

# A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF FORCES IMPACTING MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING OF CONFLICT-INDUCED DISPLACED PERSONS IN HONG KONG

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## Presentation Overview

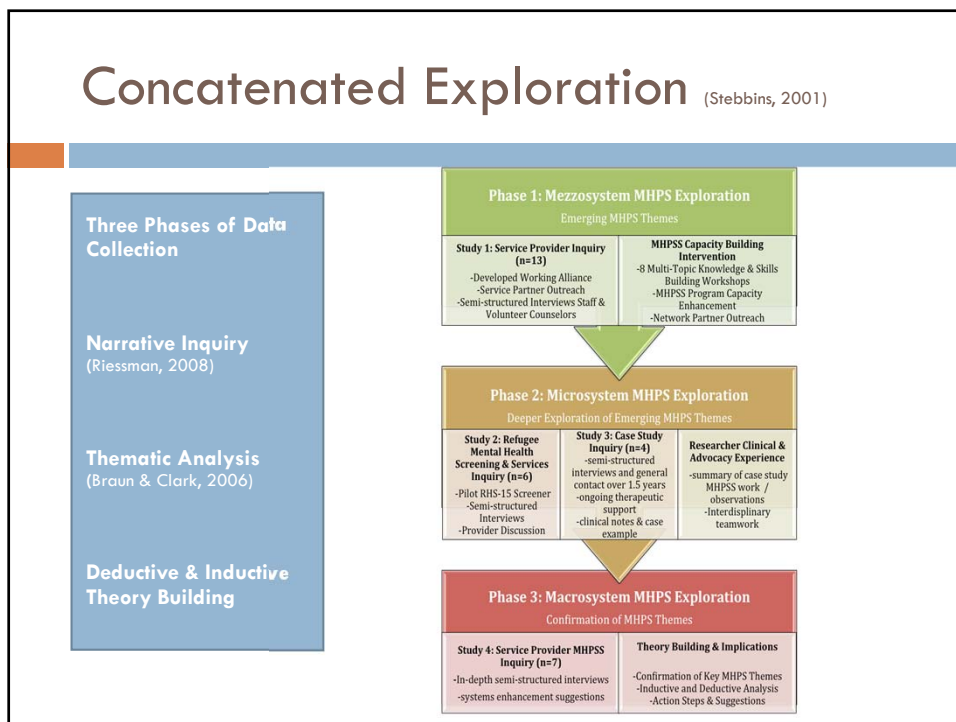
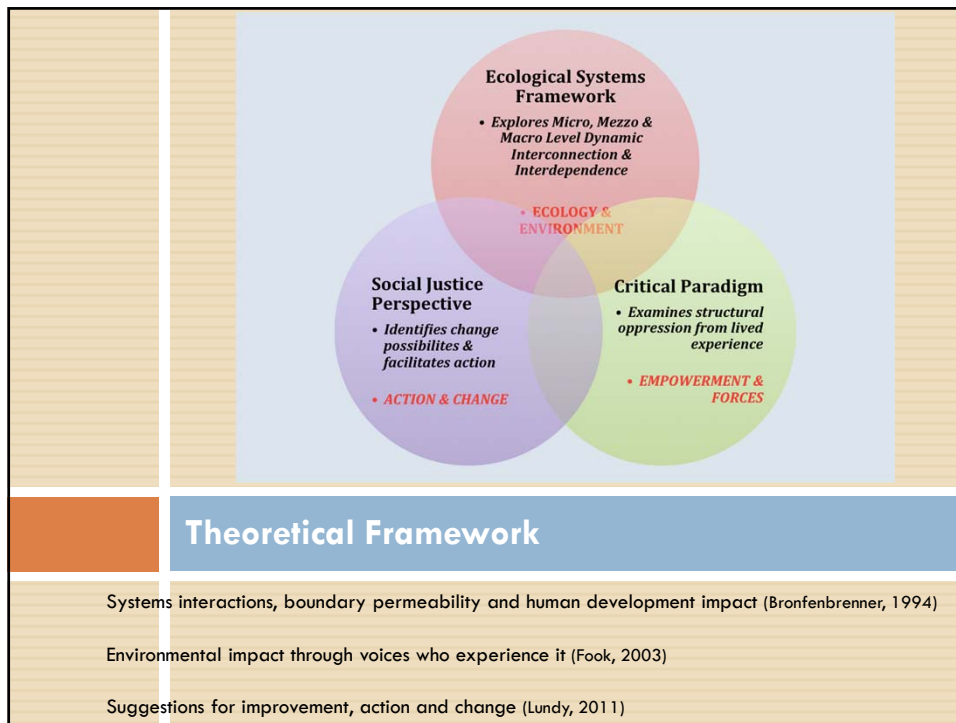
- Introduction & Background
- Lived Experience & Health Impact
- Empathic Failure & Growth

