

# A systematic review of MHPSS interventions targeting non-clinical Arabic-speaking refugees and/or displaced populations in the MENA region

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## Introduction

Middle East & North African (MENA) displaced populations represent the largest displaced people globally (UNHCR, 2023) and have experienced enduring exposure to trauma and related stressors affecting several generations pre- and post-migration. Women represent half the refugee population and suffer more psychological distress than men (Atrooz et al 2023, Hosseini et al 2023, Tahir et al 2022).

Despite this, there is no published systematic review examining Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions targeting MENA refugees and displaced populations.

**AIM:** Identify existing MHPSS interventions and assess their effectiveness in improving mental health outcomes in a refugee context.

## Mixed-methods approach phase 1: Syst. Rev. (Prospero CRD42023421057)

**Databases:** MEDLINE, PsycInfo, Global Health, ASSIA, Sociological Abstracts, Dissertations, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, WHO Global Eastern Mediterranean

**Period of Search:** March 2011 – November 2022

**Search strategy:**  
**P=** Non-clinical adult Arabic-speaking refugees and/or displaced populations.  
**I=** MHPSS interventions.  
**C=** Active comparators, treatment as usual groups, placebo groups or no action.  
**O=** Grief or mental distress.

**Inclusion criteria:**

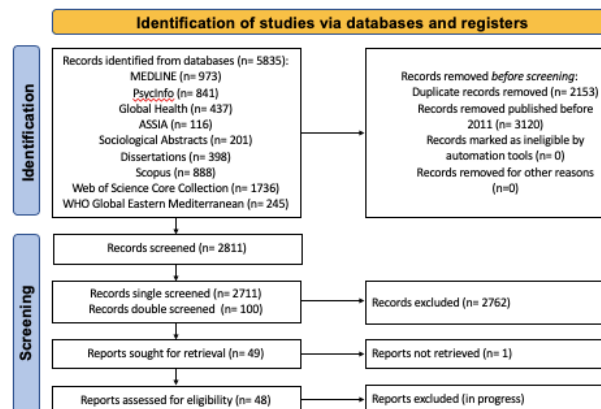
- Participant nationality and intervention location: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, or Oman.
- MHPSS intervention: Any type of local/outside support aiming to protect/promote psychosocial well-being or prevent or treat mental disorders and/or distress.
- Pre- and post-intervention assessment(s), i.e., measures of change.

**Exclusion criteria:**

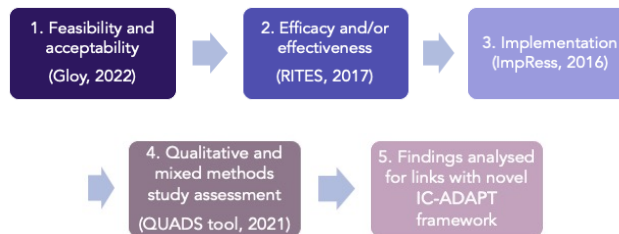
- X Interventions older than 2011
- X Participants <18 or >65
- X Clinical population
- X Sample size ≤10

## Results

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Included Studies

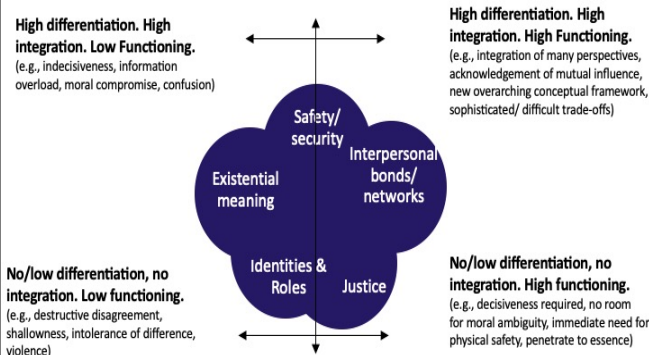


48 primary research articles included and assessed for:



IC = Integrative Complexity (Suedfeld & Rank, 1976)  
 ADAPT = Adaptation and Development After Persecution and Trauma (Silove, 2013)

IC: interactionist cognitive processing model with two variables, differentiation & integration  
 ADAPT: eco-psychosocial model of 5 internal adaptive systems with societal correlates  
 Low to high functioning at individual and group levels.



(Source: Boyd-MacMillan, E., Silove, D., DeMarinis, V., in preparation for invited publication, 2024)

## Phase 1 Syst. Rev. conclusions will:

Identify essential components for effective and feasible MHPSS interventions that will help host country mental health services develop culturally informed interventions that support adaptive functioning and social engagement to reduce social isolation, facilitate integration and increase social cohesion between refugees and nationals.

Inform phase 2 Community Readiness Assessment design, themes, and questions for focus groups\* and interviews\*\* exploring i) Syrian refugees' understanding of their needs, how those needs could be met, and their desire and readiness for change, and ii) cultural differences in how psychological distress is perceived and potentially manifested.

\*Focus group target population will be two Arabic-speaking non-clinical communities with mild to moderate mental distress living in Lebanon: 1- Syrian refugee women, 2- Lebanese women.

\*\*Interviewees will include mental healthcare practitioners from the Lebanese healthcare system in Beirut and NGO humanitarian workers providing MHPSS.

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## Further information

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