

## **Cultural adaptation of a digital intervention for mental health promotion in Southeast Asia within the MentalHigh project**

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### **Research aim**

This study aims to describe the process of cultural adaptation of a digital intervention developed and tested in Spain (Smiling is Fun) for promoting mental health in higher education institutions in Vietnam and Cambodia within the Erasmus + Capacity Building project MentalHigh: <https://mentalhigh.net/>

### **Setting**

Higher education setting: Seven universities (five from Vietnam and two from Cambodia) participated in the cultural adaptation. Representatives from each university (managers, faculty) were nominated to participate in the process. A student board with students from the different universities participated too.

### **Method(s)**

MentalHigh adopts a culturally adapted psychotherapy approach defined as a systematic change of an intervention where consideration of culture and context modifies the intervention in accordance with the individuals' values, contexts, and cultural relevance. Following the work by Derek Richards, we integrate several approaches: cultural sensitivity framework (CSF), cross cultural principles from Helms (2015) and ecological validity framework (EVF). Representatives had access to the program and measured the cultural sensitivity with interviews and focus group and the ecological validity using the Cultural Relevance Questionnaire (CRQ). The student board validated the changes proposed in the program.

### **Key finding(s)**

Adapting an intervention for students in Vietnam and Cambodia required careful consideration of cultural factors and the specific needs of the students. Most of the changes included using culturally appropriate examples that are culturally sensitive to the values, beliefs and norms of Vietnam and Cambodia. Also, including characters addressing issues that are common for students in these countries (economic, academic and family pressure; difficulties with peers; etc.). In addition, in terms of psychological content, an effort was made to simplify technical language and make the exercises easier so that students can practice in each of the program modules.

### **Discussion**

- How do we implement mental health promotion in different contexts beyond high-income countries?
- How can we sustain mental health promotion programs in lower-income countries?

### **Challenges**

One of the main challenges was the effort to convert the audiovisual material (videos and illustrations) because it entailed changing the characters and examples. Another challenge was the translation into Vietnamese and Khmer. Working groups within the consortium were formed to conduct those tasks.

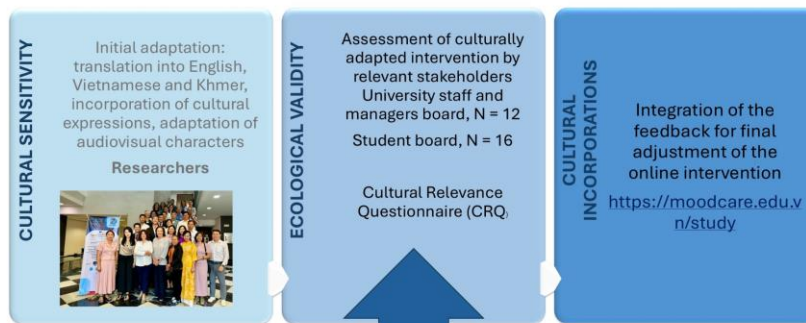
From Smiling is fun to MoodCare. An online program for mental health promotion developed and tested in Europe was culturally adapted for university students in Vietnam and Cambodia within the Erasmus + Capacity Building project MentalHigh: <https://mentalhigh.net/>



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MentalHigh adopts a culturally adapted psychotherapy (CAP) approach defined as a systematic change of an intervention protocol where consideration of culture and context modifies the intervention in accordance with the individuals' values, contexts, and cultural relevance. Following the work initiated in this domain by Derek Richards's team in Ireland (i.e., Salamanca et al., 2019), we integrate several theoretical approaches, named the cultural sensitivity framework (CSF), cross cultural principles from Helms (2015) and the ecological validity framework (EVF).



**Functional equivalence:** the extent to which the same ostensible behaviours (e.g., crying) are interpreted similarly in different cultural or racial groups, occur with equal frequency within these groups, and elicit similar reactions from other members of the groups.

**Conceptual equivalence:** refers to the extent to which different concepts are analogous for the cultural group that is targeted for the treatment (e.g., symbols, metaphors and concepts).

**Linguistic equivalence:** indicates the language or dialect used during the process and in evaluations of the process and outcome have been adjusted so that it has meaning to the person(s) being assessed (e.g. regionalism, slang).



### Conclusion and challenges

Adapting an online psychological intervention program for students in Vietnam and Cambodia required careful consideration of cultural factors and the specific needs of the students.

Most of the changes:

- culturally appropriate examples that are culturally sensitive to the values, beliefs and norms of Vietnam and Cambodia.
- including characters/examples addressing issues that are common for students in these countries (economic, academic and family pressure; difficulties with peers; etc.).
- In terms of psychological content, an effort was made to simplify technical language and make the exercises easier so that students can practice in each of the modules.

