The intrinsic interlinkage between peacebuilding and mental health and psychosocial support: The International Association for Human Values model of integrated psychosocial peacebuilding

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In view of the evolving discussion on bridging the mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding fields, this article proposes that they don’t need to be bridged, but are already intrinsically interlinked. The approach and methodology of the International Association for Human Values is presented as a conceptual and practical model of integrated peacebuilding, both addressing a gap in peacebuilding as well as working complementary to traditional mental health and psychosocial support methods. This article will present an overview of several congruencies between the mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding fields, illustrated with practical examples from International Association for Human Values programmes from around the world. The author argues that sustainability of peacebuilding cannot happen without psychosocial peacebuilding; an approach that integrates the full range of psychosocial factors into peacebuilding including, but not limited to, the integration of mental health and psychosocial support. She concludes that as an integrated field, we can move forward to the full and joint aspiration of both mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding, towards optimal health and positive peace.

Keywords: International Association for Human Values, mental health, psychosocial peacebuilding, psychosocial support

Introduction

Background and terminology

From the perspective of peacebuilding (PB) theory, the overlap between the PB field and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) seemed minimal until a decade ago. While there was attention for psychosocial aspects of PB, such as building a culture of peace, peace education, reconciliation and trauma relief, as well as in the more interpersonal field of conflict resolution, this attention came mostly as an addendum to the ‘hard core’ of peacebuilding, which focused on political, economic, security and justice issues (see Hertog, 2010 for an overview of the respective literature on this). However, sustainable peace remains elusive without attention to the psychosocial aspects, even when all the structural, formal peacebuilding blocks are in place. Providing vocational training for youth to increase employment opportunities and improve livelihoods will be hampered if the youth are depressed, do not have hope or are too worried to be able to focus on learning. Demobilisation and disarmament processes will be hampered without basic trust between groups being restored. The emotional, psychological, socio psychological and existential spiritual issues involved in
peacebuilding are integral peacebuilding aspects. They include, but are not limited to, attitudes, perceptions, cognitive thinking patterns, values, expectations, desires, emotions, traumas and wounds, assumptions, motivations, relationships, intentions, concerns, taboos, principles, norms, beliefs, identities, loyalties, worldviews and memories (Hertog, 2010).

Integral and structural aspects are interdependent, interacting and mutually reinforcing components for peacebuilding. Integral aspects are needed to bring structures to life and to make them function in the way for which they are designed, while political, economic, security and judicial institutions and structures can play a supporting role for integral aspects to develop in the support of peace (Hertog, 2010).

Working on the integral aspects of peacebuilding allows for the envisioned peace to be internalised and socially supported, and hence more sustainable. In view of the anger, frustration, depression, pain, greed and alienation driving many conflicts around the world today, it is the need of the hour to complement existing efforts with an equally massive investment in the (often) intangible psychosocial factors of peacebuilding.

Over the last decade, attention to various psychosocial aspects of peacebuilding in theory, policy and practice has vastly expanded (see Hertog, 2010 for examples). However, we still need a better understanding of the specific contribution of integral aspects to peacebuilding processes and their specific way of interacting with, influencing, reinforcing or inhibiting the other respective areas of peacebuilding. For example, what is the effect of relieving posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in war affected populations on the reduction of interpersonal violence? Or do peace negotiations produce more results when accompanied by self-reflective methods for negotiators? Infusing the integral dimensions of peacebuilding in an integrative way into the peace architecture, allows us to really be able to speak about ‘the art and soul’ of building peace (Hertog, 2010).

In this article, peacebuilding and the violence it aims to prevent and address, are understood in their broader meanings. Peacebuilding is a wide range of activities carried out by many actors in different spheres and at different levels (see Hertog, 2010 for more on the definition of peacebuilding). Countless small and large activities contribute to a peacebuilding process: activities aiming to enhance public security, generate economic recovery, facilitate social healing, promote democratic institutions, build sustainable relationships or install mechanisms to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent way. Peacebuilding activities can be geared towards long-term changes, such as addressing principal political, economic and social root causes of conflict, or focus on short-term goals, such as management of humanitarian crises, negotiating settlements, addressing refugee issues or providing temporary essential government functions. Hence, it includes activities by state and non state actors, individuals and communities, religious and secular actors or theoreticians and practitioners at the local or grassroots level, the middle range or the top level. As a process, peacebuilding encompasses the prevention of violence up to the reconstruction of society after violence in a dynamic, but not necessarily linear process. It relates to the individual as well as to community, society, state, international and global levels. Similarly, violence is understood in its multiple dimensions, comprising physical, psychological, criminal, environmental, cultural and structural violence.

