The Strong Families Programme was developed and piloted in Afghanistan thanks to the generous support of the US-INL. To date, this programme has further been piloted in Central America, Central, West, South and South-East Asia, East, West and South Africa and South-East Europe thanks to the support of Japan, Sweden, France and the US-INL.

Structure of the strong families programme

HOW does it work?

**Program components**

**Caregiver sessions**
- Goal: Normalise and manage stress, improve parenting confidence and skills to deal with stress
- decrease risk factors: favorable attitudes towards coercive parenting strategies, poor family management skills, high levels of stress, environment favoring early initiation of drug use and of conflict and violence
- Increase protective factors: improved family interaction, enhanced relationships, non-violent discipline, prosocial involvement, caregiver social support

**Child sessions**
- Goal: Improve mental health outcomes; Better deal with stress; Reduce challenging behavior
- Improved caregiver confidence in family management skills
- Improved child behavior
- Reduced aggressive and hostile behaviors
- Improved mental health outcomes in children and parents

**Family sessions**
- Goal: Improved communication and relationships; Decreased coercive parenting
- Improved mental health for caregivers and children
- Reduction in violence
- Reduction in substance abuse
- Reduction in risky behaviors

**Program process to address underlying causes**

**Long term impact**

**Short term participant and family impact**

**Contact us**

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#SDG3 #SDG4 #SDG5 #SDG16
Value of family skills programmes

Families living in challenged settings

Globally, many families live in challenged settings, facing significant difficulties on their everyday lives. Challenges can be living in rural or underserved areas with inadequate access to safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity on schools, high unemployment etc. Other challenges include a history of invasion and war that leaves families internally dis- placed, migrating, living in refugee camps or in conflict/post-conflict situations. Proper parent skills in these circumstances are even more crucial and specific family skills need to be prioritized.

While Strong Families was originally designed and piloted in Afghanistan, it has evolved to a global version that can be applied (and is piloted) on families in challenged settings in many other countries. Preliminary data on its initial stages of implementation in Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee reception centers in Serbia showed significant changes on measures such as emotional or conflict problems and improved functional parenting, such as parental consistency or positive en-couragement for example. These findings reflect the previously demonstrated positive impact of the programme on the improved caregiver confidence in family manage- ment skills, improving caregiver in parents, increased capacity to cope with stress, improved child behaviour, reduced aggressive and hostile behaviour and hence improved mental health outcomes in children and parents overall. The Strong Families programme showed significant impact on both, girls and boys and their respective caregivers.

Purpose, goals & philosophy of the Strong Families Programme

The Strong Families Programme (SF) is a family skills pro- gramme for challenged settings. SF offers an evidence-informed prevention response building family skills that are effective in preventing a wide range of social and health problems, including drug use, violence and other negative social consequences in families with special needs. The programme was developed by UNODC and its intervention is based on a strong evidence base and is universal in low resource settings:

1. SF helps caregivers and children, living in such settings, to deal with difficulties and daily stresses and challenges. A major focus is to line time and financial constraints on the fam- ily structure and function to help as such families prevent drug use, violence and other negative social consequences in their children. It is a universal within this selective subgroup of families, who are selected for families with children aged between 8 and 15 years.

2. The programme requires an infrastructure that is easy to mobilise and train. The nominated facilitators of the materials do not need to have specific technical skills and can be trained in 2 days by certified trainers. This makes it easier to be integrat- ed within the wider set of other needs in the community. Facili-ator's manual was designed to be easy to follow to ensure fidelity of implementation with minimal technical support.

3. The programme, unlike many other family skills pro- grammes in high-income countries, is free of any charge or cost to families, and does not require any specific material such as DVDs, DVD players, projectors, etc. It does not require any time-consuming equipment.

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5. SF offers ways to make caring for children easier and more effective.

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Philosophy of Strong Families

1. All families have strengths and skills.
2. Even in difficult times caregivers do the best they can to love and care for their children.
3. Families are made stronger by sharing their challenges and finding ways to deal with them.
4. The challenges families have faced often makes them stronger and give them more resilience and wisdom.
5. The programme offers ways to make caring for children easier and more effective.
6. Each family knows what is most likely to work in their situation.
7. Families have specific strengths and skills.
8. Every family is made stronger by sharing their challenges and finding ways to deal with them.
9. The challenges families have faced often makes them stronger and give them more resilience and wisdom.
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Preliminary results

While Strong Families was originally designed and piloted in Afghanistan, it has evolved to a global version that can be applied (and is piloted) on families in challenged settings in many other countries. Preliminary data on its initial stages of implementation in Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee reception centers in Serbia showed significant changes on measures such as emotional or conflict problems and improved functional parenting, such as parental consistency or positive encouragement for example. These findings reflect the previously demonstrated positive impact of the programme on the improved caregiver confidence in family management skills, improving caregiver in parenting, increased capacity to cope with stress, improved child behaviour, reduced aggressive and hostile behaviour and hence improved mental health outcomes in children and parents overall. The Strong Families programme showed significant impact on both, girls and boys and their respective caregivers.

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Figure: Amongst children with high or very high (17) total difficulty scores of the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) at baseline, as assessed by the caregivers in pilot studies in 3 cities in Afghanistan (n=41 out of 72 families overall) and in Afghans in 3 refugee reception centers in Serbia (n=9/21 families) in 2018 a significant decline in the scores was found before and after the Strong Families programme, which even declined further after 6 weeks