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Universities and NGOs in the United Kingdom and Colombia collaborate to rebuild mental health services in post-conflict communities.



A new partnership, jointly funded by Minciencias (Colombia) and ESRC/UKRI (UK), aims to build effective mental health provision in Colombian communities heavily affected by armed conflict and help build new roads to peace.

STARS-C, a collaboration between University College London (UCL), London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá and not-for-profit organisations COOMBUVIPAC and Corpo Manigua will implement a participatory intervention designed to strengthen mental health care systems. It will result in a co-produced toolkit to guide institutions in the scaling up of community mental health services.

The project will focus on two Territorially Focused Development (PDET) communities in Caquetá-Colombia, working directly with those who have been affected by conflict including forcefully displaced populations, former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) members and local citizens.

The project will utilize years of expertise in community development, global mental health and specialist knowledge of the impacts of the Colombian conflict. This is expanded

through a novel collaboration that joins with economists, psychologists and public health doctors for integrating perspectives on institutional development, governance and policy making.

Improving mental health outcomes is crucial in supporting the economic and social recovery of post-conflict countries. It is a Colombian national priority following the peace agreement of 2016, which was signed by the government and the FARC after more than five decades of conflict.

Dr Rochelle Burgess (UCL), UK Principal Investigator, says:

“For too long, the people who use services, have been left out of processes related to determining what counts as meaningful supports. I am so excited to be working alongside colleagues at LSE, Los Andes and our community partners Corpomanigua and COOMBUVIPAC, to push the boundaries on what counts as services and intervention to improve mental health. Thanks to ESRC/Newton Fund we have the opportunity to build community mental health models from the bottom up, led by the people who matter most; everyday citizens whose mental health is at risk because of complex social worlds.”

Professor Sandra Jovchelovitch (LSE), UK Co-Principal Investigator, says:

“I am absolutely delighted to be collaborating with colleagues in the UK and Colombia in this exciting research partnership designed to improve mental health services in communities most affected by the Colombian armed conflict. Our research will bring together for the first-time local communities and mental health systems in a much-needed dialogue for creating services that are inclusive and effective for all.”

Dr Darío Maldonado (Universidad de los Andes), Colombia PI, says:

“The needs of the Colombian population regarding their mental health are immense. Even more so in remote areas that have been affected by the armed conflict and by years of disconnection with the state apparatus. This project is a great opportunity to contribute to the improvement in the well-being of these forgotten populations using scientific knowledge to find solutions to their mental health problems and being respectful of the vision that they themselves have about their lives and their interests.”

Dr Maria Cecilia Dedios (Universidad de los Andes and LSE), Colombia Co-PI, says:

“This is a fantastic opportunity to contribute to a pivotal post-conflict policy challenge in Colombia - the availability and quality of local mental health services in communities heavily affected by the armed conflict. This project brings together communities and academics from multiple disciplines to produce solutions that are anchored in local understandings of mental health and wellbeing and are feasible in low- and middle-income countries such as Colombia”.

More information:

“Starting from the bottom: Using Participatory Action Research to re-imagine local mental health services in Colombia” (STARS-C) will take place over a 28-month period from February 2021 to June 2023.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-health/research/z-research/stars-c>

Study Partners

The UCL Institute for Global Health (IGH) is a world-leading centre of research and teaching excellence in global health, based in the heart of London. Our unique approach combines interdisciplinary work with community engagement, to develop and implement practical solutions to global health problems. Our research, teaching and enterprise activities address the broad determinants of health and the major causes of death and ill-health. Our work ranges from tackling issues affecting the most disadvantaged in society to addressing the major challenges affecting everyone, such as climate change.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-health/>

The Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science (PBS) at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) conducts research and teaching into mind and behaviour in society. Its interdisciplinary faculty & researchers cover areas from social psychology to behavioural economics, political psychology to organisational culture, consumer behaviour to public engagement, community development to global health, happiness and well-being. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/PBS>

Alberto Lleras Camargo School of Government was established in 2006 to articulate the study of public affairs within Los Andes University. **Universidad de los Andes** was founded in 1948. It is Colombia’s first independent university, conceived as a centre for study and research and a place where truth could be upheld. The School of Government aims to propose interdisciplinary and technical solutions to the social, economic and political problems faced by Colombia and other Latin American countries. Ever since the university was founded, its activities have focused on excellence, and this is affirmed in the Comprehensive Development Plan <https://egob.uniandes.edu.co/es/>

Links to connected studies

Promoting Trauma Resilient Communities in Tocancipa, Colombia - <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-health/research/z-research/promoting-trauma-resilient-communities-tocancipa-colombia>

Pathways to Reconciliation - <https://www.lse.ac.uk/PBS/Research/Pathways-to-Reconciliation>

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