The International Association for Human Values approach

The International Association for Human Values (IAHV), a largely volunteer based, non-profit, nongovernmental organisation (NGO) with around 25 branches worldwide,
offers an innovative and comprehensive psychosocial approach to peacebuilding. Working to effectively integrate psychosocial factors into peacebuilding, it simultaneously addresses a crucial gap in peacebuilding policies and practices, as well as complements traditional MHPSS efforts. The approach is broader than just the integration of MHPSS and PB. It works with minds and mindsets, in general, not just with mental health issues, and integrates a wide range of psychosocial factors, not just those related to psychosocial support. Its aim is to transform mindsets, attitudes, wellbeing and behaviour of people involved in, or affected by, conflict and violence in the world today. IAHV programmes do not just focus on alleviating symptoms and providing ‘psychosocial’ support, but also on laying a strong, healthy psychosocial foundation on all sides of the conflict for sustainable peacebuilding. In this way, they aim to strengthen other peacebuilding and development efforts, increasing overall impact. Providing an effective link between inner and outer peace through a profoundly human centred approach, it offers a model to scale up personal transformation to peacebuilding impact. IAHV’s methods to release acute, episodic and chronic stresses have benefited millions of people in 150 countries over the last 30 years, and have been successfully integrated in trauma relief, disaster responses, education, health, prisoner rehabilitation and other sectors.

**IAHV methodology of integrated peacebuilding**

IAHV programmes use a comprehensive set of processes and tools facilitating physical, mental, emotional and existential changes, as such positively transforming wellbeing, attitudes, behaviours and relationships. Recognising that no peace can become self-sustainable as long as it is not internalised and socially supported by the people involved, IAHV focuses on strengthening a fertile psychosocial foundation in individuals and communities for sustainable peace. IAHV uses a holistic approach to personal transformation that addresses the physical to deeply existential layers, transcending the strictly cognitive (Figure 1). On the physical level, it provides deep stress release and relaxation, increases energy levels and

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**Figure 1: IAHV model of intrapersonal transformation**

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improves overall physical health and well-being. On the emotional level, it releases strong negative emotions, fosters more positive and life supporting emotions and increases emotional resilience. On the mental level, it calms tension and worries in the mind, improves clarity of mind and concentration, reduces the impact of negative or traumatic memories, and fosters a more positive mindset.

Core techniques used for this are from Sudarshan Kriya & Practices (SK&P), which includes gentle stretches (yoga postures), specific breathing exercises, cognitive coping and stressor evaluation strategies. The central component of SK&P is SK, which is understood to use specific rhythms of breath to eliminate stress, support the various organs and systems within the body, transform overpowering emotions, and restore peace of mind, thus supporting the whole mind/body system. Independent research suggests SK&P results in rapid and sustainable reduction rates of posttraumatic stress (PTS) (65%), clinical depression 68–73% (mild, moderate and severe), anxiety 73% and stress, whilst increasing optimism, calmness, concentration and recovery from stressful stimuli (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005; Carter et al., 2013; Descilo et al., 2009; Katzman et al., 2012). Benefits for physical and mental health, validated by international peer reviewed papers include: reduction of the stress hormone cortisol, reduction of lactate levels (stress indicator), and increase of the wellbeing hormone prolactin, suggesting 'SK&P is an effective method to release stress and enhance resilience against stress' (Sharma, Sen, Singh, Bhardwaj, Kochupillai, & Singh, 2003); and 'SK&P was statistically as effective as the conventional treatments for depression studied and may be more effective for preventing relapse' (Janakiramaiah, & Gangadhar, 1998). An 8 hour IAHV workshop for displaced persons resulted in a 60% drop in scores on the PTSD checklist (PCL-I7) and a 90% drop in scores on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), (Descilo et al., 2009). SK&P practitioners have also demonstrated significantly greater EEG Beta wave activity in the left frontal, occipital and midline regions of the brain than in controls, which is indicative of heightened alertness/mental focus (Bhatia et al., 2003).

