



## Maximising meaningful and impactful mental health research for Syrian refugees during Covid-19 – co-creation, local relevance and ethical practice

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Bioethics in Research**

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# Background to the study

Frameworks for understanding mental health amongst those fleeing the Syrian conflict have been criticised for often adopting ill-fitting models which are divorced from their sociocultural contexts (Hassan, Ventevogel, Jefee-Bahloul, Barkil-Oteo & Kirmayer, 2016).

The mental health constructs adopted may not be cross-culturally valid and their focus on illness and disorder may exacerbate cultures of stigma, misinterpret local idioms of distress, and potentially lead to an overemphasis on the role conflict-trauma at the expense of social determinants of mental health (Wells, Wells & Laws, 2015; WHO, 2014).



Illustrator: Sophia Neilson, 2020



**How can we co-create an international research project with local mental health researchers/practitioners and displaced Syrians which is locally relevant and impactful?**



# One Health FIELD Network

Food Security Intelligence and Evidence-based  
Interventions for Local Sustainable Development in  
Fragile and Conflict-affected States

# Embedding an ethical approach

## Doing Ethical Research Together

Strengthening how we do research in complex and fragile settings



THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Global Research Ethics Toolkit which has been developed in collaboration with more than 200 researchers from more than 30 countries representing 60 different disciplines.

Offers a flexible frame of reference which promotes contextual ethical reflection and accountability within the research process and among research teams (Reid, et al., 2021).

ENGLISH & SPANISH WEBSITES

<https://www.ethical-global-research.ed.ac.uk/>

<https://www.ethical-global-research.ed.ac.uk/es>





## From the FIELD

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Multidisciplinary, global research collaboration  
exploring Covid-19's impact on the lives and  
livelihoods of Syrians

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Lebanon, Iraqi Kurdistan, Jordan, Syria and  
Turkey

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100 cross-sectoral questionnaire surveys  
delivered remotely April – June 2020

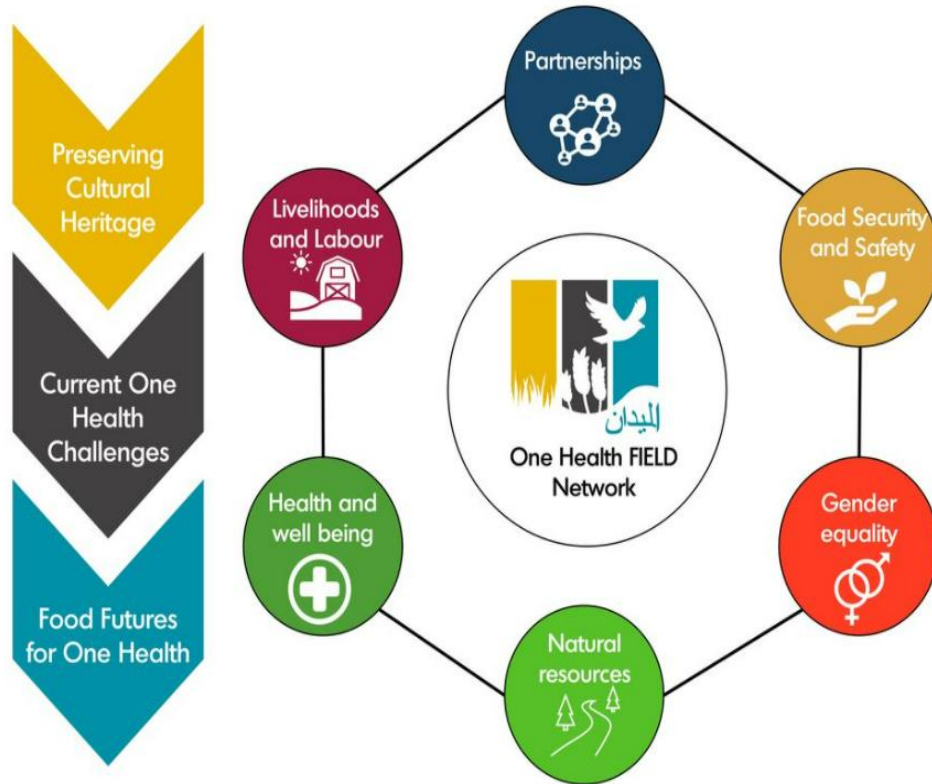
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Video ethnographic approaches

