intervention

Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas

CALL FOR ENGAGEMENT

Special Issue:

Critical Perspectives on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): Engaging with Power & Politics

February 1st 2027	Deadline abstract or short expression of interest
July 1st 2027	Deadline fully developed contributions
2028	Planned publication

An invitation to contribute

We invite you to join us in critically reflecting on how power and politics shape the field of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). We want to create space for different perspectives, experiences, and ideas, including those that are often overlooked in academic debates.

How can you contribute?

Our intention is to make the process of developing contributions to this special issue part of the reflection itself. We welcome research, field reports, personal reflections, dialogues, commentaries, and creative contributions. But you can also start by sharing an emerging idea, question, or experience. We value linguistic diversity and welcome submissions in different languages to foster greater inclusivity and accessibility.

You do not need to have a fully developed manuscript or idea to start a conversation with us. We would love to hear from you.

Contact Rina Ghafoerkhan, Editor-in-Chief, *Interve*ntion at: r.ghafoerkhan@arq.org.

hosted by ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre

With the support of mariwala health initiative

In collaboration with MHPSS.net

Why this special issue, and why now?

Who gets to decide what support people need in times of crisis? Whose knowledge and experiences shape the interventions offered, and whose voices remain unheard? What happens when people delivering mental health and psychosocial support are asked to implement programmes that do not reflect their realities? And what would it take to do things differently?

Over the past decades, MHPSS has moved from the margins to become an established component of humanitarian response, development programming, peacebuilding, climate adaptation, gender-based violence prevention and response, child protection, education, and public health. This expansion has brought much-needed recognition to the psychological and social consequences of conflict, displacement, disaster, and structural adversity.

Yet it has also brought important questions into sharper focus. Who defines what counts as a mental health or psychosocial problem? Whose understanding of suffering, healing, and wellbeing informs the responses developed? Who controls the resources, sets priorities, and determines what constitutes evidence of success? And how does MHPSS engage with the political, economic, and social conditions that contribute to people's suffering in the first place?

These questions are not new. Practitioners, researchers, activists, community members, and people with lived experience have long challenged the assumptions and power relations underlying humanitarian and mental health interventions. Conversations about localisation, decolonisation, epistemic justice, participation, and the social determinants of mental health have gained increasing attention. Yet critical perspectives within MHPSS remain fragmented, and many experiences and forms of knowledge continue to find little space in mainstream academic and policy debates.

The field has developed through global frameworks, technical guidance, common interventions, research agendas, funding arrangements, and coordination mechanisms. While these have contributed to the development and recognition of MHPSS, their underlying assumptions, power relations, and unintended consequences have not always received sustained critical scrutiny.

At the same time, people working within MHPSS may find themselves navigating difficult contradictions: between what communities ask for and what donors fund; between what is considered evidence-based and what feels meaningful locally; between institutional expectations and professional or personal convictions. People receiving support may experience interventions in different ways but lack meaningful opportunities to shape or challenge them.

These experiences are not peripheral to re-thinking the future of MHPSS. They are essential to it.

At a time of growing inequalities, shifting humanitarian priorities, and renewed debates about power and justice, there is a pressing need to bring these experiences and questions into deeper conversation.

An invitation to question, reflect, and imagine

With this special issue, *Intervention* invites contributions that critically explore how power and politics shape the field of MHPSS in its knowledge, policy, funding, research, coordination, implementation, and everyday practice.

We are interested in the visible and less visible ways power operates: through institutions and resources, through professional and disciplinary hierarchies, through language and concepts, through relationships between providers and recipients of support, and through the ways in which knowledge is judged and legitimized.

We welcome contributions that challenge prevailing assumptions, explore tensions and contradictions, document experiences of exclusion or resistance, and examine the possibilities for meaningful change.

But this special issue is not intended to advance a single critical position or prescribe what transformation should look like. We recognise that power operates in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, that people experience it differently, and that none of us holds all the answers.

We want to create space for disagreement, uncertainty, unexpected perspectives, and conversations that may not yet have found a place in established MHPSS debates.

Alongside critiques of existing practices, we particularly welcome examples of alternatives that offer hope: moments when power has shifted, communities have shaped responses on their own terms, dominant assumptions have been challenged, or different ways of working have emerged.

Our ambition is not only to ask what is wrong, but also what might be possible.

Themes and questions to explore

We welcome contributions from diverse disciplinary, geographical, professional, and personal perspectives. Potential themes include, but are not limited to:

- **Power, politics, and the causes of suffering**
  How does MHPSS engage with structural violence, inequality, oppression, displacement, colonial legacies, and political injustice? When might psychosocial interventions risk individualising or depoliticising suffering? When does taking a political stance undermine or threaten the ability to provide support?

- **Knowledge, evidence, and epistemic justice**
  Whose knowledge counts in MHPSS? How do dominant research paradigms, professional expertise, and evidence standards privilege certain perspectives while marginalising others? What alternative ways of knowing and producing knowledge deserve greater recognition? What constitutes 'lived experience' in the context of MHPSS?

- **Funding, institutions, and decision-making**
  How do donors, international organisations, governments, and coordination structures influence what MHPSS can and cannot do? Where is decision-making power concentrated, and how does this shape the field?

- **Localisation, participation, and community agency**
  Who defines participation, and who benefits from it? What happens when communities challenge externally defined priorities? What might genuinely community-led or locally accountable MHPSS look like?