When individuals are able to release stress and negative emotions, calm their worries and tensions in their minds and are thus positively established in themselves, this is reflected in their behaviour, relationships and outlook towards the world. Building on the restored mental and emotional wellbeing, our programmes apply a set of pedagogical methods and strategies (processes, knowledge, discussions, games, practical tools) to strengthen self-confidence, explore a broadened and shared self-identity, inculcate human values, improve nonviolent conflict resolution, address issues of trust, fear, suspicion and hatred, reduce resentment, build connectedness and reinforce healthy attitudes and skills for peaceful coexistence. On a behavioural level, this can subsequently lead to a diminished need for negative coping strategies, improved communication and life skills to handle challenging situations, reduced inclination towards harmful behaviour towards themselves or others (this can manifest in reduced frequency and severity of violent incidents; criminal activity; substance abuse; recruitment; aggression) and increased inclination to take responsibility. Similarly, individuals can feel more resilient against peer pressures, overwhelming emotions, discriminatory behaviours, intimidation or recruitment by armed groups. Restoring peace at every level well beyond the cognitive, IAHV programmes are deeply empowering, life affirming and truly holistic.

As social beings, we find ourselves, through all seven dimensions of our existence in constant and mutual interaction with different aspects of society (Figure 2). Negative societal impacts, such as injustice, discrimination, violence, poverty or lack of
health care, can cause or exacerbate inner turmoil, stress, tension, illness or frustration. A supportive environment, on the other hand, that provides security, justice, fulfillment of basic needs, health care, education and a sense of dignity, can strengthen health, inner well-being and positivity. Different IAHV initiatives foster the development of human, effective and just systems in all sectors of society, such as inclusive leadership, transparent governance, ethical business, humane prison rehabilitation and holistic education.

When our inner world is disturbed, our impact on society is more likely to be neutral or negative in terms of disengagement, frustration, anger, disappointment, radicalization, disrespect, violence, depression or resistance. Individuals who are well established in themselves, healed and empowered, are more likely to bring a positive contribution to different aspects of society and to play a peace enhancing role within their communities and institutions. The development of peaceful, healthy and prosperous societies would be proportionate to the number of individuals who are thus internally empowered, and the extent to which they are empowered. Focusing on the individual as the basis for social and political transformation is how we aim to turn personal transformation into peacebuilding impact.

IAHV works on the transformation of both the inner and outer world. It emphasizes inner transformation as a cornerstone for social and peacebuilding, as it depends on how one is able to align the seven dimensions of one’s existence, one can still be centred, connected and contribute positively when the outer world is in chaos, or one can still feel disturbed, stressed and angry inside, even when the outside world is peaceful.

As social beings, we also find ourselves, through all seven dimensions of our existence, in constant and mutual interaction with other people and our environment. How one feels inside has a direct impact on the level and extent to which one feels connected to the people around them, family members, neighbours, communities and the nation, but also to the world at large, the environment and this universe. When individuals are stressed and tense, they can feel more isolated and disconnected from themselves, others and their environment. When individuals feel connected within themselves, they are more likely to develop interpersonally and within communities, creating inclusive relationships and greater community resilience to conflict or restoring the social fabric after conflict. Underpinning
this work, IAHV promotes universal human values such as nonviolence, dignity, equity, justice and wellbeing, to strengthen a psychosocial foundation that positively impacts the way individuals, relationships and communities interact at every level of society. As such, the IAHV psychosocial programming brings about changes in the individual, the communities and the context itself, restoring peace within and between individuals, communities and society. As much as it works for prevention, it is equally applied to intervention, transformation and rehabilitation at all stages of peacebuilding. It enacts individual transformation and structural change at every level of society, from grassroots to global leadership. Through our organisation of Transformational Leadership in Excellence Programmes on the political and corporate leadership levels, and global awareness raising and networking symposia on acute social topics such as ethics in business, artificial intelligence, the girl child, interreligious understanding and climate issues, IAHV in partnership with other organisations promotes longer-term structural change. While the above outlines the IAHV model of transformation in general, in practice programme duration and components are adapted to needs, context and target groups. They range, for example, from one hour stress relief workshops for general public affected by stress or disaster, to six hour (spread over three days) stress relief and resilience workshops for war affected children, nine hour (spread over three days) stress management and professional excellence trainings for field staff, 12 hour (spread over four days) trauma relief trainings for refugees, five day youth empowerment trainings, to 10 day youth leadership trainings.

