**Project Duration**
February-December 2014

**Intervention Zone**
Cox’s Bazar District, Bangladesh

**Project objectives**
To measure the impact of a psychosocial follow-up provided to pregnant women on maternal mental health and child well-being (nutritional status, child development) on the short and long term.

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**CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

Mental health, which is not readily measurable, cannot be separated from physical health (WHO, 2001a). Depression is reported to be one of the leading causes of the disease burden of mental health, particularly among women of reproductive age (WHO, 2008). During that same year, unipolar depression became the third leading contributor to the global burden of diseases with 65.5 million disability adjusted live years (DALYs), constituting 4.3% of the total DALYs (WHO, 2008). An estimated 20% of women are at risk of depression during any stage of their lives (Brockington, 2004; Kessler et al., 1994a) however the onset of depressive symptoms frequently peaks during the childbearing years (Kessler et al., 1994b), usually within a couple of weeks after delivery (Cox et al, 1993).

So, mental health problems like depression, anxiety and somatic complaints, have been identified as an important public health problem affecting women as well as their family (Seyfried & Marcus, 2003). These effects in turn can affect their new-born mental and physical development by mediating through poor mother-child interaction. WHO, along with other international organizations, have acknowledged the 1,000-day window of opportunity from pregnancy to age 2 as a critical time in a child’s life because malnutrition does not only have an impact that can possibly cause irreversible damage to the children’s immune function and physical health (stunting and impaired vision) but also diminished intellectual capacities. These potential damages reduce the child’s ability to achieve and be more productive throughout his or her life.

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**SUMMARY**

The project consists in a quantitative assessment of the current ACF Mental Health and Care Practices prevention program, which is conducted in two official refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar. The study is composed of two research lines, A and B. Line A refers to the evaluation of the long term effects of the program on children’s development, mother’s well-being and child rearing knowledge (these participants have been part of ACF prevention program since 2011). A comparative analysis will take place with a control group of mothers with children of the same age that did not take part in the intervention. Line B aims at evaluating the immediate effects of the program on newly enrolled pregnant women concerning their and their babies’ nutritional status, their psychological status, their knowledge on maternal and child care and their perceived social support. A comparative analysis will be conducted with a control group of pregnant women that are not involved in the intervention.

The program activities aim at encouraging pregnant women’s participation in individual and group work where they can share their knowledge, emotions and experiences to fellow women, identify appropriate psychosocial resources and coping strategies for their difficulties through mutual support within the group, which will increase their capacity and resources (both internal and external) to provide proper care to their children and reduce the risk of malnutrition.
PRIMAR OBJECTIVE
- To measure the psychosocial and nutritional impact of a community-based MHCP prevention intervention.
- To provide recommendations on MHCP intervention for pregnant and lactating women to promote their well-being and reduce the risk of child malnutrition and development impairment.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
- To assess and compare maternal mental health, child development and nutritional measures between intervened and non-intervened comparison group as well as at different points in time on pregnant and lactating mothers through quantitative assessments.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS
- The program should show longer term positive effects among women that participated between 2011 and 2012 in relation to their mental health status and knowledge about maternal and child care practices compared to the control group;
- The program shows longer term positive effects (better nutritional status) among the children of the women that participated between 2011 and 2012 based on anthropometric measurement and child development scales compared to the control group;
- The program will reduce maternal physical and mental health problems and improve knowledge on child rearing among group 3 (new enrolled participants from November 2014) and 4 (new enrolled participants from March 2015 onwards) compared to control group;
- Children from group 4 will have higher birth weight than children in the control group;
- Children from group 4 will have better nutritional status than children in the control group.

Implementing agency
- Action Contre la Faim - France

Sponsor
- BPRM (Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration)
- Action contre la Faim, France

Scientific partners
- ICDDR, B
- UCL

For more details...
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