

Strengthening Mental Health Services in Island Communities: The Impact of IBAMA's Multi-Sectoral Approach

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Outline

- Background
- Literature review
- Objectives
- Methodology
- Results
- Conclusion
- Reference list



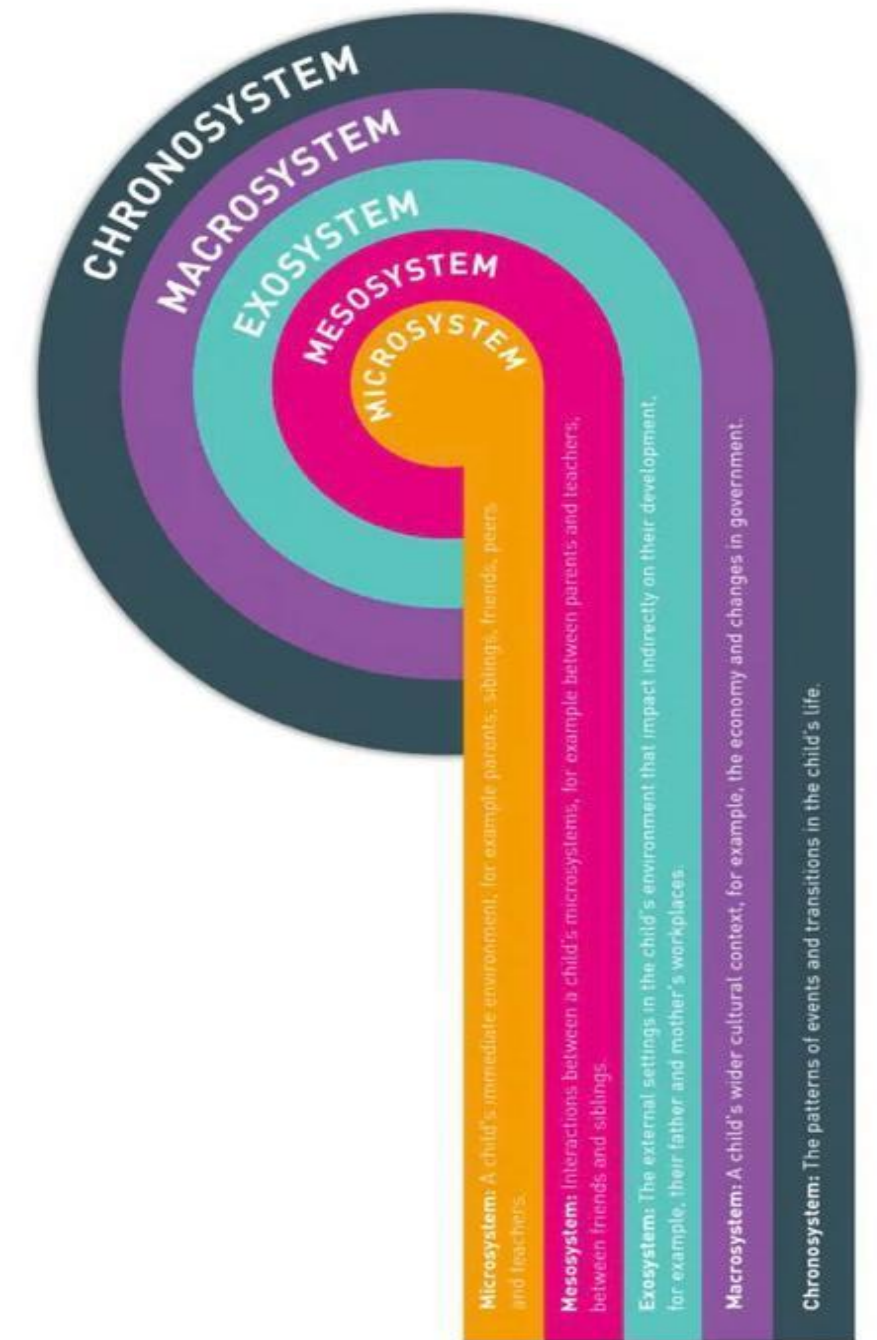
Background

- Social service provision embodies the principle that no one is left behind and seeks to provide essential support to the most vulnerable populations
- The geographic dispersion of the islands of the Maldives presents a unique set of challenges for the provision of social services, particularly in the context of intricate matters such as mental health
- Consequently, a multi-sectoral mechanism was introduced to the social service provision in the Maldives in the year 2000 and has since evolved in response to changing needs and circumstances.
- The Ijthimaaee Badhahi Madhadhuverin (IBAMA), supported by UNICEF is a multi-sectoral community-level assistance mechanism aims to identify and provide assistance to vulnerable individuals from a responsive and prevention approach



