

Final Report: The Impact of the We Love Reading Pilot Program on the Psychosocial Health of Participating Children in Zaatari Refugee Camp

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The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was completed by 10 participating storytellers for up to 15 randomly selected children in their reading circles for a total of 82 children. The SDQ is a tool used for measuring and assessing the psychological wellbeing of 2 to 17 year olds. An SDQ survey was completed for each child both before the start of the We Love Reading (WLR) pilot program and at the end of the WLR program ('before' and 'after' measurements).

The SDQ measures attributes on five scales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behavior. There is additionally an overall stress score. The SDQ scores are dimensions, and with each point increase in score, the likelihood of current or future psychiatric problems rises. The SDQ was used with the WLR pilot program as a means of evaluating any effects of this specific intervention on the psychosocial health of the participating children.

The survey responses and behavior scores were evaluated using Minitab. The differences of overall stress, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer problems, and prosocial scores for each child were calculated. A one sample T test was performed to measure the difference where the null hypothesis was a difference of 0 and significance was indicated by a larger difference in values.

The analysis results for the one-sample T tests are displayed below. For each of the five dimensions and the overall stress scores, the calculated p values were $p < .001$. This indicates a significant decrease in overall stress, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, and peer problems and a significant increase in prosocial behavior (kind and helpful behavior) by the end of the program.

The mean values for each of the five scales for American 4-17 years olds are 1.6, 1.3, 2.8, 1.4, and 8.6 respectively. The mean values calculated from the evaluated population *before* the start of the program were 4.6, 4.1, 5.0, 5.1, and 5.0 respectively. The score for emotional distress (4.6) is slightly above average. The score for conduct problems (4.1) is slightly higher than average. The score for hyperactivity (5.0) falls on the higher end of the average range (0 to 5). The score for difficulty getting

along with other children (5.1) falls under the very high range (5 to 10). Lastly, the score for kind and helpful behavior (5.0) is below the average range (6 to 10).

The mean values of the five scales for the evaluated population *after* the program were 2.7, 1.9, 2.8, 3.9, and 7.1 respectively. Overall, the calculated mean scores for the first four scales decreased from the start of the program. The score for kind and helpful behavior, on the other hand, increased. The average score for emotional distress at the end of the program falls within the average range. The scores for conduct problems and hyperactivity similarly fall within average scores. The score for difficulty getting along with other children (3.9) falls under the high range, and the value for kind and helpful behavior (7.1) falls within the average range.

The mean value for overall stress for American 4-17 year olds is 7.1. The calculated mean value for overall stress for the evaluated population before the start of the program is 18.8, which falls under the high range (15 to 19). The calculated mean value for overall stress for the evaluated population after the program is 11.2, which falls just above the average range (0 to 11).

Comparing the calculated mean values with average population values from the US is useful in identifying the degree to which the calculated values differ from that of a population not undergoing the extreme levels of stressors from their environment. Despite this significant difference in current lifestyle between the two groups of sampled children, the children in Zaatari display an ability to achieve average scores that come relatively close to the average values from the US population sample; not only can they achieve such scores, but they were achieved after the children participated in the WLR pilot program. This achievement points towards the resilience of the children and their ability to cope with and adapt to a different and stressful environment with their experiences through the WLR program.

Although the collected data indicate a significant change in the SDQ scores from May (at the beginning of the program) to August (at the end of the program), it is crucial to note confounding variables and limitations surrounding this study. One major set of confounding factors is the lack of data regarding other programs or activities the children participated in before or during the time of the study; during the time of the study, various NGOs and local organizations held social activities and sponsored programs focused on improving the social health of the refugee children in the camp. Another set of confounding variables includes the lack of data regarding all other social and psychological aspects of the children's lives before and during the time of the study; this data includes traumatic experiences of the refugee children and any significant changes in the children's home and community environment that affected his or her psychological state. Without this information, there is inevitably less confidence in attributing the improvement of the children's psychosocial health to the WLR program.

Many limitations in this study were a result of logistical difficulties. First, children that were not participants of the WLR program could not be sampled as a control because the storytellers completing the surveys did not have regular interactions with children not participating in their reading circles. The children in their circles consisted of their siblings, relatives, and neighbors. Another limitation was that several of the storytellers completed the pre-program surveys during or after the duration of the program due to logistical challenges. Although clear instructions were given to complete these surveys based on their recall of each child's behavior before the start of the program, inaccuracy in the responses can be inevitable when completing the surveys from memory.

Although clear limitations surrounded the collection of data for this study, the significant findings provide crucial evidence for the important role the WLR program most probably played in the behavioral and social health of the participating children. The conversations and interviews with individual and groups of storytellers and children throughout the duration of the pilot program were overwhelmingly positive. Many of the storytellers described distinct positive changes in the children's behaviors; these changes ranged from the attribution of new habits (such as reading for pleasure, independent writing, and sharing) as well as decreases in negative behavior. This positive feedback contributes to the strong evidence base of the significant role the WLR pilot program played in supporting and nourishing the psychosocial wellbeing of the children in Zaatari camp.

