The social tissue of youth mental health in Colombia: developing a community level mapping tool

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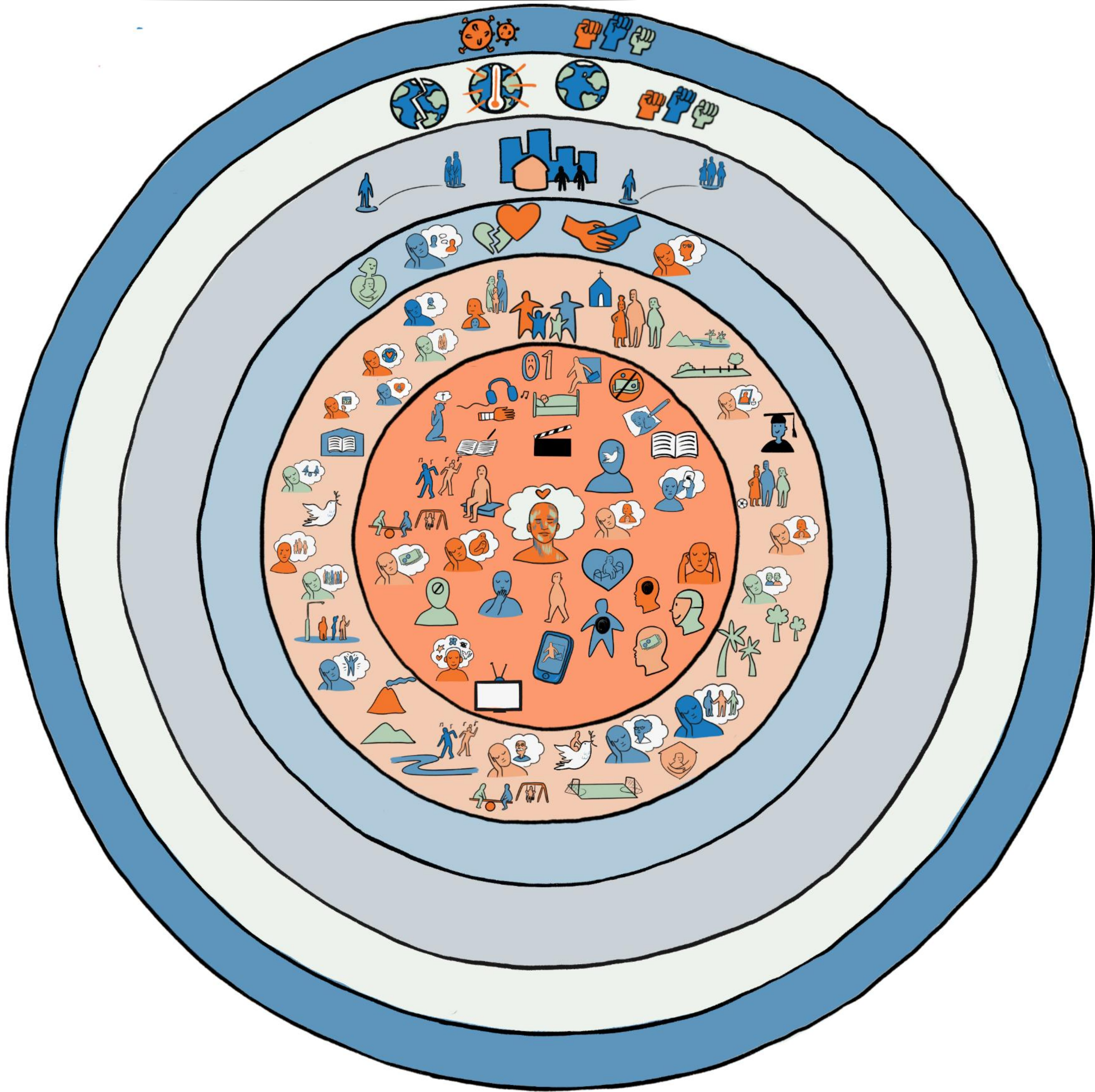
Rationale

Colombia's long running internal conflict has led to large numbers of internally displaced persons. Violence has significantly impacted the population's mental health including children and young people[1] Colombia's Pacific region has experienced particularly high levels of violence, being home to many displaced afro-Colombian and indigenous young people. Building on research undertaken in Colombia (2020-2024) [2,3], this poster showcases the development of a tool created using participatory methods to map the social tissue of mental health for children and young people.

Objective

We were asked by our research participants to:
1. Democratize the research process
2. Give communities a tool they could use locally to understand children and young people's mental health needs and identify supports or deficits in the social tissue of mental health

We used ecological systems theory to help us meet this challenge.

Methods

A three-stage process took place:

1) Participatory workshops in a case study site in Colombia's Pacific region where we collected empirical data (77 individual children's maps) to inform tool development;
2) 3 focus groups with a total of 94 participants with children and young people who helped test and refine the tool;
3) Finally, the tool itself with guidance about how to run an activity to use it and an instruction guide about how to read the maps were created and tested with local communities in Colombia's Pacific region.

Conclusion

The tool was developed to understand relative need and, as a way for children and young people to voice their needs into policy and practice. It contributed to understand participants' lived experiences in relation to mental health. Such tools are vital when working to identify local need and plan services in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

Results

The work enabled an in-depth understanding of the social tissue of mental health for children and young people affected by conflict. Responding to requests by community organisations to democratise our research, we worked with communities to develop a tool to understand the social tissue of young people's mental health in a relative and contextual way, creating an individual map of their experiences. To our knowledge this is the first attempt to analyse relative rather than individual mental health need and contextual support , providing a local resource for communities to plan and seek funding where possible to effectively support young people.

For more information and to see our project videos and resources as well as academic publications see our website: https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/projects/mapping-mental-health-resources-for-young-people
Or get there using this QR code:

REFERENCES: 1. Comisión de la Verdad. No Hay Futuro si No Hay Verdad: Informe Final. Bogotá: Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad la Convivencia y la No Repetición; 2022; 2. Fenton, SJ., Gutiérrez, J.R.R., Pinilla-Roncancio, M. et al. Macro level system mapping of the provision of mental health services to young people living in a conflict context in Colombia. BMC Health Serv Res 24, 138 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10602-2; 3. Weber, S., Carranza, F., Rengifo, J.R. et al. Mapping mental health care services for children and youth population in Colombia's Pacific: potential for boundary spanning between community and formal services. Int J Ment Health Syst 18, 9 (2024).

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