

Implementing psychosocial methods to reinforce women's legal rights awareness training in Jordan

Lina Darras & Roza van der Heide

There are often large gaps between providing information on legal rights and the actual use of that information in women's daily lives. Clinical psychologists from the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development - Legal Aid devised joint psychosocial legal awareness training sessions to empower women through culturally sensitive assertiveness skills training, so they could make better practical use of legal rights information. Training of trainers sessions were held with Family Guidance Awareness Center lawyers and social workers, who conducted an anecdotal study with women from the community of Zarga, Jordan to verify two different methods. The first method involved conducting both legal awareness and a psychosocial session on the same day. The second method, utilised modules, both legal and psychosocial, spread over the course of two days. Quotes from participants strongly suggest that women are able to make better use of legal information if provided with a supportive, skills based psychosocial session as an adjunct, it also suggested that it is likely that longer information and longer psychosocial training sessions (method 2) result in the best outcomes, so long as there is a sufficient break between sessions to overcome fatigue. However, before more widespread implementation of these methods, we recommend more longitudinal research, specifically focused on testing for unintended negative consequences, seeing how well changes can be generalised to fit into women's everyday lives, and how well they last over time.

Keywords: assertiveness training, empowerment, female headed households, legal empowerment, Legal Rights Awareness Training, training of trainers, women

Key implications for practice:

- Large gaps exist between providing information on legal rights and the actual use of that information in women's lives in middle income countries.
- Simply providing information could have a negative effect as women can feel disempowered facing too many barriers to claim their rights.
- Suggestions are provided for improving traditional legal rights awareness training through skills training to make practical use of the legal rights.

Introduction

After seven of years of field experience, it became very apparent to Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development - Legal Aid (ARDD-Legal Aid) that there are often large gaps between providing legal information on, and the actual ability to access, justice. This is due to several factors, including economics, societal pressures, stigma and psychological effects. Psychosocial support (PSS) tools can help deal with these factors, both directly and indirectly. Therefore, an adjunct psychosocial session was designed to empower women through culturally sensitive assertiveness skills training, so they could make better, practical use of the legal rights information, allowing participants to translate information from

awareness raising sessions into action (no matter how small) in their daily lives. The psychosocial service of ARDD-Legal Aid and the Family Guidance Awareness Centre (FGAC) developed and informally tested the effectiveness of the addition of a psychosocial skills training component to women's legal awareness training sessions. This paper describes the trainings and the anecdotal results of these pilot studies in Zarqa, Jordan.

Background

The United Nations (UN) has explicitly stated: *“Access to justice is a basic human right as well as an indispensable means to combat poverty, prevent and resolve conflict”* (UNDP, 2014, p.3). However, for a large population of the world, violations of these UN defined rights is a part of their daily life. This includes discrimination, sexual violence, domestic violence, psychological violence and harassment. Research shows that between 16 and 50% of the female population of the world experience violence at some point in their life (Dahiya, Kumar, Nehra, & Supriti, 2013). Meanwhile, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that, as of July 2015, as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some other way – most often by someone she knows. This violence has an immense impact on psychological wellbeing. A study by WHO stated that there is a positive relationship between sexual violence and mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression disorders (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Research with Jordanian students showed high numbers of violence, with 86% reporting having experienced at least one type of family violence. The most prevailing types of abuse in their families were intimidation, emotional abuse and physical abuse. About half of the test group reported their mothers were also subjected to abuse (Al-Badayneh, 2012). This sobering evidence

clearly shows that violence is a day-to-day experience for many women and girls within Jordan.

Unfortunately, not everyone has access to justice in order to hold the perpetrators of such violence accountable for their actions. Women often cannot access justice because they lack the knowledge of their rights, or are unaware of the ways in which they can insist on claiming them. Just as in many other places in the world, a lacunae remains in raising awareness about the legal rights of women within the MENA region.

