

# **Social intervention development and evaluation in Sierra Leone: A feasibility study**

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Knowledge Production and Transfer' (Webber et al, submission no. 2099)Background: World Health Organisation reports that around only one in five people experiencing mental distress in low and middle-income countries receive any formal support. In Sierra Leone this is as low as 2%, but it is possible that social interventions can help to fill this treatment gap. However, these need to be context specific and 'socially robust' to account for the nature of wider communities, and to be informed by rigorous research. We aimed to convene people from the UK and Sierra Leone to co-produce innovative and locally appropriate approaches to addressing those problems.Method: In collaboration with partners from King's Centre for Global Health and Enabling Access to Mental Health we conducted a feasibility study in Sierra Leone using ethnographic methodology. Combining interviews, focus groups and researcher observations with a variety of stakeholders in the mental health sector, we explored existing practice and identified service needs. Data collected from multiple sources was transcribed and triangulated using comparative method of grounded theory to analyse the applicability of social work models and concepts within the context of Sierra Leone.Results: Findings from the feasibility study indicate partners are enthusiastic about the potential of social interventions to connect individuals and enhance community engagement, thus reducing stigma of mental illness. Data points to a significant need for training in low-cost psychosocial approaches to mental health care at both the district and community levels. Feedback from stakeholders on the creation of an intervention framework was positive, highlighting specific elements of social capital within the cultural context.Conclusions: Results highlight the importance of translating locally adapted social interventions to a low-income country. The long-term aim of this project is to adapt evidence-based models of practice and training materials to meet the needs of other countries facing a similar treatment gap.