



WellPak: Community-based Integration of a Digital Intervention for Mental Health in Pakistan

Project type

interdisciplinary pilot project cross-sector project global health postdoc fellowship

Research areas involved

Biomedical sciences Public health
 Social sciences and humanities Engineering and other sciences

Project duration

August 2021– December 2023

Project team

Name	Organization	Discipline(s)
Prof. Dr. Hajo Zeeb	Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology – BIPS	Epidemiology, Public Health
Maham Saleem	Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology – BIPS	Public Health, Mental Health
Prof. Dr. Markus Koester	University of ULM, Ulm, Germany	Psychiatry
Prof. Dr. Shamsa Zafar	Fazaia Medical College, Islamabad, Pakistan	Gender Health
Dr. Siham Sikander	Fazaia Medical College, Islamabad, Pakistan	Psychiatry, Global Mental Health
Ramazan Salman	Ethno-Medical Center, Hannover, Germany	Medical Sociology





Case Study

WellPak Project: Community-Based Digital Intervention for Mental Health in Pakistan

The WellPak project is a collaboration between the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology – BIPS, the University of ULM, Ethno-Medical Center in Germany, and Fazaia Medical College in Pakistan. This Project addresses the significant mental health care gap in Pakistan, where many individuals remain untreated due to a shortage of specialists. The project aims to digitally adapt the WHO's Problem Management Plus (PM+) program into a Technology-Assisted Problem Management Plus (TA-PM+) platform. This digital intervention is designed for Lay Health Workers (LHWs) to deliver, monitor, and supervise mental health care effectively.

Project Summary

Phase 1: A scoping review was conducted to synthesize global implementation strategies of PM+ to inform adaptation of PM+ for culturally diverse and resource-limited settings like Pakistan. It highlighted the need for cultural adjustments and identified challenges such as high costs, mental health stigma, and difficulties in maintaining quality control in training and supervision.

Phase 2: The digital adaptation of PM+ was achieved through a co-production process, involving a stakeholder consultation, collaborative designing, and usability testing, resulting in the TA-PM+ platform. This platform includes an app for LHWs and a web-based backend for supervisors. It features video clips, avatars, and a personal dashboard to assist LHWs in delivering the intervention. Usability testing showed high satisfaction, with an initial usability score of 5.62 (out of 7) based on the mHealth Usability Questionnaire. After improvements, a subsequent field evaluation involving individuals with depression increased the score to 5.96. The TA-PM+ session client satisfaction score was 40 out of 46, indicating high contentment with the sessions.

Phase 3: The feasibility study evaluated the real-world acceptability and effectiveness of TA-PM+ among 77 women, screened for depression and anxiety, in community settings in Islamabad. The study showed a significant reduction in mental health symptoms, with General Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) scores decreasing from 8.72 to 3.46 and Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) scores dropping from 10.60 to 4.52. LHWs reported improved case management and communication, with the structured guidance provided by the app.

Lessons for the Wider Community:

Adapting or developing digital interventions requires engagement with local stakeholders and consideration of available resources. While digital interventions offer accessibility, effectiveness, and cost-efficiency, success depends on alignment with contextual factors. Neglecting unique settings or imposing interventions from high-income to low-income areas may worsen existing divides. A thoughtful, context-sensitive approach is vital for the successful deployment and impact of digital interventions, fostering inclusivity and bridging healthcare and digital gaps.

Contact:

Prof.Dr.med. Hajo Zeeb and Maham Saleem

Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology - BIPS
GmbH

Department of Prevention and Evaluation

E-Mail: zeeb@leibniz-bips.de

saleem@leibniz-bips.de

www.leibniz-bips.de



Project photos:



Group Photo from WELLPAK Workshop (above).

Key organizers and participants of the International Symposium on the provision of mental health care to the community (below). Credit: WELLPAK.



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Contact

German Alliance for Global Health Research (GLOHRA)

Secretariat c/o Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

Charitéplatz 1, 10117 Berlin, Germany

e: secretariat@globalhealth.de

t: +49 30 450 572 100

www.globalhealth.de

linkedin.com/company/globalhealth-de

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