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# Partnerships – local expertise & protective links



**cara**  
a lifeline to academics at risk

 **Syrian**  
Academic expertise

 **ERBIL POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY**  
زانكوی پۆلیتیه کونیکه هه ولیر

  
**DEVELOPMENT  
WORKSHOP**

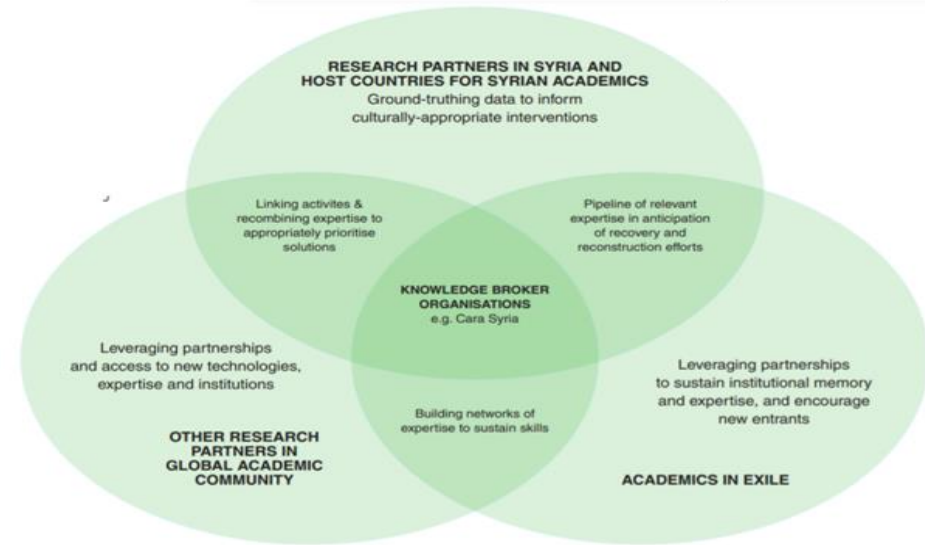
  
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# Syrian Academics and their Role in the Future of Food Security for Syria Roundtable, Istanbul (19-20 June 2019)



Hydroponics And Biotechnology	History And Islamic Civilisation	Agricultural Engineering	Food Science	Plant Protection
Economics	Clinical Psychology	Population Medicine	Veterinary Public Health	Public Health Law
Political Science, International Relations And Social Economy	Musicology	Sustainable Natural Resources Management	Human Rights	Social Science





# Mental Health Scales & Measures in a Syrian refugee context

- How to translate validated measures for the local context?
- How do we fulfil our responsibility to Do No Harm?
- In the end, what are we measuring?