Influx of refugees

Jordan has been a host country for many refugees from around the Middle East over the past decades. More than half of the Jordanian population is originally Palestinian, with over 800,000 people from Iraq, Syria and other countries also having found refuge in Jordan (UNHCR, 2014). The recent Syrian Crisis has led to the development of two large refugee camps, housing 101,239 refugees, as of April 2015 (UNHCR, 2014). The remaining 84% of refugees live throughout the country, with the majority residing in Amman, Irbid, Mafraq and Zarqa governorates, as described in a report produced by UNHCR (Voon, 2014). As the unrest in the region continues and the Syrian crisis enters its fifth year, the number of those displaced by the conflict continues to grow, and the challenges of responding to their needs remain high. Additionally, the influx of high numbers of refugees has stretched the absorptive capacity of Jordanian communities, most of which already had challenging living conditions. A study evaluating the effect of the Syrian refugee crisis on Jordanian communities has found tensions due to competition for income, struggles to find housing, and educational concerns (IMC & UNICEF, 2014). Unfortunately, these daily stressors create fertile ground for abuse. While there is yet to be a

rigorous study identifying increasing levels of violence within Jordanian communities as a consequence of the influx of refugee groups, anecdotal evidence suggests that this is the case.

Syrian refugees residing in Jordan are often also vulnerable to violations of their rights due to the lack of official residence and legal status in Jordan. A report produced by Care International Organization (CARE) detailed that many refugees had experienced incidents of discrimination, exploitation or abuse and stated that they did not feel able to go to the police, report incidents, or to seek legal redress and support due to their irregular status (CARE, 2013).

Zarqa: a case study

Zarqa is the third largest governorate in Jordan, with more than 76,000 registered Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2014), of which one third are female headed households (FHH) (UNHCR, 2015). FHH are considered among the most vulnerable of refugees, for a variety of reasons. For instance, many have difficulties in securing rental accommodation because landlords are not willing to rent to unaccompanied women. Furthermore, women who head households reported generalised feelings of insecurity in their new communities and fear of discrimination or exploitation based on community perceptions of unaccompanied women (CARE, 2013). These women face some of the most egregious of rights violations, with limited ways in which to pursue justice. On top of this, there were pre-existing issues of violence in Zarqa before the arrival of refugees. Indeed, a survey conducted by the Family Guidance and Awareness Center (FGAC) (2001) on 1,164 families in Zarqa governorate shows that family violence is mostly against wives (National Council for Family Affairs (NCF), 2008). The survey also shows that more than two thirds of the cases of violence against females takes place within families living in poverty.

Box 1: Case study 1

Rula is 40 years old and is often exposed to violence within her marriage. Her husband regularly beats her. She has asked for help from her family, however they tell her that she should solve this problem on her own. They said that divorce is not an option, as this will ruin both her and her family's reputation.

Box 2: Case study 2

Soad is 35 years old and has had many problems within her marriage. Her husband leaves home for several weeks without telling her where he is, and without providing her and the children with financial support. She is not able to pay for the rent and is barely able to provide the children with food. Soad is afraid to ask her family for help as she is ashamed and terrified she will be stigmatised and blamed for not being a good mother and wife. She has worked secretly for the past year and is afraid to tell anyone because it will be shameful to say that she has had to work to provide for her family.

Legal empowerment

Legal empowerment is an important source of development that allows individuals the ability to utilise the law in order to advance their own rights and role in society (Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and United Nations Development Programme, 2008). The availability of legal aid services and legal awareness contributes strongly to legal empowerment, ensuring justice for all citizens and contributing to a more peaceful and secure society. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) views legal empowerment as a way to enhance the effectiveness of development assistance in helping improve the lives of disadvantaged groups (ADB, 2009). In addition, ADB states

that legal empowerment promotes gender equality and empowers women (ADB, 2009). Legal empowerment on a personal level includes the process of making a claim that can improve personal capacities, such as enhancing a sense of self-belief, and includes future choices of individuals to become agents of change. This allows people to be more conscious of the decisions they make within their households, especially mother/daughter relationships where mothers can empower their daughter's decision making skills. Also, these women can serve as role models, not only in their families, but also within their communities. Such individual gains can encourage other people to use the law in disputes with other people or public authorities, and this process can lead to broader concrete gains for poor and marginalised groups (Domingo & Neil, 2014).

Legal empowerment interventions, such as raising women's awareness of their legal rights, are sorely needed in Jordan, for both refugees and local communities. Legal awareness sessions aim to empower women through providing information about their rights and responsibilities, as well as tools to improve their life situation. As a result, it also aims to encourage the gaining of the skills and knowledge to overcome obstacles in life and help them develop within themselves and in society.