Figure 3: IAHV model of interrelationships and social cohesion
Core techniques and modules are combined and tailored for each target group, resulting in a wide variety of programmes, including follow-up sessions where practically possible, advanced programmes, training of trainers and joint project implementation. Like some other PB and MHPSS approaches, the core of the approach is to empower individuals and communities to become self-reliant and to create the change they want to see themselves. IAHV empowers individuals and communities with knowledge, skills and tools to improve their own physical, mental and emotional well-being, and to develop and implement their own projects that address the needs they themselves have identified. Empowering themselves to overcome responses to trauma and build local resilience, individuals and communities create self-sustaining change and reduces dependency on external support. This inherently self-sustainable approach strengthens local resources while also focusing on existing capacity, instead of deficits.

Strengths and challenges
The IAHV Healing, Resilience and Empowerment programmes are evidence based, accessible, inclusive, scalable and cost effective. The simple, yet powerful practices are free from unwanted side-effects, non-invasive, do not make people dependent on external support and can cut health care/assistance costs. The results are profound and effective, while the techniques themselves are easy to learn and to integrate into life, they are applicable across cultures, free from risk of stigmatisation and without requiring the involvement of psychologists and psychiatrists, often scarce within complex emergencies. Complementary to traditional MHPSS approaches and to helpful local practices, our programmes can be delivered to large groups while still having a deeply personal transformational effect. In the face of chronic emergency and societal breakdown, humanitarian organisations often lack the resources to offer appropriate psychosocial programmes on the scale required. Standard psycho-pharmacological, psychotherapeutic and one-on-one interventions are costly, and, in some cases, ineffective and culturally inappropriate. Therefore, it is all the more important to employ innovative, scalable and cost effective methods to address acute psychological and psychosomatic needs, and prevent and reduce long-term negative consequences.

Like other organisations, IAHV has faced challenges in convincing partner organisations, donors and policy makers to consider supporting and integrating nontraditional approaches, which have been considered mostly as an addendum to traditional MHPSS and PB efforts for a long time.

Mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding congruencies
In what follows, some of the congruencies of the PB and MHPSS fields and, in particular, the aim of both fields, the connection between intrapersonal and social peace, and different operational congruencies will be discussed. It is written from the perspective of a holistic peacebuilding approach and illustrated with concrete, practice based examples and testimonies of the IAHV experience around the world to illustrate the diversity of contexts, target groups and outcomes.

Aims of mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding fields: optimum health and positive peace
The ultimate aims of both MHPSS and PB fields seem to converge in a shared aspiration to optimise the overall wellbeing of individuals and their functioning within a society, which, in turn, further promotes that wellbeing. The broader, more inclusive definitions...
of both positive peace and mental health refer to these same aspects. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing’ and mental health as ‘a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community’. (WHO, 2014, n.d.) Positive peace is defined as a state that promotes wellbeing and positive relationships in a society characterised by well functioning and fair systems, which together facilitate the resolution of conflicts without violence. (Galtung, 1964; Galtung, 1967; Hertog, 2010) Therefore, it could be said that an optimum state of health, in its broader understanding, correlates with a state of positive peace.

From our perspective, this state refers to the full manifestation of human values both within the individual and in society. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, co-founder of IAHV, has formulated his vision in this regard: ‘a violence-free society, disease-free body, stress-free mind, inhibition-free intellect, trauma-free memory, and a sorrow-free soul is the birthright of every individual.’ (Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, 2015).

