

TOOL 10**PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT: PERCEPTIONS BY GENERAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS²²**

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

Method: Interviews with general community members (free listing with further questions)

Time needed: One to two days

Human resources needed: Four people

Background

This tool is useful as a way to gain quick information from general community members living in a humanitarian setting.

This tool's first question involves free listing which is often useful in the beginning of an assessment to get an overview of the different types of problems and resources in a community. Free listing means asking an individual (often a general community member) to provide as many answers to a single question as possible. It can focus on a wide variety of topics. For instance, people can be asked to list the types of problems they have, what they do when they face problems, where they go for help and so on.

In the tool described below, the assessor uses free listing to ask respondents about what problems they have. The assessor then selects the type of problem of our interest (that is, mental health and psychosocial problems) for more in-depth assessment on how the problem is seen to impact on daily functioning and how people may cope with it.

You can carry out free listing with individuals or in group settings. However, it is recommended doing it with individuals where feasible, because in a group people may influence each other's answers. It is recommended that you interview at least 10 to 15 people. It may be necessary to interview more than 15 people whenever additional interviews are likely to lead to relevant, new information.

Generally, it will be useful to ask these questions separately for women and men (and for children, youth and adults if this applies) and to check if there are differences.

Before using the 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.

22 Source: IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Participatory Assessment I: Perceptions by General Community Members. 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.

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 live in this area. Our aim is to know what kind of problems people in this area have, to decide how we can offer 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 do choose to be interviewed, I can assure you that your information will remain anonymous so no-one will know what you have told us. We cannot give you anything for taking part but we would greatly value your time and responses. Do you have any questions?

- Would you like to be interviewed?
1. Yes
 2. No

Interview

Step 1: Free listing

1.1 The interview starts by free listing on the following question to ask for all types of problems.

“What kind of problems do _____ [INSERT GROUP OF INTEREST] have because of the humanitarian situation? Please list as many problems that you can think of.”

Notes:

- a) Groups of interest may include women in this community, men in this community, teenage girls in this community, young children in this community, etc.
- b) When using free listing, you keep on encouraging the respondent to give more answers. For example after the respondent has listed a few problems and remains silent, you could ask:

“What *other* kind of problems do _____ [INSERT GROUP OF INTEREST] have because of the humanitarian situation? Please list as many problems that you can think of.” The respondent may now list a few more problems. You would then continue with the question until the respondent gives no more answers.
- c) After the list is completed, you should ask for a short description of each problem listed so that the following table can be completed.

TABLE 1. LIST OF PROBLEMS (OF ANY KIND)

Problem	Description
1.1.1	
1.1.2	
1.1.3	
1.1.4	
1.1.5	
1.1.6	
1.1.7	
1.1.8	
1.1.9	
1.1.10	
1.1.11	
1.1.12	
1.1.13	
1.1.14	
1.1.15	
1.1.16	
1.1.17	
1.1.18	
1.1.19	
1.1.20	

1.2 You should then look at the responses to question 1.1 and follow the instructions below to select mental health and psychosocial problems specifically.

Select those problems which are especially relevant from a mental health / psychosocial perspective, such as:

- (a) problems related to social relationships (domestic and community violence, child abuse, family separation); and
- (b) problems related to:
 - feelings (for example feeling sad or fearful);
 - thinking (for example worrying); or
 - behaviour (for example drinking).

Copy these into Table 1.2 below and also in the first column of Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below.

TABLE 1.2 LIST OF MENTAL HEALTH/PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS
1.2.1
1.2.2
1.2.3
1.2.4
1.2.5
1.2.6
1.2.7
1.2.8
1.2.9
1.2.10

Step 2: Ranking

2.1 Find out from the respondent which mental health / psychosocial problems are perceived to be important and why.

“You mentioned a number of problems, including [READ OUT PROBLEMS NAMED IN 1.2 ABOVE]. Of these problems, which is the most important problem?” “Why?”

“Of these problems, which is the second most important problem?” “Why?”

“Of these problems, which is the third most important problem?” “Why?”

TABLE 2.1 TOP THREE PRIORITY PROBLEMS	
2.1.1	Problem:
	Explanation:
2.1.2	Problem:
	Explanation:
2.1.3	Problem:
	Explanation:

Step 3: Daily functioning and coping

3.1 Try to identify the impact of mental health / psychosocial problems on daily functioning by asking what tasks could be affected.

“Sometimes [NAME A PROBLEM FROM 1.2 ABOVE] may make it difficult for a person to perform their usual tasks. For example, things they do for themselves, their family or in their community. If a [INSERT GROUP OF INTEREST] suffers from [NAME AGAIN THE PROBLEM LISTED FROM 1.2 ABOVE], what kind of tasks will be difficult for them?”

Report the answer in Table 3.1. Repeat the question for each of the problems mentioned in 1.2.

TABLE 3.1 IMPAIRMENT OF DAILY ACTIVITIES	
Repeat for each problem mentioned under 1.2	
Mental health/ psychosocial problems (as listed in 1.2)	Affected task
1.2.1	3.1.1
1.2.2	3.1.2
1.2.3	3.1.3
1.2.4	3.1.4
1.2.5	3.1.5
1.2.6	3.1.6
1.2.7	3.1.7
1.2.8	3.1.8
1.2.9	3.1.9
1.2.10	3.1.10

3.2 Then try to identify how people cope with each of these mental health / psychosocial problems and whether this helps them.

“What kind of things do _____ [INSERT GROUP OF INTEREST] people do to deal with such problems? E.g., things they do by themselves, things they can do with their families or things they do with their communities?” “Does doing that help with the problem?”

Report the answer in Table 3.2. Repeat the question for each of the problems mentioned in 1.2.

TABLE 3.2 COPING		
Repeat for each problem mentioned under 1.2.		
Mental health/ psychosocial problems (as listed in 1.2)	Coping	Is the coping method helpful?
1.2.1	3.2.1	Yes/No
1.2.2	3.2.2	Yes/No
1.2.3	3.2.3	Yes/No
1.2.4	3.2.4	Yes/No
1.2.5	3.2.5	Yes/No
1.2.6	3.2.6	Yes/No
1.2.7	3.2.7	Yes/No
1.2.8	3.2.8	Yes/No
1.2.9	3.2.9	Yes/No
1.2.10	3.2.10	Yes/No