

TOOL 11**PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT: PERCEPTIONS BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS WITH IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMMUNITY²³**

Why use this tool: For learning about local perspectives on problems and coping in a participatory manner, to provide information for MHPSS response

Method: (Individual or group) key informant interviews

Human resources needed: One person

Time needed: Three days for collecting data (assuming the interviewer carries out four interviews a day) and three days for analysis and reporting

Background

This tool is especially useful as a way to gain more in-depth information after preliminary information has been obtained (see [Tool 10](#))

This tool provides questions to use in **key informant or group interviews with community members who are expected to have in-depth knowledge of the affected community**. These could be displacement camp committee members, local staff, religious leaders, traditional healers, women's association leaders, midwives, youth club leaders, school principals, school teachers, counsellors, and so on. You could also include young people.

Do not use all the questions from this tool. Choose those questions that are relevant to you.

Remember that a common mistake in assessments is to ask too many questions that are not subsequently analysed, reported or otherwise used. So, do not ask more questions than are needed. Interviews should last no more than one hour. If an interview takes more than one hour, then it is generally better to make a second appointment at another time for a follow-up interview.

When adapting the questionnaire to the local context, **do not** change the sequence of the interview questions (e.g., first asking about problems in a subgroup of the population, then asking what people in this subgroup are doing already to address the problem, and ending with a question on what additional help may be needed)

These interviews can be done with individuals or groups. However, it is recommended to do them with individuals where feasible, because individuals in a group may influence each other's answers. It is recommended to interview at least 10-15 people. It may be necessary to interview more than 15 people whenever additional interviews are likely to lead to relevant, new information.

Before using this tool you should be trained in general interviewing techniques that are relevant to semi-structured interviews in humanitarian settings, for example, how to probe and avoid introducing bias. You should not ask highly sensitive questions that may put people (interviewee, interviewer, or other people) in danger. Depending on the context, these should be asked only during individual key informant interviews (for example questions about people at risk of human rights violations).

²³ IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Participatory Assessment II: Perceptions by community members with in-depth knowledge of the community. In: *IASC Reference Group Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Assessment Guide*, forthcoming. This tool has been reproduced here with permission from the IASC Reference Group.

Remember it can be very relevant to interview traditional/ religious/ indigenous healers on local perceptions of mental health and available resources. A specific tool with questions to interview them is available upon request. That tool in particular is relevant to implementing IASC Guidelines Action 6.4 on potential collaboration with healers.

Informed consent

It is important to obtain informed consent before doing any interviews. An example of how to do this is provided here.

Hello, my name is _____ and I work for _____. We have been working in ____ (area) to _____ (type of work) for ____ (period). Currently, we are talking to people who we believe know a lot about the people affected by this [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]. In this interview I would like to ask you about various problems people in the community have. I would also like to ask how people deal with these problems, and if additional help may be needed.

Our aim is to learn from your knowledge and experience, so that we will be better able to provide support. We cannot promise to give you support in exchange for this interview. We are here *only* to ask questions and learn from your experiences. You are free to take part or not.

If you choose to be interviewed, I can assure you that your information will remain confidential. You are free not to take part. We cannot give you anything for taking part but I would greatly value your time and responses. Also, you can stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions? Would you like to be interviewed?

1. Yes
2. No

A. SOURCES OF DISTRESS

First, I would like to ask you about problems in the community.

- What do people in your community believe has caused the current [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]?
- According to community members, what are the consequences of the [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]?
- According to community members, what will be further consequences of the [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]?
- How has the [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT] affected daily community life?
- How has [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT] affected people’s livelihood, activities/ work?
- How are people trying to rebuild and recover from this crisis?

B. RISK GROUPS

- Which people in your community are suffering the most from the current crisis. . . Who else? . . . and who else?

C. NATURE OF DISTRESS AND SUPPORT

C1. Now, I would like to ask a number of questions about children being upset/ distressed.

(COMMENT: You could repeat this question for boys and girls separately and for different age groups, for example, children under 6, children between 6 and 12, and adolescents from 13 to 18).

- How would an outsider recognise a child who is emotionally upset/ distressed by [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]?
 - a. What does the child look like?
 - b. How do they behave?
 - c. Are there different types of being upset? What are they?
 - d. How can I tell the difference between [NAME ANSWER FROM C1]?
- In normal circumstances (before the recent emergency), what did community members usually do to reduce the upset/ distress of children?
- What are community members doing right now to reduce the upset/ distress of children?
- What else is being done right now to help children who are upset/ distressed?
- Where do children who are upset/ distressed seek help?
- What more could be done to help children who are upset / distressed?