**Peace of mind and social peace are connected**

There is a close interlinkage between one’s inner state of mind, its external expression and the impact on society. One person unable to handle his/her own negative emotions or experiences, can create misery for dozens or thousands of people. Inner peace in individuals is not only a sign of mental health but also essential for inclusive peacebuilding. As Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says: ‘unless every member of our global family is peaceful, our peace is incomplete’ (Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, 2016). A human centred approach to peacebuilding fully incorporates the intrapersonal dimension as an essential foundation for social peace.

**Operational congruencies**

In order to illustrate the intrinsic interlinkage of MHPSS and PB, the following five levels of overlap are outlined below.

**Level 1: Healing**

Postulate: individuals and communities who have processed their negatively impacting experiences, wounds and responses to traumas are less likely to commit harm to themselves or others.

This refers to a fundamental premise in criminology, victimology, trauma work and peacebuilding that perpetrators of violence are often victims/survivors of some sort of violence themselves. Trauma, stress and conflict related experiences, when not addressed or healed, can lead to harmful behaviour towards oneself (depression, suicidal tendencies, substance abuse) or others (aggression, hatred, abuse, crime). By facilitating healing, stress and trauma relief, IAHV aims to take away a major driving force of future violence, crime and destructive behaviour. Therefore, we work with both perpetrators of violence as well as those affected by violence, to break the cycles of violence and prevent future violence. By healing individuals through evidence based techniques, IAHV also aims to contribute to the lessening of collective and transgenerational trauma.

People affected by armed conflict as survivors, witnesses, or perpetrators, often suffer from a variety of psychosocial symptoms and syndromes, such as depression, mental/physical/emotional stress and illness, responses to trauma/PTS, anxiety, rage, frustration, aggression and sense of disconnect. They may face a wide range of emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioural and social problems, including negative coping strategies. IAHV has provided stress and trauma relief to around 150,000 individuals in conflict and war zones, such as Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Kashmir, India, USA, Balkans, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Northern Caucasus, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Afghanistan. For example, one Yazidi survivor, who was
trapped by IS on Sinjar mountain and witnessed the brutal IS attacks on her people, losing all faith and hope in humanity, said after going through a trauma relief workshop: ‘now we can trust [humans] again’ (IAHV, Improving Trauma Relief and Resilience). From a similar programme, a young man in Iraq expressed: ‘it feels like breathing out all the stress of war and breathing in a new life. I felt really relaxed.’ Similarly, IAHV has provided healing through its Prison SMART programme that has benefited more than 400,000 prisoners in 60+ countries around the world. For example, one imprisoned mercenary, who had fought six wars over the last three decades and had been addicted to metal cleaning liquid and other substances, and no longer able to sleep because of continuous nightmares and flashbacks, suffered from PTSD to such an extent that he could no longer control his emotions nor be in a room with someone as he might uncontrollably attack them with a knife. After doing the Prison SMART programme, he said he could sleep ‘for the first time since childhood’ and was again ‘fully in control of his emotions’, thereby no longer constituting a danger to himself or others. A former Al Qaeda member imprisoned in India realised: ‘I thought I would go to heaven by killing. Now I know that heaven is right here on Earth by loving.’ (IAHV, Beyond Violent Extremism and Armed Conflict). Also, USA war veterans who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan and struggled with severe substance abuse, domestic violence, depression and suicidal tendencies after their return back home, experienced significant and sustained improvements in PTSD symptoms after participating in a specially tailored programme (Seppälä et al., 2014).

Our organisation has also reached out to affected families of suicide bombers, terrorists and Syrian fighters to increase healing and coping capacity. A mother of a foreign fighter in Belgium testified after doing our programme: ‘I learned to accept the situation, to live with it. I am able to forgive myself and to forgive my son now’ (IAHV, Beyond Violent Extremism and Armed Conflict).

**Level 2: Resilience** Postulate: Resilient individuals and communities are not just healed from negative impacts, but can withstand and recover more quickly from such negative impacts and better resist violent and divisive tendencies.
Strengthening resilience, as the capacity of individuals and communities to be able to deal with challenging situations, to withstand negative impacts, or to recover from them fully and in a relatively short timeframe, is as much a MHPSS as a PB concern. From a PB perspective, strengthened mental and emotional resilience reduces the risk of negative or violent coping strategies, of harming oneself or others, or of giving in to peer pressures or negative influences. As one hard core recidivist said after doing the Prison SMART programme: ‘it is as if I feel an anchor inside me now’ [that prevents me from slipping down the same destructive path].

