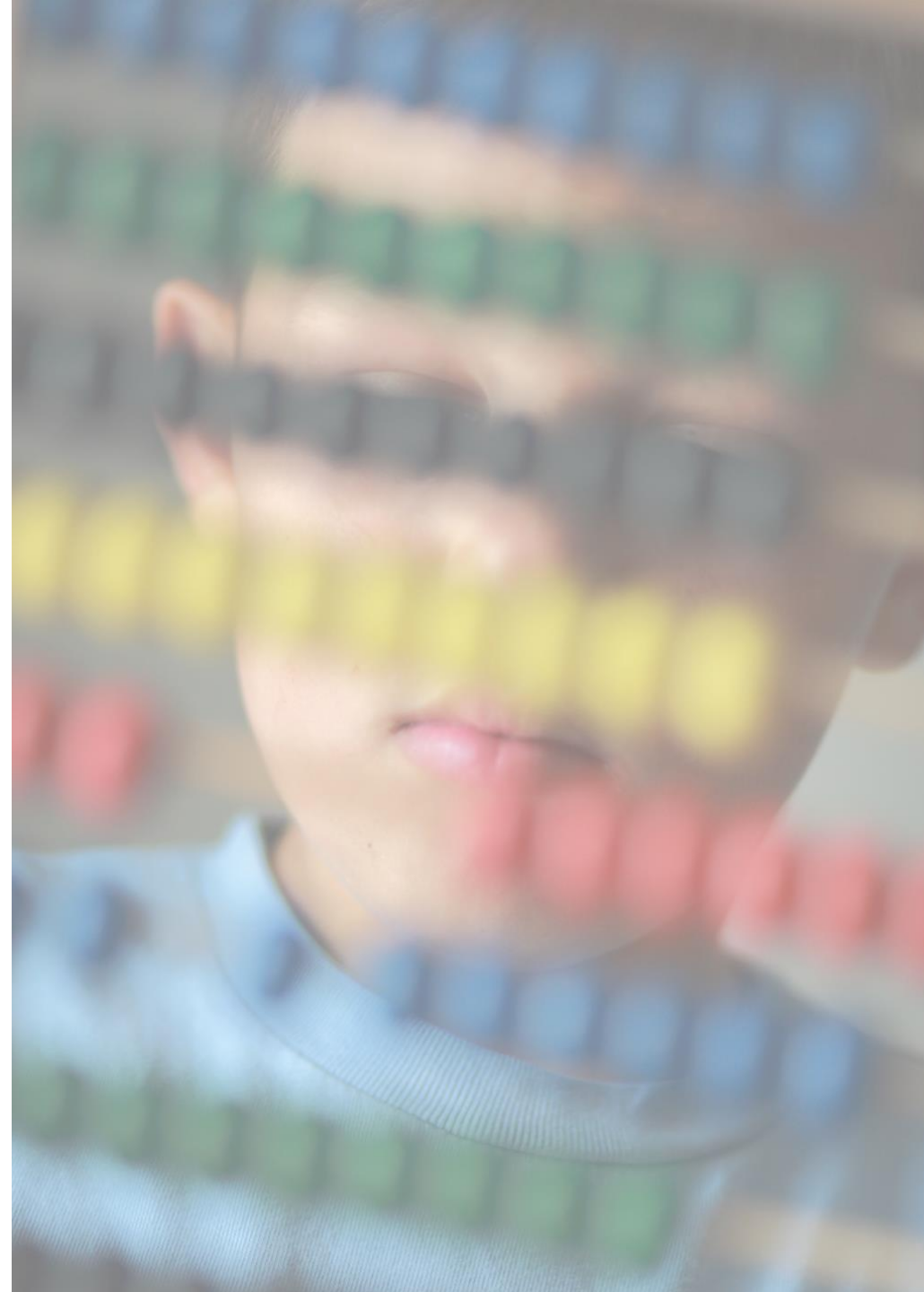




MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN ALONG THE CONTINUUM OF CHILD CARE

Leah James, PhD, MHPSS/Child Protection Specialist,
UNICEF ECARO

Martin Punaks, MA, Child Protection Specialist,
UNICEF ECARO



MHPSS AND CHILDREN'S CARE

Objectives

Support country offices in understanding and promoting good practices for children and families at risk of separation, in alternative care and who are leaving care, including humanitarian settings, by:

1. Applying an MHPSS-informed lens to all services.
2. Using specialized MHPSS interventions to meet specific mental health needs.

Deliverable

UNICEF Technical Note.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



Team

Leah James (MHPSS and Child Protection Specialist)
Martin Punaks (Child Protection and Care Specialist)