RESULTS FROM MINITAB:

One-Sample T: SCORES: overall stress

Test of $\mu = 0$ vs < 0

Variable	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean	95% Upper Bound	T	P
SCORES: overall stress	82	-7.512	8.153	0.900	-6.014	-8.34	0.000

One-Sample T: Emotional Distress, Behavioral Difficulties, Hyperactivity, Difficulty getting along with other children

Test of $\mu = 0$ vs < 0

Variable	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean	95% Upper Bound	T	P
Emotional Distress	82	-1.963	2.617	0.289	-1.482	-6.79	0.000
Behavioral Difficulties	82	-2.134	2.609	0.288	-1.655	-7.41	0.000
Hyperactivity/concentrat	82	-2.159	3.148	0.348	-1.580	-6.21	0.000
Difficulty getting along	82	-1.146	2.347	0.259	-0.715	-4.42	0.000

One-Sample T: Kind and helpful behavior

Test of $\mu = 0$ vs > 0

Variable	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean	95% Lower Bound	T	P
Kind and helpful behavior	82	2.037	3.125	0.345	1.462	5.90	0.000

Interview Report: The perspective of storytellers in the Za’atari Refugee Camp on the We Love Reading Pilot Program

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Methodology

The storytellers were interviewed in 10 of the 12 interviews were carried out at the IRD center in District 10. Only 2 of the 12 interviews were recorded. All of these interviews were carried out in an informal setting; many times, other storytellers or Za’atari inhabitants were present while the interview was being carried out.

Summary and Overall Impressions

Of the 26 trained storytellers, 12 were reached, about 40%. The age of the storytellers ranged from 17 years old to mid-40s. All of the readers except 3 that were interviewed already work for IRD or at the IRD center. Of those who already worked for IRD or at the center, many cited their current involvement in similar activities as their reason for attending the training session. Of those who said that this was their first time taking part in this kind of activity, two cited their husbands as the person who informed them about the initial training for the program. Their husbands worked at the IRD centers.

Those who were interviewed did not know the remaining ladies who did not provide any contact information. The remaining ladies did not already work with IRD or partnering NGOs.

Purpose and Effects of the Program: Self

When asked about what they saw as the purpose of this program for themselves, the majority cited the education and wellbeing of their children as their reason. One storyteller, a mother of 5, responded “for my children” when asked. She explained that she first began for the sake of her own children, but she was happy to see other children in her neighborhood start attending the sessions. Another cited her prior involvement in reading out loud to children in Daraa as her reason. One storyteller said she joined the program out of her personal love for reading and writing since she was little; she saw this as an opportunity to fulfill her dream to continue reading and writing.

Purpose and Effects of the Program: Kids

When asked about what they saw as the purpose of the program for the kids, themes included an alternative education, an alternative to other activities, and the growth of positive ideas and practices amongst the children.

Several of the storytellers discussed the inability or disinterest of most children to attend one of the three schools in Za'atari. Reasons cited by the storytellers included the long distance between homes and the school combined with lack of security (especially for girls), the heat, lack of motivation among students, and the lack of Syrian teachers and the Syrian curriculum. One storyteller went on to say that despite the lack of interest in school amongst the kids in her sessions, after the start of the program, her kids were motivated to learn how to read in order to be able to read and understand the stories in the books on their own. Another storyteller puts time during her sessions to teach the kids how to read because of their strong interest in learning.

Several storytellers saw the sessions as a beneficial alternative for the kids; one storyteller stated that instead of spending time in the sun and dirt outdoors or sitting in front of the TV all day, the children are given the opportunity to do something more beneficial for them. Another storyteller talked about how the kids have become used to being outside, and she saw this as a strong alternative especially with the lack of school.

One of the storytellers pointed out how during the storytelling sessions, the children behave well and are calm and respectful to one another as opposed to times when the kids play roughly with and resort to bothering or hitting one another. This same storyteller then told the story about his baby brother, who is 4 years old, who told the storyteller he should stop smoking for his health; his brother told him this after the kids had all read the story *My Life is Better Without Smoking*. He also said that the kids would start coughing dramatically when he would smoke around them, and one of the kids dramatically told him, "I'm dying!"

Most of the storytellers give the books to the children in their sessions to borrow and return to the next session. Many then said that the kids in their sessions would write the stories from the books and draw their own illustrations when they took a book home. One of the young girls who does this said she did this so that "she could have a copy of the book at home." At least two of the storytellers noticed their kids writing their own stories. The storytellers described the

stories' topics to range from their everyday lives to what they hope to see in their future to fantasy tales with kings, queens, and dragons. One storyteller went on to further describe the enthusiasm of a few of the older girls in her reading circle; she stated that the day after she distributed notebooks to them to write their stories, these girls came to her the following day to show her the stories they've written in their new notebooks.