Literature Review

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO) in their 2001 report, western nations are increasingly favoring community-based mental health services as the primary mode of delivering psychiatric care.
- The community-based model adopted by these nations involves a collaborative system that integrates social services within the local community, engages families, and various institutions and organizations. This model operated in close-proximity with the communities refers to the immediate environment in which individuals interact on a regular basis as in the microsystem.
- Rensberg and Sumner (2023) illuminates the salient aspects of how multi and intersectoral approaches have the potential to significantly impact the recovery process for individuals contending with mental illness or related challenges, particularly within low or middle-income countries.
- Jones (2022) suggests that the macrosystem, a concept within ecological theory, encapsulates cultural, religious beliefs, and societal norms. By leveraging cultural and religious beliefs as persuasive tools for mental health advocacy and the destigmatization of mental health issues, multi sectoral mechanisms contributes to significant shifts in societal perceptions and attitudes.



Objectives

This paper pursues two primary objectives:

1. To understand the significance of the multi-sectoral approach of IBAMA in addressing mental health concerns, and
2. To investigate the impact of IBAMA on the mental health well-being of island communities, supported by a case study



IBAMA Training of Trainers for stakeholders (2022)



IBAMA Initial training for stakeholders held at Stelco (2022)



Laamu Atoll IBAMA Initial Training (2023)

Methodology

- This study utilized a mixed method approach which includes:
 1. A review of secondary data on concept papers and policy documents
 2. Qualitative component employing thematic analysis of key informant interviews
- A comprehensive literature review examined research papers, articles, journals pertaining to multi sectoral mechanisms and their impact on mental health with ecological theory as a foundational framework.
- The inclusion criteria for the key informant interviews for the qualitative component was based on their active involvement in the initial conceptualization and implementation phases of the Community Social Groups (CSG), which evolved into the IBAMA initiative.
- Additionally, interviews were conducted with key individuals associated with a case study demonstrating the work of IBAMA in an island community.



Discussion and Results

The findings of this research underscore the importance of a community-based approach and the work carried out to establish a community-based approach in the Maldives to protect and promote the rights of the vulnerable groups in island communities.

The Commencement of a Multisectoral Approach

- According to some key informants, the project initiated back in the early 2000s, initially known as **Island Child Protection Committees (ICPC)** through a designated Childcare Coordinator (CCC) focused mainly on prevention and identifying issues, and worked on advocacy programs for school students and families.
- Having a Childcare Coordinator at island level was the first step towards bridging the gap between service provision and ensuring the rights of the vulnerable.
- This outcome was a key success, leading towards UNICEF to further invest in the mechanism, which led to the development of the concept to the initiative known as **Community Social Groups (CSG)**
- This transformation from **ICPC** to **CSG** marked a critical phase in the development of the initiative



Transition to ICPC to Community Social Groups (CSG)

- The ICPC initiative originated as a pilot project in Addu City with a primary focus on child protection, encompassing various sectors of intervention for a period of two years.
- Despite the initial obstacles, the multi-sectoral approach began to evolve, eventually incorporating Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and transitioning from Island Child Protection Committees (ICPC) to Community Support Groups (CSG).
- The CSG concept embraced a flexible approach, tailoring interventions to address the unique needs and challenges specific to each island community.
- The key informants interviewed for this research stated that although the key stakeholder agencies were beneficiaries of the CSG, the resistance from stakeholders on collaborating in the multi-sectoral approach became the major challenge to implement CSG.



Thaa Atoll Orientation Programme for CSGs (2018)



Gaafu Alif Atoll Orientation and Training Programme for CSGs (2018)

Transition to IBAMA (Ijthimaaee Badhahi Madhadhuverin)

- The successes and the lessons learnt from the CSG initiative was taken into account which came into effect during the period where relevant changes were brought to the CSG concept and formalised under the name Ijthimaaee Badhahi Madhadhuverin, IBAMA.
- IBAMA is a multi-sectoral support mechanism formed at community level for prevention and responding to Violence Against Children, and other vulnerable groups.
- IBAMA consists of government authorities with an official mandate of social protection of communities.
- IBAMA Guideline was endorsed in September 2022 (*IBAMA Usool number: 2022/G-33*)
- IBAMA members undergo IBAMA Initial Training to identify, examine, assess, and evaluate the situations of vulnerable individuals through Vulnerability Mapping, and to provide care and support by coordinating with relevant stakeholders.

