



Peer Support Group Benefits for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Amman, Jordan

Program Description

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is consistently associated with a wide range of adverse mental health outcomes including PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviors, and general psychological distress. The mental health needs of refugee and other forced migrant SGBV survivors in settings such as Jordan are often intensified by post-migration stressors such as financial strain, legal insecurity, and isolation. Despite the need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), barriers often limit access, including lack of information, financial considerations, and language and cultural mismatches with available service offerings (Sawadogo et al., 2023). Peer support groups for survivors of SGBV appear to be a promising intervention addressing mental health outcomes, while overcoming some access barriers (Block et al., 2019; Khazai et al., 2025).

In 2022, the Center for Victims of Torture piloted peer support groups for survivors of SGBV in Amman, Jordan. 758 individuals from refugee and host communities enrolled in peer support groups through December 2024. Each group comprised of 6 to 7 sessions and session topics were identified by participants to reflect their interests and experiences (e.g., the effects of early marriage, self-care). The groups aimed to improve participants' mental and physical health, strengthen community support, and build resilience. Groups were facilitated by trained peers in Arabic. Peer facilitators drew on their own experiences of recovery to guide group conversations and support participants.

Evidence Collected

Qualitative data was collected to understand participant, peer facilitator, and trainer experiences of the SGBV peer support groups. One focus group discussion and six individual interviews were conducted with group participants (n=12). Participants were purposely sampled by nationality and attendance patterns (>4 sessions and ≤4 sessions). All peer facilitators (volunteers) (n=3) and trainers (n=3) also participated in individual interviews. Semi-structured interview guides were utilized to address key questions including factors influencing group attendance and perceived impact of the peer group on participants' mental and physical health, social connection and support, and coping skills.

Interpretation of Evidence

Key Finding #1: Participant well-being improved as a result of the peer support group.

Group participants highlighted feeling greater optimism, strength, and determination after the peer support group. The majority reported using tools they learned in the group to support their mental health. Improvement in physical health was reported by two participants. Peer facilitators and trainers also highlighted perceived client improvement in mental health.

“

The workshop gave me the strength of patience and perseverance. Today may not be good, but tomorrow may be better. We should not put pressure on ourselves or underestimate what can happen. - Client

”

“

When I feel distressed, I like to close my eyes, sit on the couch, and practice the same exercises we learned. These exercises help me forget and relax, and this has had a positive effect on my mental state. - Client

”

“

I felt a significant improvement in my morale. I used to cry a lot in the past, but the sessions helped me feel better and more optimistic. - Client

”

Key Finding #2: Participants learned coping skills and self-care strategies to manage difficult situations.

Coping Skills | Clients described a variety of techniques they learned and used to cope with difficult situations including going for walks, breathing and muscle relaxation exercises, and listening to the Quran or music.



After the workshops I became more capable of dealing with difficult situations....like dealing with my father's illness, I learned to face matters with patience, look for flexible solutions, and sometimes go to sleep and wake up the next day to see the problem from another angle. - Client



Self Care | Clients shared being more attentive to self-care and engaging in related activities. Examples included taking time for oneself, focusing on own dreams, purchasing new beauty items or clothes, and exercise.



I have become more attentive to my personal happiness. Now, when I do something for myself, like drinking coffee or something I love, I feel happy. I need to give myself these moments away from my responsibilities as a mother. - Client



Key Finding #3: Groups created or improved a sense of hope among participants.

Clients, facilitators, and trainers all reported that hearing from others with similar life experiences gave group members hope and strength.



When I hear from others and share their experiences, it certainly gives me hope. It gives me hope and strength. Hope and strength are what I have gained from these workshops. - Client



The women supported each other and shared their experiences, which strengthened their sense of power, courage, security, and patience. - Facilitator



The presence of successful women in the community, who have overcome experiences of violence and become active in the community, had a great impact on the women in the group. - Trainer



Key Finding #4: Increased social connection and sense of community results were mixed for participants.

Two-thirds of client participants shared that they have stronger relationships following the peer support group. Others shared that they do not have strong social relationships generally and did not find that the group helped them in this regard, despite making efforts to communicate with group members.



After the workshops, I became more open to others and started meeting with my friends more regularly. I now have a group of friends that I meet with regularly. This change has helped me feel more connected and secure. - Client



Conclusion

Results from this pilot suggest that peer support groups may enhance emotional wellbeing and strengthen peer relationships for women survivors of SGBV.

Statement about Interpreting Evidence

While results are promising, without quantitative data or a control comparison group it is difficult to determine the role the peer support group services played in improving observed changes relative to other factors. Additionally, analysis is based on a non random and potentially non representative subsample of program participants and staff. Results are focused on self-reported data, which may be influenced by recall or social desirability bias.

References

- 1.Sawadogo, P. M., Sia, D., Onadja, Y., Beogo, I., Sangli, G., Sawadogo, N., ... & Tchouaket Nguemeleu, E. (2023). Barriers and facilitators of access to sexual and reproductive health services among migrant, internally displaced, asylum seeking and refugee women: A scoping review. *PLoS One*, 18(9), e0291486.
2. Block, K., Nasr, H., Vaughan, C., & Alsaraf, S. (2019). What responses, approaches to treatment, and other supports are effective in assisting refugees who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence. Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRIS), University of Birmingham.
3. Khazai, Z., Muntinga, M., & Verdonk, P. (2025). 'First you are a victim, then a survivor and finally, a warrior': Perceptions of refugee women on sexual and gender based violence in the Netherlands. *Global Public Health*, 20(1), 2574000. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17441692.2025.2574000>

Suggested citation:

Lawrence, S. and Eleimat, I. (2026). "Peer Support Group Benefits for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Amman, Jordan." CVT Evidence Brief, January 2026.

For questions, contact: CVT's Research Director, ResearchDirector@CVT.org