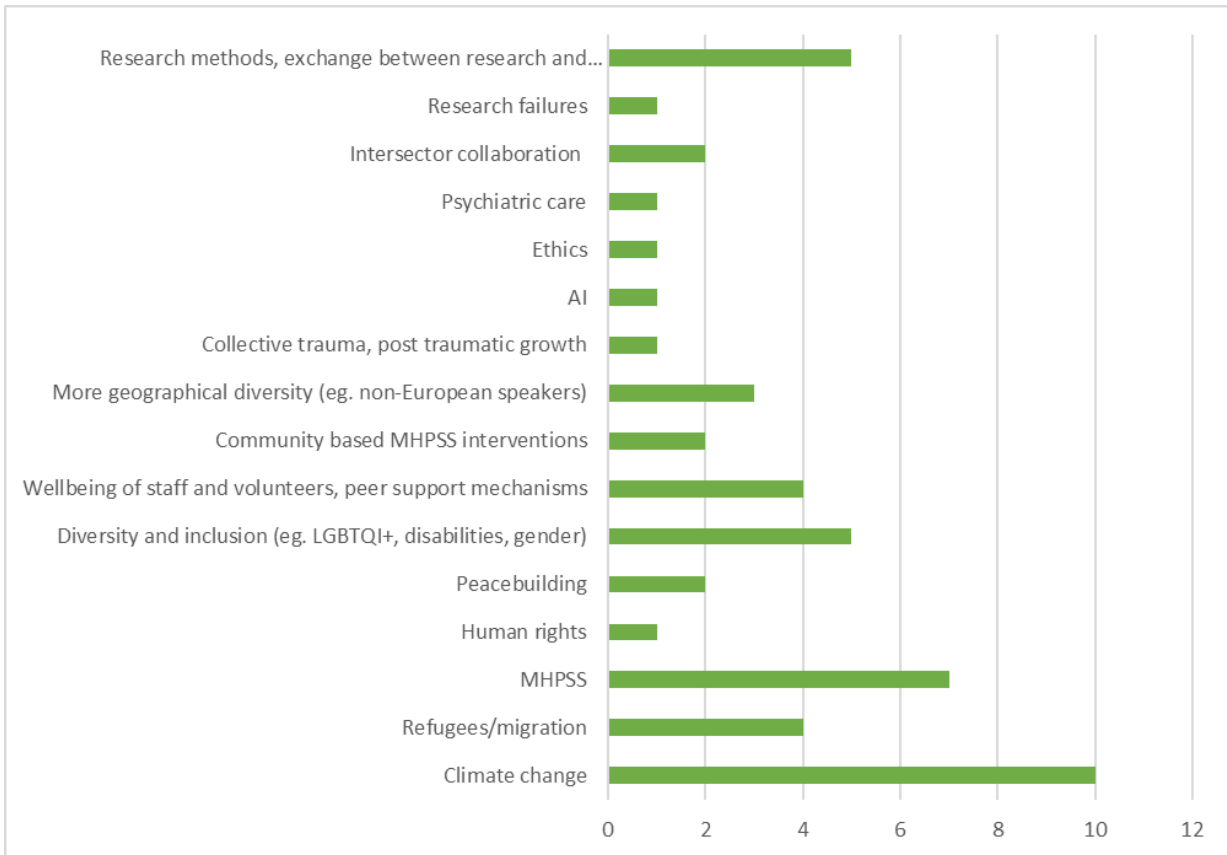
When asked about aspects of the event that were considered valuable or enjoyable, the respondents answered as follows:



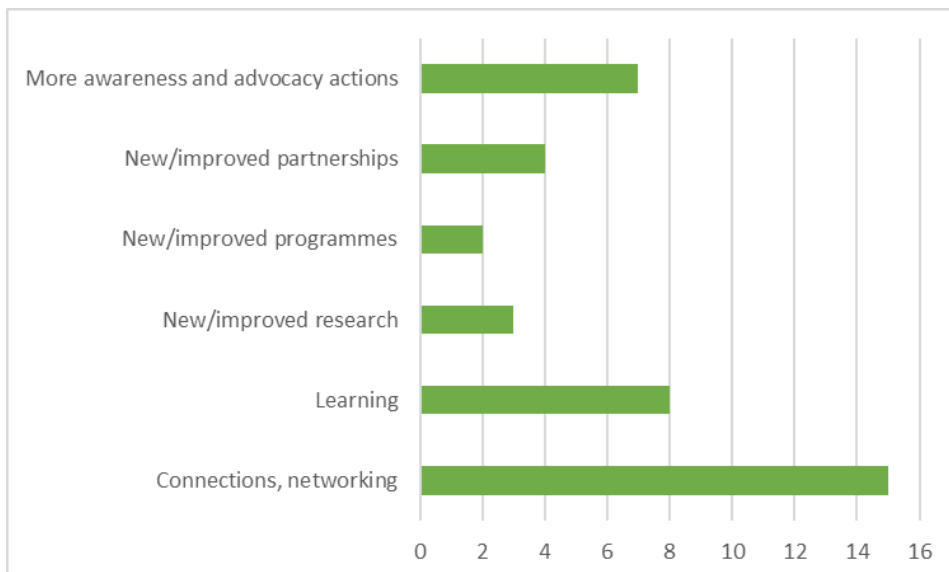
On the other hand, the following aspects were highlighted among those in need of improvement:



Many themes were mentioned among the recommendations for the next MHPSS Research event. A clear interest for issues related to climate change and research methods, as well as the exchange between the researchers and the practitioners, emerges from the results. Furthermore, quite a few of the respondents showed interest for a stronger focus on diversity, both in terms of geographical representation among speakers and participants, and in terms of problematics that affect specific demographics (eg. LGBTQI+, disabilities, gender, etc).



The last question asked participants about actions taken as a result of the event, as well as actions that they were planning to take. While many factors influence this aspect, it is interesting to note that the majority highlighted the value and importance of opportunities for making connections, networking, and learning about new practices and notions.



The organisers thank those who participated and those who gave feedback and look forward to being in touch with them through the IFRC's Research Network <http://bit.ly/researchnetwork>