However, there are barriers to ensuring that legal awareness sessions reach women in need. Research conducted by ADB has shown that some women are so severely disempowered, or lack the education and understanding, to be able claim their rights (ADB, 2009). This means that the potential to measure the impact of legal awareness sessions is difficult and limited. The difficulties are further compounded by the fact that access to justice is also hard to measure and data is scarce (Barendrecht & De Langen, 2008).

Additionally, there is limited research on the effectiveness of legal awareness raising

approaches. Knowledge gained from practical experience indicates that current approaches tend to simply present information on women's rights, and ignore the complexity of exercising these rights within the culture where the women live. For example, in Jordan, cultural aspects play a very important role in the low uptake of legal aid services. Commitment to the family is very strong and problems are often viewed as internal family matters. As a result, outside parties may be viewed with suspicion because it is thought they could harm the reputation of, or cause dishonour to, the family. Furthermore, Arab culture may be viewed as a '*masculine*' culture, where the rights of men are seen as more important than the rights of women.

While awareness trainings provide information concerning domestic violence, child custody and women's rights regarding divorce and alimony, it does not address other, difficult realities that make accessing the justice system unattractive or difficult for women. In fact, it is possible that by only providing information sessions, without supporting women to address how realistic it is to access justice, may actually be disempowering or harmful because being unable to access rights you are told you are entitled to can lead to frustration and hopelessness. As such, this represents significant shortcomings of traditional, information based, awareness raising trainings.

Barriers to accessing justice

There are many barriers for women to access the justice system in Jordan, which include psychological, cultural and financial barriers. A recent study in Jordan showed a strong tendency for families to view violence against women as a personal and familial issue rather than a social and/or legal problem. Discussing '*familial*' issues within the community, or to outside parties, is thought to cause harm, stigmatise families and damage reputations (Btoush & Haj-Yahia,

2008). Additionally, women may have feelings of shame, depression and/or fear of intimidation. For example, if a woman decides to use her right to divorce, she may lose her only source of income, as well as her children, as many families insist the woman leaves the children with her husband when she moves back in with her parents. Furthermore, divorced women may be stigmatised and socially ostracised due to accusations of being rebellious and not caring about her family and children. These issues cause high amounts of stress. As a result, women often deny their needs, minimise the significance of the situation and are hesitant to ask for help to avoid feelings of shame or stigma.

Research has been conducted in Jordan addressing this issue of why women do not seek help, and it was found that a large percentage of women believe that violence against women is justified and beneficial (Haj-Yahia, 2002). Further, a study undertaken by Oweis showed that women who grew up with abuse, violence and repression often normalise, accept and justify violence, regardless of how much they suffer (Oweis, Gharaibeh, Al-Natour & Froelicher, 2009). The prospect of being rejected by parents, being socially ostracised, combined with the potential of losing one's children and the low likelihood of finding employment means many women remain married, even in violent marriages.

Psychosocial support can help women to feel more empowered. It is essential in creating an empowering environment to approach women as survivors, rather than victims. Labelling people as victims of their situation can cause harm as it may be demeaning and cause shame. Simply using the term 'survivor' helps to build a sense of self-help that enables women to recover and regain a sense of trust (Wessels, 2009).

Rationale for the project

Therefore, it was determined by the ARDD-Legal Aid, a Jordanian nongovernmental

organisation (NGO), that providing psychosocial support and basic assertiveness skills training for women's empowerment would help women make *practical use* of the legal rights information. The project aimed to allow participants to *translate* the information they have been given in the awareness raising session *into action* (*no matter how small*) in their daily lives.

It is important to note that the aim was not to completely change the way women thought or behaved, but rather to make small adjustments, such as: their belief in their own rights; acceptance of their situation; understanding of the practical limitations of their rights; and their ability to make better decisions based on the information they were given in the legal sessions. Therefore, by combining legal knowledge with self-assertiveness training would support women to take small steps towards improving their access to the justice system. Eventually, this approach also works to empower women to discuss their rights with other women, supporting increased participation in the family, and other important decisions.

Methodology

ARDD-Legal Aid, established in 2008, is dedicated to promoting human rights and combating injustice through democracy and development work, which is coalesced through the provision of legal services to vulnerable populations in Jordan.