C2. Now, I would like to ask a number of questions about women being upset/ distressed.

- How would an outsider recognize a woman who is emotionally upset/ distressed by the [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]?
 - a. What does she look like?
 - b. How does she behave?
 - c. Are there different types of being upset? What are they?
 - d. How can I tell the difference between [NAME ANSWER FROM C2]?
- In normal circumstances (before the recent emergency), what did community members usually do for women to reduce upset/ distress?
- What are community members doing for each other right now to reduce women's upset/ distress?
- What else is being done right now to help women who are upset/ distressed?
- Where do women who are upset/ distressed seek help?
- What more could be done to help women who are upset / distressed?

C3. Now, I would like to ask a number of questions about men being upset/ distressed.

- How would an outsider recognize a man who is emotionally upset/ distressed by the [NAME OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE FLOODS, EXPLOSION, ARMED CONFLICT]?
 - a. What does he look like?
 - b. How does he behave?
 - c. Are there different types of being upset? What are they?
 - d. How can I tell the difference between [NAME ANSWER FROM C3]?
- In normal circumstances (before the recent emergency), what did community members usually do for men to reduce upset/ distress?
- What are community members doing for each other right now to reduce men's upset/ distress?
- What else is being done right now to help men who are upset/ distressed?
- Where do men who are upset/ distressed seek help?
- What more could be done to help men who are upset / distressed?

C4. Now, I also would like to ask about what happens when people die in your community.

- When someone in this community dies how do the family and friends express their grief?
 - a. What are the first things to be done? Why?
 - b. How do other family/ friends/ community members express support?
 - c. What happens to the body?
 - d. What other things need to be done?
 - e. How long does mourning continue?
 - f. What happens if the body cannot be found/ identified?
- What happens if the process you described (for example, burial) cannot be done?
- What are community members doing for each other right now to help bereaved families and friends?
- What else is being done right now to help people who are bereaved?
- Where do people who are bereaved seek help?
- What more could be done to help people who are bereaved?

C5. In all communities there are people with mental disorders. May I ask about them? (COMMENT: the word mental disorders may not be well-understood. Where needed, use an appropriate synonym that is understood.)

- Do you have people with mental disorders in the community?
- What kind of problems do they have?
- In general, what do community members think about people with mental disorders? How do they treat them?
- In normal circumstances (before the recent emergency), what did community members usually do to help people with mental disorders?
- What are community members doing right now to help people with mental disorders?
- What else is being done right now to help those with mental disorders?
- Where do people with mental disorders seek help?
- What more could be done to help people with mental disorders?

C6. In most communities there are people (men, women and children) who have been raped or sexually abused. May I ask about them? (COMMENT: additional questions may be phrased by replacing the word 'raped or sexually abused' with 'tortured' or with any other potentially traumatic event that is relevant.)

- If someone has been raped, what kind of problems may the person have?
- In general, what do community members think about people who have been raped? How do they treat them?
- In normal circumstances (before the recent emergency), what did community members normally do to help those who have been raped?
- What are community members doing right now to help those who have been raped?
- What else is being done right now to help those who have been raped?
- Where do people who have been raped seek help?
- What more could be done to help those who have been raped?

C7. In most communities there are people who have problems with alcohol. May I ask about them? (COMMENT: depending on the context, the questions below may need to be asked also - or only - for drugs.)²⁴

- If someone frequently drinks a lot of alcohol, what kind of problems may happen in the family or community?
- If someone frequently drinks a lot of alcohol, what kind of problems may happen for him or her?
- In general, what do community members think of people who frequently drink a lot of alcohol? How do they treat them?
- In normal circumstances (before the recent emergency) what did community members normally do to reduce problems caused by alcohol?
- What are community members doing right now to reduce these problems?
- What else is being done right now to deal with these problems?
- Where do people seek help for these problems?
- What more could be done to reduce these problems?

24 For a more in-depth tool on alcohol and drug use, see UNHCR & WHO (2008) *Rapid Assessment of Alcohol and Other Substance Use in Conflict-affected and Displaced Populations: A Field Guide*. Geneva: UNHCR.