A University of California and Los Angeles (UCLA) study (Ghahremani, Oh, Dean, Mouzakis, Wilson & London, 2013, p.139) concluded that ‘the [IAHV] programme can promote mental health, potentially protecting from harmful coping behaviours and risk behaviour’, as it was shown to reduce the impulsive behaviour of adolescent participants.

When, in 2012, ethnic clashes broke out in the north eastern Indian state of Assam, which displaced 400,000 people and claimed 77 lives, three villages where the IAHV sister organisation Art of Living had been conducting community development programmes, remained violence free. When the surrounding villages succumbed to the violence unleashed by escalating ethnic tensions between the indigenous Bodo community and migrant Muslims, the villagers from Borlao and Borpara (Golpara) stood up as a group to those spreading violence and guarded their villages themselves, not allowing any rioters to enter. The riots engulfed 400 villages, but these three villages in the centre of Bodo land saw no incidence of violence. Considering that the village inhabitants were a mix of Bodos, Muslims, Asamese, Christians, tribals and Bengalis and were located in the worst riot affected district of Udalguri, this was an exceptional display of resilience, solidarity and unity against forces of division.

**Level 3: Empowerment** Postulate: Nonviolently empowered individuals and communities are not just resilient to negative impacts, but can also be agents for positive change in society to transform those negative impacts and improve both MHPSS and PB objectives.

Empowerment of individuals and communities builds up the social capital in terms of individual capacities, community capacities and their interactions. From a mental health perspective, empowerment as the realisation of one’s full potential and contribution to society reflects the WHO mental health definition above. From a PB perspective, only empowered individuals proactively transform driving factors of conflict and violence, reach out to opponents and transform relationships, build bridges between fractured communities, challenge injustice and human rights violations, develop more peace enhancing economic and political systems, train others in peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills or raise their voice for the wellbeing of their fellow human beings. From a PB perspective, it is important that this empowerment is nonviolent in its concept and implementation. Anger and frustration are powerful empowering driving factors, but they need to be channelled internally and externally in order to have positive outcomes. When not channelled, they often lead to destructive outcomes and vicious cycles of reactions and revenge.

One Yazidi youth, filled with fury and hatred for the brutalities IS had inflicted on his family and people, including the kidnapping and rape of his sister, and for the crimes against humanity which he had been documenting as a human rights activist, was ready to take revenge and join the militias fighting against IS. However, since his friends invited him to a peacebuilding workshop and later an IAHV Youth Leadership Peacebuilding training, he now gives Stress Release and Resilience workshops in a camp in Dohuk for hundreds of displaced people and...
inspires them to join the Citizens Peace Movement of Iraq.\textsuperscript{8}

In Denmark, former gang members, criminals, drug addicts and prisoners are training and supporting thousands of others in and outside prison, following the rehabilitation journey they themselves underwent via Breathe/Prison SMART programmes. Grateful for their ‘new lives’, they are committed to preventing others from going down a destructive path and to support them to turn their backs on a life of crime, violence, stress and disillusion.\textsuperscript{9} As one prisoner in the UK remarked: ‘I spent my whole life to destroying society. After doing the Prison SMART programme, I now want to spend the rest of my life contributing to society’.\textsuperscript{10}

Also in the ghettos of Panama City, the Art of Living Foundation was approached in 2008 to conduct a 20 month rehabilitation and empowerment programme for 11 gang members. They had joined a gang to help provide income for their families and security from rival gangs. Caught up in the vicious cycle of violence and crime as a way of life and without education, parental support or other options, they underwent a profound transformation during the programme. Before long, the former gang members became known as the ‘Youth for Change’ for their service in orphanages and their mentorship to younger children. One ex-gang member poignantly remarked: ‘we used to behave even worse than them. Now we’ve changed and we come to teach them that there can be a change. All of them deserve a chance just as we had too. We have to stretch out our hand to help other people who also deserve a chance. We can teach them to change as a person, and to shift their mind, to become a good person and not to fix things only with bullets, but to see there are different ways’ (IAHV, Beyond Violent Extremism).