This study was part of one of ARDD-Legal Aid's projects (implemented in partnership with Oxfam GB) named *Women's Access to Justice Program*. This project aimed to reduce vulnerability and suffering by securing just outcomes and verdicts for marginalised women and was implemented in Zarqa, as well as other governorates. Through this, and several other projects, ARDD-Legal Aid has learned that women from Zarqa are often not aware of their legal rights, nor know how to access them. Many women in Zarqa are restricted by a potent combination

of customs, traditions and a culture of shame. Additionally, women tend to waive their rights to inheritance and do not invoke their right to hold property. This project utilised the above approach to increase women's understanding of their rights within Zarqa.

The study was designed in partnership with the FGAC, which is a Jordanian community based organisation (CBO) working in Zarqa to empower women socially, economically and legally. In addition, they provide psychosocial support and counselling to both children and women. One of their major programmes is empowering women who are subjected to violence through providing information on human rights in general, their specific legal rights and the means to deal with violence.

Design

To fill the gaps within the existing legal awareness training, FGAC and the Psychosocial Support team at ARDD-Legal Aid came up with a new, local initiative aiming to use psychosocial approaches to enhance the impact of the legal rights awareness training. An anecdotal study was conducted to verify two different methods. The first method involved conducting both legal awareness and a psychosocial session on the same day. The second method spread out the use of both legal and psychosocial modules over the course of two days.

Participants

Women were selected for the trainings in two different ways. Firstly, through the legal aid service of FGAC. Women from Zarqa, both Jordanians and refugees from Syria, who sought legal advice were asked if they were interested in participating in the training. The women who were selected had previously asked for legal consultation related to problems within their marriage. The second selection method allowed the women who had already been selected to invite

women from their communities who were also experiencing marital problems.

Materials

A manual was developed for the Training of Trainers (ToT) session for the implementing social worker entitled: *Assertiveness Training for Women (Following Legal Empowerment Training)*. The modules used different resources, such as *Self-esteem of Adolescent School Girls: Empowerment Lessons from U.S.* (Rathore, 2012), *Empowering Women in the Middle East by Psychosocial Interventions* (Rasi, 2013), *Empowerment and Health & Well-being: Evidence Review* (Woodall, Raine, South, Warwick & Booth, 2010) and *Counseling Training Manual Trauma, Guilt and Self Esteem* (International Planned Parenthood Federation South Asia Regional Office, 2009). Pre and post evaluations were developed for training in order to verify if legal awareness had improved after participation. All materials were culturally sensitive.

Procedures

ARDD-Legal Aid's local clinical psychologist has had extensive experience working with refugees and other marginalised communities. To ensure that the sessions were properly conducted, ARDD-Legal Aid's psychologist gave an eight-hour ToT session, divided over two days, to FGAC social workers on how to provide a Psychosocial Support session that reinforces traditional legal rights awareness trainings. Pre evaluations were filled in before the training started. The session plan was designed with the following specific goals:

1. To help participants understand the meanings of the term 'assertive'. (In Arabic, the direct translation of this word is not widely understood, so the concept must be discussed thoroughly).
2. To help participants differentiate between the terms 'assertive', 'aggressive', and 'passive' and to understand the

- negative aspects of being either *'passive'* or *'aggressive'*.
3. To help participants identify situations where assertiveness skills should be used, i.e. in order to meet their valid needs.
 4. To raise self-esteem by assisting participants in identifying things they like about themselves.
 5. To encourage women to take on empowering values that strengthen assertiveness, such as: self-respect; recognising their own needs; asking for what they want; and not to be overly responsible for others, etc.
 6. To teach specific skills in assertive communication skills: how to make 'I' statements; the broken record technique; and skills in saying 'no'.
 7. To make use of non-verbal techniques to meet ones needs, including: eye contact, body posture, voice tone, etc.
 8. To teach women how to use common problem solving techniques to increase the likelihood that they consider all their options before taking a particular course of action.
 9. To shift perspectives of women who are resistant to the idea of the benefits of being assertive, even if the shift is subtle.

To further ensure that the trainings are effective and have a wide reach, ARDD-Legal Aid's local clinical psychologist also conducted ToT sessions with FGAC lawyers (who facilitated legal awareness sessions). The lawyers first filled in a pre evaluation

form, which was then followed by a training about assertiveness skills and tools on how to support and reinforce women during their decision-making processes. The training aimed to improve their knowledge of the psychological barriers women encounter, in order to assist them in the legal awareness sessions.