- **Everyday experiences of power in MHPSS practice**
  How do practitioners navigate ethical tensions, institutional pressures, silencing, and compromises that they confront in their work? What is at stake in these experiences of power – for practitioners and for the people they seek to support? What can we learn from people who have questioned, resisted, adapted, or refused to comply with or participate?

- **Experiences of receiving MHPSS**
  What does it feel like to be the subject of an intervention, assessment, research project, or programme? How do people receiving support experience authority, care, dignity, exclusion, or resistance?

- **Power within MHPSS research and academia**
  Who sets research agendas, authors publications, owns data, and receives recognition? How might academic and publishing practices reproduce the inequalities they seek to critique? How can we advance research equity by

addressing unequal access to funding, career opportunities, equitable authorship practices, and opportunities to produce and shape knowledge?

- **Resistance, solidarity, and alternative futures**
  Where have power relations been challenged or transformed? What practices offer possibilities for greater justice, reciprocity, accountability, and collective wellbeing?

These themes are starting points rather than boundaries. We encourage contributors to bring forward questions and experiences that we may not have anticipated.

Who do we hope to hear from?

We invite contributions from researchers, MHPSS practitioners, community organisers, activists, policymakers, people with lived experience, and others who wish to engage critically with these questions.

We particularly encourage contributions from people and communities whose perspectives have historically been underrepresented in international MHPSS debates, including those based in the Global South, conflict-affected settings, grassroots organisations, and community-led initiatives.

We recognise that many people with important experiences and insights do not necessarily identify as researchers or writers, or may not have access to the institutional resources, language, networks, or opportunities that academic publishing often requires.

We value linguistic diversity and recognise that language can be a significant barrier to participation and recognition. We therefore welcome initial contributions in different languages and aim to explore ways to support multilingual participation throughout the process and multi-language publication.

We also recognise that invitations to participate can reproduce unequal relationships when people are expected to contribute their time, experiences, and knowledge without adequate recognition, support, or influence.

We therefore want to explore more accessible and collaborative ways of developing contributions, while remaining attentive to the practical and structural barriers that participation involves.

You do not need to have a fully developed academic paper to start a conversation with us.

Types of contributions

We welcome a broad range of contributions, including:

- Original empirical research articles
- Field reports and practice-based accounts
- Conceptual and theoretical papers
- Reflective essays and personal narratives
- Dialogues, interviews, and collective reflections
- Commentaries and debate pieces
- Creative contributions, including artwork and poetry

We are especially interested in contributions that bring different perspectives into dialogue, including collaborations between practitioners, researchers, community members, and people with lived experience.

Where appropriate, we encourage collective forms of authorship and contributions that reflect conversations rather than a single individual perspective.

We also welcome proposals that experiment with forms of expression beyond conventional academic writing. The editorial team will explore how these may be accommodated within the journal's publication requirements or through complementary spaces and platforms.

Beyond a conventional Call for Papers: Our commitment to the process

The questions raised in this special issue also apply to how it is developed.
Who feels invited to contribute to an academic journal? Who has the confidence, time, resources, and institutional support to submit an abstract or write a paper? Whose contributions are recognised as sufficiently rigorous or relevant? And how can an editorial process create space for voices and perspectives that might otherwise remain unheard?

We do not want simply to invite critical perspectives on power while leaving our own ways of working unquestioned.

Our intention is to make the process of developing this special issue part of the reflection itself.

Rather than only receiving completed manuscripts, we hope to facilitate a more interactive and supportive process in which ideas can be explored, challenged, and developed through exchange.

Depending on contributors' needs and available resources, this may include:

- **Early conversations about ideas**: Opportunities for prospective contributors to discuss an initial experience, question, or proposal before preparing a formal submission.
- **Support in developing contributions**: Constructive editorial feedback and, where feasible, opportunities for mentoring or writing support, particularly for contributors less familiar with academic publishing.
- **Dialogues across perspectives**: Facilitated conversations among contributors to explore connections, disagreements, and emerging questions across different contributions.
- **Collective reflection and writing**: Encouraging co-authored pieces, group discussions, and collaborations that bring different forms of knowledge and experience into conversation.
- **Alternative ways to participate**: Exploring how people who may not wish or be able to submit a conventional manuscript can contribute to the wider dialogue, including through spoken, visual, or other creative forms.

We recognise that these intentions come with practical, ethical, and institutional challenges. Not all inequalities can be resolved through an editorial process, and we do not want to promise forms of support that we cannot deliver. We aim to be transparent about what is possible, remain open to feedback, and reflect critically on the opportunities and limitations of our own approach.

Submission information and timeline

Prospective contributors are invited to submit an abstract or short expression of interest outlining their proposed contribution by February 1st 2027.

Expressions of interest may describe an emerging idea, practical experience, research question, or proposed collaborative contribution. A fully developed manuscript is not required at this stage.

Prospective contributors who would like to discuss an idea before submitting are warmly encouraged to contact the editorial team.

Following the initial submission stage, selected contributors may be invited to participate in dialogues and exchanges to further develop their contributions and strengthen connections across the special issue. Participation in these activities will be optional and subject to available resources.

The deadline for fully developed manuscripts or other contributions will be July 1st 2027.

Detailed author guidelines are available on the Intervention journal website: interventionjournal.org

For questions, initial ideas, or expressions of interest, please contact:
Rina Ghafoerkhan
Editor-in-Chief, *Intervention*
r.ghafoerkhan@arq.org

intervention
Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas

hosted by ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre

With the support of mariwala health initiative

In collaboration with MHPSS.net