HELP@APP: development and evaluation of a self-help app for traumatized Syrian refugees in Germany – study design

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BACKGROUND

Since 2014, Syrians have become the largest group among refugees in Germany. Many of them were exposed to sequential traumatizing events including war, escape and post-migration stressors (e.g. cultural barriers or discrimination experiences). Potentially traumatizing events are associated with an increased risk for developing mental disorders. Recent studies reported prevalence rates of 34% for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Syrian refugees. However, there is a lack of adequate treatment options in Germany. Low-threshold e-health interventions could fill this gap. Indeed, meta-analyses showed evidence for the effectiveness of internet-based interventions for posttraumatic stress. This potential remains unutilised for refugees in Germany to date.

AIMS

- Development of a self-help app in Arabic language for traumatized Syrian refugees in Germany (Fig. 1-3)
- Evaluation of the efficacy, user friendliness and cost-effectiveness by conducting a randomized controlled trial (RCT)

APP-DEVELOPMENT

Fig. 1: The steps of developing the app „Sanadak“.

Fig. 2: Basic concept of „Sanadak“. All modules contain videos, audios and exercises. In addition, self-tests with individual feedback are included.

Fig. 3: Screenshots of the app.

EVALUATION

Study design

Prospective RCT with two arms: intervention group with $n = 61$ and control group with $n = 61$ (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Study design

Participants

- **Inclusion criteria:** Syrian refugees living in Germany, traumatic event according to ICD-10 or DSM-V, moderate posttraumatic symptom severity (PDS-5 > 11), age: 18–65 years, owning a compatible device
- **Exclusion criteria:** severe posttraumatic stress (PDS-5 ≥ 60), severe depressive symptomatology, acute suicidal tendencies, current psychotherapy, psychopharmaceutical medication, pregnancy

Results

The results of this study will provide evidence on the efficacy of app with regard to changes in symptom burden related to traumatizing events. Specific outcomes of interest include:

- **Primary Outcome:** posttraumatic stress symptomatology
- **Secondary Outcomes:** symptoms of depression, anxiety, somatization; quality of life, self-efficacy, posttraumatic growth, among others
- **Benefit analysis:** user acceptance, user friendliness, app usability
- **Economic health benefit evaluation:** physician contact & quality-adjusted life years

DISCUSSION & OUTLOOK

The self-help app in Arabic language provides low-threshold access to information, for example regarding ways of coping with posttraumatic stress and developing resources, to a broad target group of traumatized refugees. Thus, health care deficits in this group can be addressed. After successful completion of the project HELP@APP, our app “Sanadak” will be made available free of charge.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

QR-code for open access study protocol

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