After the ToT trainings were finalised and both FGAC lawyers and social workers had filled in the post evaluation form, they conducted the training to beneficiaries. Participants also started by filling in a pre evaluation form, followed by the training. This session was structured as a legal rights awareness training, followed by a psychosocial support training. Immediately after each session, participants had to fill in the post evaluation. Each participant received one legal and one psychosocial session. In total 17 sessions were held, with each group having approximately 10 participants. FGAC tested two different implementation methods. The first method involved conducting both legal awareness and psychosocial sessions on the same day. Specifically, there was a one-hour information session (lawyer administered), followed by a 30-minute break, and then a one-hour psychosocial session (social worker administered).

The second method spread the modules over two days. On the first day, participants received two and a half hours of information from the lawyer about their legal rights. Then after several days, the participants came back and they received two and a half

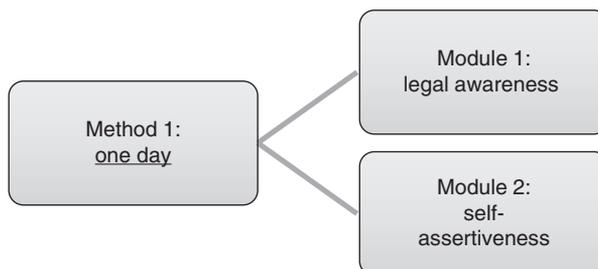


Figure 1: Method 1.

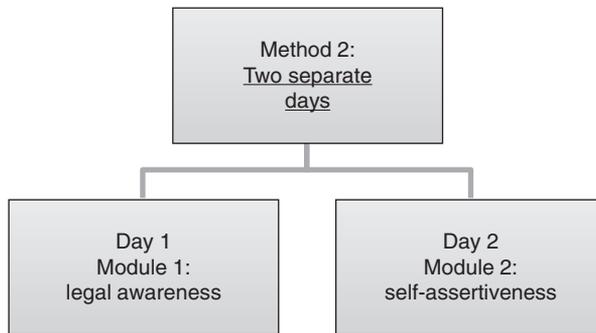


Figure 2: Method 2.

hours of psychosocial training from a social worker.

Each participant received one training on each topic (legal and psychosocial), and after they finalised the training, participants filled in a post evaluation form.

Feedback from ToT sessions

After the ToT sessions, lawyers and social workers provided positive feedback that the training was helpful, applicable for daily use and well structured. The lawyers felt they had a better understanding of how to encourage women to make positive, personal changes.

There were some concerns from lawyers that women would not find the training acceptable, especially those from families with conservative men. There were also concerns the women would find the assumptions underlying the training to be unacceptable, and that implementing some of the assertiveness skills in some women's homes may put them at risk of harm. Therefore, after hearing both lawyer's and social worker's concerns, the session plan was adapted further to encourage participating women to reflect on how easy it would be for them to implement assertive changes in their personal lives. This specifically examined how they could do this within the context of their own families, the safeness of doing

so, and allowing for further discussion about the long-term time frame for change and the importance of change being undertaken in small steps.

Results

Results: method 1

FGAC evaluated and compared findings from the pre and post evaluations from both studies. Women trained under method 1, with both legal and psychosocial (shorter) sessions on the same day, reported that they could make an association between legal rights and the application of this knowledge in daily life. The pre and post evaluations showed that there was an increase in knowledge and legal awareness. For example, one woman said that because of the assertiveness session she was able to support her daughter in her choice to first finish her college before marrying, and also to convince her husband that there will come another opportunity [for his daughter to marry]. The women also reported that it was easy for them to participate in two sessions on the same day, in regards to transportation and time.

For both facilitators and participants in method 1, there was an overall response that there was not enough time for the sessions. It was felt that one hour for legal awareness raising, and one hour for the psychosocial training did not allow them to cover enough

information, and participants felt they did not have sufficient time to discuss topics of interest, and to ask and answer questions.

Results: method 2

Results after method 2 suggested that participants and facilitators were happier spreading the sessions out across days, and having longer sessions. Similar to method 1, women reported that they could make an association between legal rights and how to apply this knowledge in daily life. There also appeared to be an increase in knowledge and legal awareness from pre to post evaluation. Facilitators felt there was enough time to present all details and participants were able to process the information and to come up with questions during the second session, which was two and a half hours long. There was also time for women to discuss their issues and questions after the sessions.