Local Councils / Local Government Authority

Women's Development Committees

Social Service Sector

Education Sector

Maldives Police Service

Health Sector

Department of Juvenile Justice

- MoGFSS takes the lead in IBAMA Roll Out, formation and further monitoring at island level at present.
- Implementation of IBAMA at island level will be primarily lead by the Island Council (IBAMA Chair being the Vice President of the Council) and run in a decentralized manner.
- UNICEF, Maldives has been providing technical, financial and other assistance which has been instrumental in the implementation and successes of the initiative.
- The key informants interviewed for this research stated that IBAMA faced a range of challenges such as, frequent policy changes, ambiguities in policy interpretation, and a lack of understanding of the concept among the new individuals in influential positions from various stakeholder agencies.

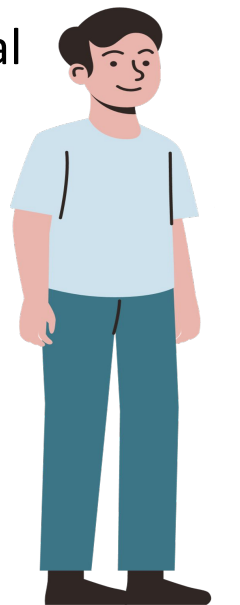
IBAMA Training of Trainers for stakeholders (2022)



Case Study

Exemplifying Success

- This successful compelling case by IBAMA involves a young adolescent who was struggling with severe mental health issues.
 - The situation came to light during the council's regular 3-monthly visit when the individual was discovered secluded in their room, with almost no physical contact with any human for a period of time displaying distressing signs of mental anguish.
 - The well-coordinated intervention by IBAMA members played a crucial role in addressing the situation;
1. IBAMA convened an urgent meeting to deliberate upon viable strategies for offering assistance to the individual.
 2. Subsequently, IBAMA facilitated the individual's transfer to Malé for immediate assistance which was provided by the healthcare professionals.
 3. Over time, through the combined efforts of healthcare professionals and IBAMA members, the individual has begun to exhibit gradual signs of improvement by removing themselves from isolation. IBAMA continues to monitor the individual with the ongoing treatments.



IBAMA and It's Implication on Mental Health

- Community values and beliefs seamlessly integrate into the prevention and response of all types of vulnerabilities in the initiative, including mental health advocacy and destigmatization efforts, contributing to long-term potential outcomes.
- Prevention of mental health issues, and advocating for good mental health is part of the IBAMA workplan in all the communities.
- With the rise in mental health rates globally, the need to address mental health challenges and the importance of focusing on the social and psychological well-being for all age groups is taken into account when planning programmes for the island communities.
- Following Vulnerability Mapping, home visits by IBAMA members offer tailored support, instilling hope and optimism regarding well-being while underscoring IBAMA's pivotal role in enhancing mental and emotional resilience.



Conclusion

- The study's findings emphasize the crucial contribution of IBAMA to both the prevention and response aspects of addressing mental health challenges in the Maldives.
- Participants of the research acknowledged the significant impact of the engagement by IBAMA that facilitated the early identification of vulnerabilities allowing for a more proactive and targeted response to issues.
- The participation of IBAMA members, who are not only individuals within the system but also representatives of various stakeholders and integral members of the community, introduces a favourable dimension.
- In many communities, the presence of IBAMA was recognized as a much-needed link between service providers and the local population.
- The collaborative approach of IBAMA Members working together in a holistic manner streamlined and reinforced the overarching objective of IBAMA, of decentralizing social services to the grassroots level.
- The findings highlight IBAMA's role as a catalyst for community-based mental health support.



- The research findings emphasize the paramount importance of IBAMA in addressing mental health challenges through its multi-sectoral approach, effectively bridging the gap between prevention and response efforts.
- It should be noted that the establishment of IBAMA in the island communities is an ongoing process, and as it evolves, the specific functions and approaches may vary based on sub-cultural differences within different island communities.
- This research investigated a single case study which may not translate to how IBAMA functions in all islands.
- Further training should be provided to IBAMA Members on capacity-building to address mental health and stigma reduction.
- The work plans of IBAMA should include community-level awareness activities to be undertaken on a regular basis to assist to remove the stigma associated with mental health.
- Implementing such proposals would strengthen IBAMA and ensure that it becomes viable and adapts to the various demands of its communities.
- Further research is warranted for the ongoing work and impacts of IBAMA with the inclusion of individuals who have received support from IBAMA initiatives.



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