# What digital MHPSS intervention fits which layer of the MHPSS Framework?

The MHPSS pyramid is commonly used within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and in other humanitarian aid organizations. The division into different layers can help guide the provision of services and interventions. We have drawn our definitions below from the Movement's MHPSS Framework, the 2022 *Digital Mental Health and Psychosocial Support: Challenges and Best Practices* report[1] and the 2023 *Designing Safe Digital Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) for Displaced and Stateless Adolescents* UNHCR-report[2] to provide context and examples of digital interventions at each layer. Further examples can be found in Annex 2 of the 2022 Challenges and Best Practices report[1] and pages 32–33 in the UNHCR-report[2].

Level of intervention

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IRCRCM) MHPSS pyramid describes services and interventions on four different levels of specification – from basic mental health promotion to specialized care. Digital services can be used on every layer as e.g. digital self-care, focused support groups or technology-supported in-person treatments. It is important to determine which target group with which needs is to be reached and to select the level of intervention accordingly.
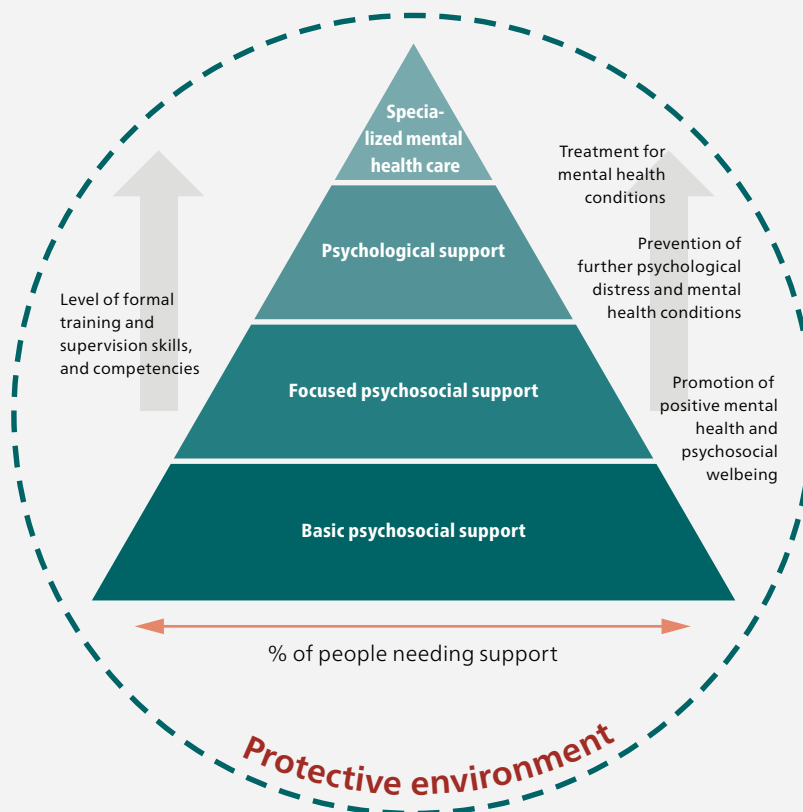
Basic psychosocial support (Layer 1)

Layer 1 of the MHPSS pyramid promotes positive mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, resilience, social interaction and social cohesion activities within communities. Social and psychological considerations are often integrated into the provision of basic services and support within the health, protection and education sectors. Subsequently, the activities on Layer 1 should be accessible to 100% of the affected population, where possible.

Examples of activities include psychological first aid (PFA) and recreational activities. Basic psychosocial support can be provided by trained Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers and/or trained community members.

Digital solutions

Digital services on Layer 1 can – according to the UNHCR report[2] – support digital connectivity and provide online services or digital programs in safe and dignified ways that protect the mental health and wellbeing of marginalized or isolated individuals and groups and that respect and enable their digital rights.

Examples of digital interventions from the reports are digital literacy programmes to help adolescents safely navigate the Internet, the psychological first aid (PFA) app and the Sui SRK app from the Swiss Red Cross that provides information and psychoeducation to reduce stigma and promote the wellbeing of refugees.

Focused psychosocial support (Layer 2)

Layer 2 of the MHPSS pyramid includes promotion of positive mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, and prevention activities, with a specific focus on groups, families and individuals at risk to strengthen community and family support.

Examples of activities include peer support and group work. Focused psychosocial support can be provided by trained and supervised Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers and/or trained community members.

Digital solutions

Digital solutions on Layer 2 can – according to the UNHCR-report[2] – strengthen community support for MHPS needs through family, peer, or community actions and mechanisms.

Examples of digital interventions from the reports are online support for facilitated peer-to-peer or community-based MHPS support groups, peer support through video provided by Red Cross volunteers for people feeling lonely, and moderated peer-to-peer support groups for depression and anxiety[3].

Psychological support (Layer 3)

Layer 3 of the MHPSS pyramid encompasses focused non-specialized psychological support including prevention and treatment activities for individuals and families with more complicated psychological distress and for people at risk of developing mental health conditions.

Examples of activities include basic psychological interventions, such as counselling and psychotherapy, which are usually provided in healthcare facilities with accompanying outreach work in community facilities, where this is culturally appropriate.

Digital solutions

Digital solutions on Layer 3 – according to the UNHCR report – can be provided through the integration of focused, non-specialized digital MHPS support into existing online programmes and services.

Examples of digital interventions from the reports are self-directed, self-paced, semi- or fully automated MHPSS applications and online programmes that address common mental health challenges such as depression, stress and anxiety. An example of this being the Step-by-step programme by WHO, providing psychoeducation and training through a mobile app and website, focusing on stress management, positive self-talk and increasing social support[4].

Specialized mental healthcare (Layer 4)

Layer 4 of the MHPSS pyramid includes specialized clinical mental health services and treatment for individuals with chronic mental health conditions and for persons suffering such severe distress that they have difficulty coping in their daily lives.

Examples of activities include treatment centres for survivors of torture and alternative approaches to drug therapy. Services can be provided within state healthcare and social welfare systems or in detention facilities.

Digital solutions

Digital solutions on Layer 4 are described in the UNHCR report[2] as «specialized MHPSS support provided online».

Examples of digital interventions from the reports are synchronous online therapy and counselling through messaging platforms or online video platforms, video call technology to conduct psychiatric treatments in digital and blended formats during COVID and Internet-based treatments with therapist support for anxiety and depression[5].

Sources/references

[1] Neidhardt, C., Palacios Mateo, S., Schmidt-Gödelitz., F. & Tsang, L. (2022). Digital Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): Challenges and Best Practices. The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

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