## The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

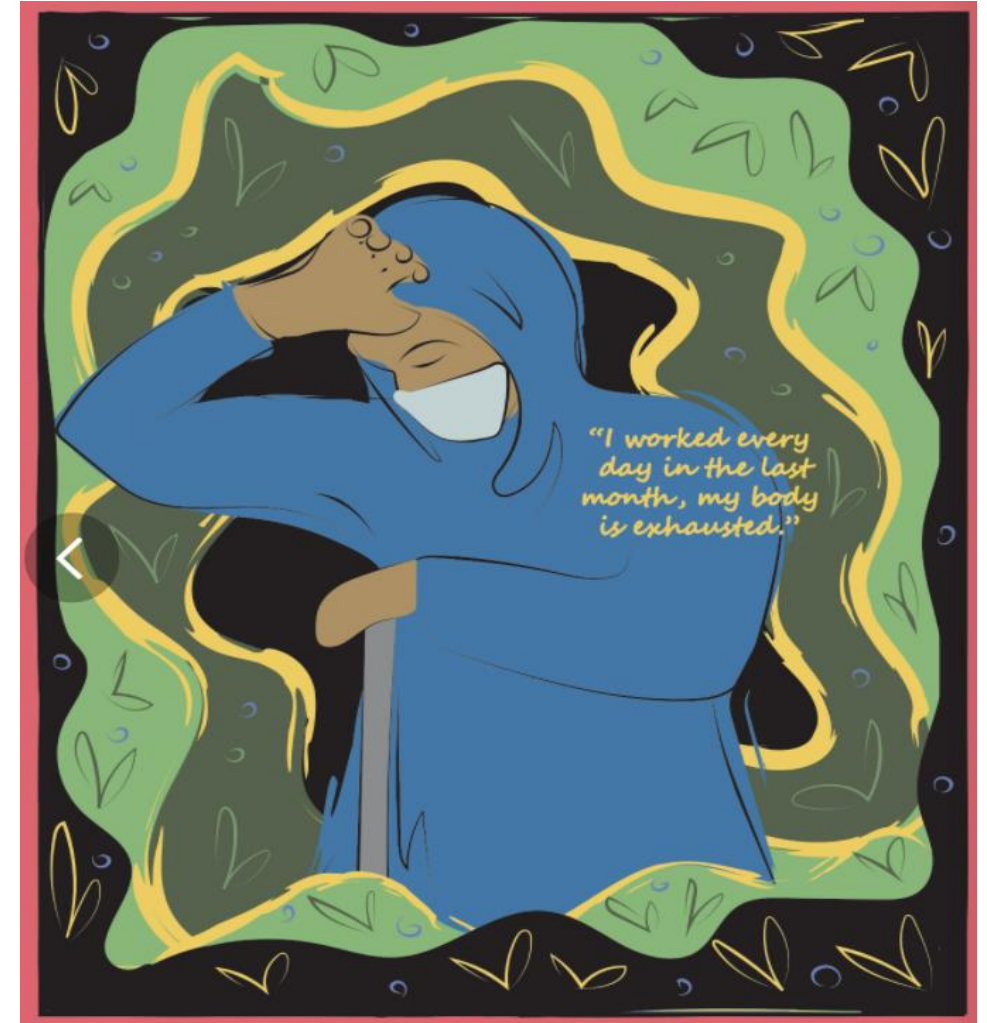
STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5

"Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

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# Reflexive research: effects on participant & researcher

- The sociocultural background which made the local researchers more knowledgeable of the particular expressions of mental distress.
- In humanitarian contexts, cultural countertransference can emerge between the researcher and the researched (Foster, 1998) and different types of empathy may manifest (Lachal, 2007).
- Mental health researchers require access to suitable training, clear referral pathways to respond to participants' stated needs, protocols for situations of harm risk and clinical supervision.



Illustrator: Sophia Neilson, 2020





## Recommendations and future research



Fit for purpose measures



Recognition of daily stressors  
alongside trauma



Diversify our understanding of  
research impact



Develop ethical systems of  
research care for participant and  
researcher

## ONE HEALTH FIELD NETWORK

### WEBSITE

<https://www.onehealthfieldnetwork.org/>



Achieving One Health  
through Food Security

# Thank you

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**Dr Shafer ABDULLATEEF**: Cara Syria Programme

**Maria AZAR**: Save the Children International

**Joy ABI-HABIB**: Save the Children International

**Joseph BURKE**: Research Fellow, School of Health in Social Science, University of Edinburgh

## ETHICS IN GLOBAL RESEARCH

### ENGLISH & SPANISH WEBSITES

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<https://www.ethical-global-research.ed.ac.uk/es>



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Dr Tobi Oshodi

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