\textbf{Level 4: Optimal professional performance} Postulate: Optimal professional performance is one level up empowerment and can be enhanced through a combination of personal wellbeing and the development of peacebuilding personalities and qualities, which can be achieved through the mutual enrichment of the MHPSS and PB field for staff in both fields.

As a psychologist from Syria who participated in our Professional Performance training noted: ‘this programme helped me in finding one of the most important keys to achieve my psychological, mental and physical health. As a psychotherapist, I will be more effective and concentrated in my sessions with patients, and as a trainer for teenagers and adults I will be more focused and calm in conveying to them my belief in the importance of peace’. Or, as the coordinator of a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon realised: ‘we are offering psychosocial support programmes, but we have never done an analysis like this to understand what are actually the psychosocial factors we need to work with. Now I know why I see that look of dissatisfaction [sic] in the eyes of the refugees I work with, my programme and approach lack their wellbeing! Thank you for teaching us a new perspective of peacebuilding’ (IAHV, Towards Integrated Peacebuilding).

Working on or in conflict poses great challenges for our inner lives and can be extremely demanding for our mental, emotional and physical wellbeing, possibly leading to stress, tension and reduced productivity, but also to burnout, depression or substance abuse. It is important for MHPSS programmes, including Kashmiri militants, Naxalite terrorists, FARC rebels, Kosovo Liberation Army veterans, the LTTE in Sri Lanka, militants in Assam and Maoists in Nepal. As one former militant from Assam testified: ‘my fight was for the people. So, maybe I have no regrets. But I realised that violence is not the path. I am now determined to build a strong harmonious community. I want to go back and resolve conflicts in my region, now that I am at peace with myself’ (IAHV, Beyond Violent Extremism).
and PB practitioners to be trained or educated in practical stress and self-management tools to effectively handle this aspect of their work, and to integrate psychosocial health and wellbeing, as well as personal resilience and stress management into effective peace and MHPSS work. Work performance is enhanced by better clarity of mind, improved concentration and increased ability to manage challenging situations (IAHV, Towards Integrated Peacebuilding).

In addition, the quality and impact of our work on the ground is, to a great extent, defined by who we are as ‘peacebuilders’ and how we engage with communities and the people with whom we work and interact. As aptly captured by Kai Brand-Jacobsen, Director of the Department of Peace Operations (DPO): ‘our words and how we behave as peacemakers are the equivalent in our field to a surgeon’s hand when doing surgery. Just as the slightest shake or mistake in surgery can cause harm, we also need to be intimately aware of how our words and behaviour are understood and perceived, and to ourselves model and manifest the values and practice we are promoting’ (IAHV, Towards Integrated Peacebuilding). Therefore, it is important to not just be empowered or trained in technical skills, but also to nurture and strengthen on a deeper level those core aspects within ourselves that support the development of peacebuilding qualities and skills essential for transformative and effective practice, including: active listening, compassion and empathy, holding multiple realities, patience and endurance, balancing simplicity and complexity, facilitation, tranquillity, creativity, discernment, integrity, intuition and a deeper sense of connectedness. Whether as PB or MHPSS practitioners, we need to be able to hold a space for the largely irrational trauma responses, emotions, experiences and memories present in the people with whom we interact and support. Therefore, more than empowerment, it is important to develop one’s full potential, both as a human being and a professional.

**Level 5: A strong psychosocial foundation for peacebuilding**

**Postulate:** Healed, resilient, empowered and trained individuals and communities together constitute a strong psychosocial foundation for any society to prevent or overcome the effects of conflict and violence.