A majority of the storytellers independently stated that there was more interest amongst the girls in their storytelling circles than amongst the boys.

All storytellers mentioned how the number of kids in their sessions have been growing. Two storytellers said over 40 kids have been attending their sessions; another storyteller said that she divides her kids into two sections, boys and girls, in order to fit all of them in her caravan to read to.

Purpose and Effects of the Program: Community

When asked about what they saw as the purpose of the program for the community, major themes mentioned included the growth and spread of reading for pleasure in the camp and WLR as a new library resource for the children. Several discussed the growing habit of reading for pleasure amongst the kids who attend. Three storytellers also talked about how the kids began to read aloud to each other; a practice that is new in this community. One storyteller talked about the lack of libraries and the lack of the habit of leisure reading in the Syrian community despite the fact that the community is cultured and well educated. She believes that the program opens the door to the younger generation to begin to view books as not just a part of school.

Reactions by non-Storytellers

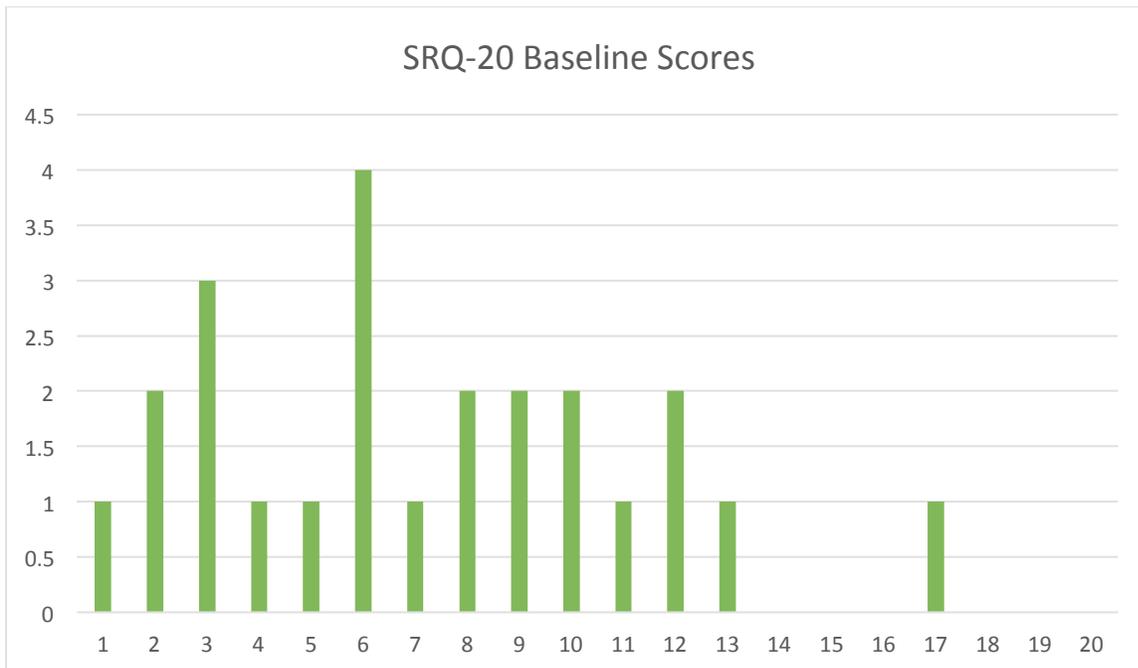
Many of the storytellers described the initial reaction by their husbands, family, and the children to the concept of reading out loud to the children as being confused or uncertain about the idea. However, all of those interviewed went on to note that this initial reaction changed once they observed the storytelling sessions. Storytellers who mentioned an initial uncertain reaction by their husbands said their husbands were ultimately fine with the start of the storytelling sessions because they did not require much organization, the storytellers did not need to leave the house or area to hold these sessions, and the kids who attended were from the neighboring homes.

In two of the three storytelling sessions attended, at least one parent of one of the neighborhood children was present. One of them was a mother of 4 of the attending children ranging from the ages of 4 to 12. When asked what she thought about reading aloud to the kids and storytelling, she responded that it was an excellent idea. She then said that the children benefit from the reading because it opens their minds and expands their perspective.

Perspectives on the Future of WLR in Za’atari

The interviewees had different perspectives on what the future of WLR in the camps should consist of. Overall, the women were not planning on stopping their read aloud sessions even at the termination of the pilot program.

Conclusions



- Mean: 7.21
- Standard deviation: 4.06
- Median: 6.5
 - ½ of the respondents scored below 6.5
 - ¾ of the respondents scored below 10
- No outliers