There were few negatives reported for method 2. However, unfortunately, no data was available on the 'drop out' rate for method 2. This means that data were not kept on the amount of people who attended the information session and not the follow up psychosocial session. In further studies, this needs to be monitored closely to ensure that the women have incentive to attend both sessions.

Quotes Below are some quotes of women who have participated in both the legal awareness and assertiveness sessions:

- Ms. Nadia (45): *'This programme is very good, we finally can speak about difficulties we face and the need for awareness.'*
- Ms. Umm Mustafa: *'I made progress in the way that I deal with issues because of this session.'*
- Ms. Umm Mohammed: *'After I participated in the sessions, I brought my parents to the centre to convince them that it is my right to not let my husband beat me.'*

Ensuring 'no harm'

One limitation of both pilot tests, which should be addressed in future research, is that women were not systematically followed up after the session(s). This means that the generalisability of its use in their homes was not tested (i.e. did they actually use their knowledge at home), generalisability across time (i.e. did the results last?), and, importantly, whether there were any unintended negative side effects. It is essential to ascertain that women were not coming to unintended harm as a result of the sessions. This is important, as Wessels states, there are risks involved with psychosocial interventions that may lead to unintentional harm (Wessels, 2009). One such example of would be if a woman inadvertently provoked retaliation (from her husband or some other member of her family) with any newly expressed assertive behaviour. Although this subject was carefully addressed in the training, and with the women themselves, this is nevertheless a very important issue and one which needs to be addressed further to be sure no harm is done to the women who have sought help.

Conclusion

Legal empowerment is an important tool that can help women to fight injustice and has the potential to empower women to claim their legal rights. However, evidence is still lacking on the effectiveness of legal empowerment interventions, partly due to the fact that these interventions are hard to measure. Knowledge gained from practical experience shows that only providing information about legal rights is not enough to actually encourage women to take the steps to claim their rights. There is even a chance that just providing information can have a negative effect on participants, as many women can feel disempowered when they know their rights, but face too many barriers to claim them.

This anecdotal study, conducted by Jordanian NGO ARDD-Legal Aid and CBO Family Guidance Awareness Center suggests that adding psychosocial training in assertiveness and self-esteem skills to traditional methods of legal awareness raising may be a promising new approach to overcoming the problem of lack of generalisability and relevance for women in developing countries. Although based only on informal testing methods, results suggest that longer information and longer psychosocial training sessions (two and a half hours each, rather than just one hour) result in the best outcomes, providing there is a sufficient break between sessions to overcome fatigue. Overcoming women's lack of access to justice in developing countries, and reducing the gap between legal rights awareness and the actual use of this knowledge in daily life, will always be an enormous challenge. It is unlikely that one session on self assertion training will erase generations of social immobility, rights violations and disempowerment. Yet, quotes from women and anecdotal reports suggest they are able to make better use of legal information if provided with a supportive, skills based psychosocial session as an adjunct. Having trainers who are able to empathise, support and listen to women's practical challenges in using their legal rights in daily life can make a small, but significant, difference in women's lives. This small difference can be the first step in leading to more significant change in the long term.

Recommendations

The authors recommend the following steps to be taken to further study this issue:

- 1) Implement a stronger research design that allows for stronger methodology. This could be done through:
 - a. A control group
 - b. Documentation of drop out rates
- 2) Follow up on the concerns of lawyers who are giving the trainings to ensure that the

sessions did not do harm to the participants, or had any unintended consequences:

- a. Qualitative interviewing
 - b. Focus Group Discussions with the participants.
- 3) More testing and research:
 - a. Particularly, longitudinal research where women are followed up over time to see how well changes have impacted their everyday life:
 - i. This can also test for unintended negative consequences (such as retaliation from spouses),
 - ii. This research must be done to understand the long term effects of the training before new approaches are adapted or implemented

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Dr. Lina Darras is a clinical psychologist working as psychosocial team leader at ARDD-Legal Aid in Jordan.

email: ldarras@ardd-legalaid.org

Ms. Roza van der Heide is clinical psychologist working as a research psychosocial support officer at ARDD-Legal Aid in Jordan.

email: rheide@ardd-legalaid.org