Research focus

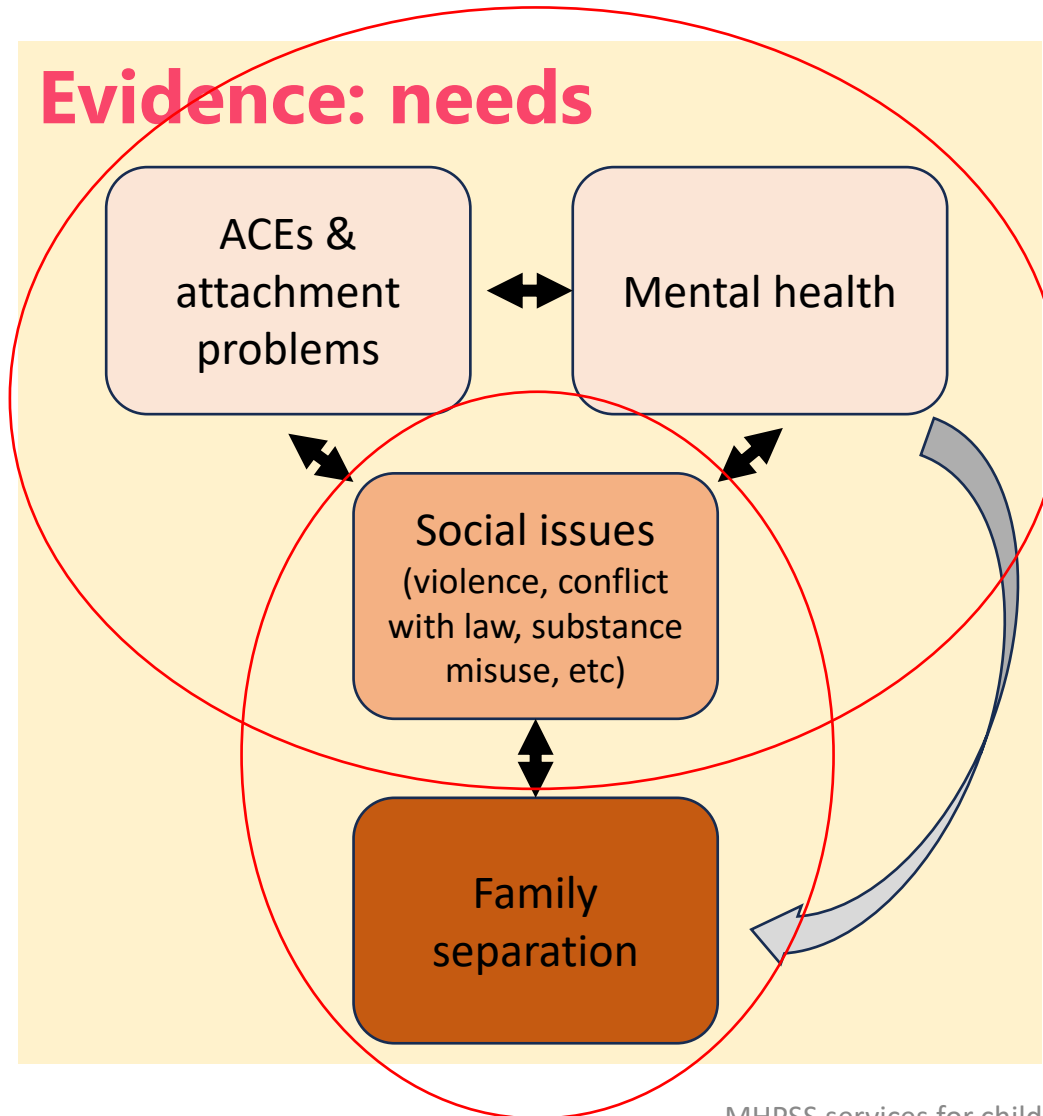
1. Mental health needs of children.
 2. MHPSS evidence-based good practice.
- Parameters: children in need of care and protection

Research methodology

1. Literature review of the evidence.
2. Country office survey and consultation.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AT RISK OF SEPARATION: KEY FINDINGS

Evidence: needs



Evidence: good practice

- Mental health problems have roots in early childhood and peak during adolescence.
- Interventions during childhood are important to prevent mental health problems and social issues escalating in children and young parents, thus reducing the risk of family breakdown.
- Interventions which target both children and parents/caregivers are effective.

CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE: KEY FINDINGS

Evidence: needs

- Children in alternative care have higher levels of mental health needs than children in the general population.
- The quality of care and MHPSS support influences a child's future mental health trajectory.
- Focusing too much on the harms of **institutional care** can distract us from the mental health needs of children and caregivers in **family-based care**.
- Suicide prevention: challenges for children in alternative care.

Evidence: good practice

- Supporting caregivers' mental health needs and skills helps children in alternative care who have mental health needs.
- MHPSS to children in alternative care is more effective if a caregiver – who has a relationship with the child – is involved.
- Resilience building – shifting the focus from problems to developmental strengths.
- Question – to best support the mental health needs of children in institutions, should the focus be on DI, MHPSS interventions, or both?

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES: KEY FINDINGS

Evidence: needs

- Evidence on effectiveness of interventions is not always conclusive – but we can be reasonably confident about some principles, approaches and interventions.
- Workforce training and support – and the need to value caregivers' knowledge and experience.
- Funding – it is hard to articulate MHPSS services' value in financial terms.
- Stigma – children/caregivers not seeking help, or only seeking informal help
- Power inequalities and unequal decision-making between professionals and children/caregivers.

Evidence: good practice

- MHPSS principles and approaches which can be used across all children's care.
- Caregiver involvement and buy-in improves the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Potential of technology assisted interventions: telephone, internet, apps, hybrid.
- Importance of integrated and multidisciplinary assessments and services.

UNICEF COUNTRY OFFICE CONSULTATION: KEY FINDINGS

Evidence: needs

- Lack of clarity on MHPSS as a concept and how it can be incorporated into programming.
- Lack of quality and consistency in MHPSS services.
- Challenges over stigma concerning mental health.
- Challenges in supporting the mental health needs of children in emergencies.
- Need for MHPSS best practice guidance, tools, resources, training.
- Need for specialized MHPSS approaches to support the most vulnerable groups.

Evidence: good practice

- Emergency contexts – good MHPSS practices.
- Good examples of government policies.
- MHPSS for parents and caregivers.
- Capacity strengthening and wellbeing supports to deliver MHPSS interventions.
- Good examples of CSOs and schools being used to deliver MHPSS interventions.

Getting in touch

If you have any additional experiences, ideas or resources, we would love to hear from you:

- Martin Punaks – mpunaks@unicef.org
- Leah James – lejames@unicef.org

Thank you!