Restoring a strong and healthy psychosocial foundation is the necessary prerequisite for stable and cohesive families, and for peacebuilding objectives such as social cohesion, reconciliation, reintegration of combatants, prevention and transformation of violence/extremism and education in conflict zones. Or, as a social worker in Beirut concluded after a programme: ‘I think this will address the roots of conflict, the psychological dimension that nobody deals with or comes close to. This is an effective group approach for psychosocial issues. We need to introduce new effective techniques to dissolve tension between many people’ (IAHV, Towards Integrated Peacebuilding). Laying a strong psychosocial foundation for peace can be supported by strengthening human values in all sectors of society, peace education from a young age onwards, strengthening cultures of peace instead of violence, teaching life skills, promoting nonviolent conflict resolution, strengthening the overall wellbeing of communities and societies and many other complementary approaches.

**Conclusion on operational congruencies**

The levels of congruency presented above are different levels of aspiration, with full respect for the reality that different individuals and communities will live different levels. For example, some individuals may experience healing, but not necessarily feel empowered to change their circumstances. Others may feel empowered, but not necessarily embody and internalise peacebuilding skills and qualities.

These levels of congruencies are relevant from the individual to the global level: just
like healed individuals are less likely to com-
mit harm, so are healed communities and
ations, etc. These levels of congruencies are distinct, but
inseparable and can be focused on separat-
ely, or as a whole. How the different levels
can be combined in a mutually reinforcing
way can be illustrated with the ‘Healing,
Resilience and Preventing Extremism’ project that
IAHV is currently implementing for war
affected children in Lebanon and Jordan.
The aim of this project is to:

1) Provide trauma relief, healing and
empowerment, and restore the over-
all physical, mental and emotional
wellbeing of the children in order to
address the range of psychosocial con-
sequences of armed conflict and violence
(level 1).

2) Strengthen human values, resilience and
nonviolent empowerment to contribute
to the prevention of recruitment, extremism and violent behaviour of affected
children (levels 2 and 3).

3) Strengthen a culture and practice of
human rights and dignity that provides
for the specific needs and risks of children
impacted by armed conflict and violence
by building the capacity of local actors
and raising awareness among decision
makers (levels 4 and 5).

**Conclusion**
The sustainability of peacebuilding in its
broadest meaning cannot happen without
psychosocial peacebuilding. Psychosocial
peacebuilding refers to an approach that
integrates the full range of psychosocial fac-
tors into peacebuilding, transforming indi-
viduals, communities and context, and
strengthening a strong psychosocial founda-
tion for peace. It is a fundamental, human
centred approach that includes, but is not
limited to, the integration of MH and PSS
into peacebuilding and highlights the intrin-
sic interlinkage of both fields.

Leaving aside the far end of clinical mental
health cases, MHPSS and peacebuilding cri-
teria and operations are stretched over a
spectrum. The boundaries between mental
health and illness, between culturally
acceptable and unacceptable forms of vio-
ence, or between technical and holistic
approaches to peacebuilding, are not fixed
and vary according to context, culture and
professional approach. While an optimum
state of health and positive peace may be
the aspirations of both fields, it is not
clear when the line is crossed where health
turns into illness and peace into violence,
since these are phenomena located on an
extended spectrum subjective to judgment.
Harming oneself is certainly a concern
for the traditional MHPSS field and so is
harming others for the traditional peace-
building field. However, not everyone in
these fields would consider the following
cases concerns to be addressed in their
fields: the belief that it is OK to kill people
who are different from you; the inner need
to join a group to experience self-esteem;
personal greed that destroys people’s lives
on a massive scale; or irritation on a daily
basis due to unprocessed past experiences.
However, from a more holistic perspective
of psychosocial peacebuilding, we need to
work on all of this and more, strengthening
wellbeing, mindsets, attitudes, behaviour,
relationships, peace enhancing systems and
professional excellence. As an integrated
field, we can move forward to the full
and joint aspiration of both MHPSS and
PB towards optimal health and positive
peace.

**References**
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1 For more information on IAHV, see www.iahv.org and www.peaceunit-iahv.org.

2 See www.aolresearch.org.
Research on the effects of the UK based IAHV Manage Your Mind programme for vulnerable communities using internationally validated questionnaires GAD-7 (generalised anxiety disorder, panic and PTSD) and PHQ-9 (depression) show reduction in levels of depression by 71.5% and anxiety by 67.7% in 4 weeks.

Oral feedback following Prison SMART training delivered by the author.

From recorded, but unpublished, testimonials following the Breathe SMART training in Denmark.

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