## Defining Key Terms

- **Conflict-Induced Displacement**
- **Fleeing** from civil war; generalized violence; and persecution on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, political opinion or social group; and **where the state authorities are unable or unwilling to protect** (FMO, 2012)
- **Mental Health**
- State of individual well-being realizing abilities, **can cope with the normal life stresses, can work productively** and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2004)
- **Psychosocial**
- **Environment influences on individual** level matters (UNHCR, 2013a)
- **Trauma**
- Single/series of events or circumstances; Physically or emotionally harmful or threatening; **Lasting adverse effects** on physical, social, emotional, or spiritual functioning and well-being

## Hong Kong Situational Context

- Transitional Displacement Setting
- 10,000 + persons seeking non-refoulement protection
  - (60 M global)
- Extremely Low Protection Recognition Rate
  - Recent Unified Screening Mechanism
- Traumatic Uncertainty:
  - Living with protection uncertainty and refoulement fears within enforced dependency without livelihood options
- Hong Kong deterrence notable after Vietnamese Boat People Era



## Pre Flight Trauma

### Significant Trauma

“There are people who suffered significant traumas; some who have been tortured and threatened with death; some experiencing periods of imprisonment by secret police. The trauma is almost indescribable over time. How they survived and remained reasonably in tact is a miracle in itself.”

### Torture

“They beat me with an [instrument]. They do it this way because it does not leave a mark. Then do a different thing on my feet...”

### Key Findings

- Violence, Torture, Cruel Punishment
- Multiple Losses
- Violent Death of Loved One
- Disappearance of Family
- Little or No Prior Healthcare
  
- Torture & Violence Injuries
- Disease & Nutritional Deficiency
- PTSD, Complicated Grief, Insomnia, Depression, Anxiety, Anger, Severe Refoulement Fears, Humiliation

## Enforced Dependency & Livelihood

### Humiliation

“I feel unhappy begging to people for help. I have hands, feet given by God. I feel uncomfortable asking for everything like house rent. [If] I have a job, then we can [pay]. I’m hoping, because I have experience, I work...the people don’t know how we are suffering in Hong Kong.”

### Retraumatization

“He suggested I close my case and go back to my country; that I did not have a chance. After he left, my head was spinning and the room was getting smaller. I [stumbled] outside and then fell down. When I woke up, I was in the hospital...my neighbor saw me and called the landlord [for help].”

### Dehumanization

“They come here and experienced dehumanization and revictimization in many ways. Through the interviews and having no work. The torture was one thing, but not being able to work and provide for your family and watching your kids starve, it’s almost worse...”

## Healthcare

### Lack of Comprehensive Care & Information Sharing

"I had bad pain and they gave me an antibiotic and Panadol and sent me home. Two days later, I was admitted with severe pain. The same doctor do a scan and need surgery now. He never gave me my medical report."

### Positive Empathic Care

"This hospital is very good for me. They do scan and everything. They ask 'how are you, are you okay?' I tell them my situation and talk about my family. They want to know, 'Your living okay, you sleeping well? They are asking about everything."

### No Healthcare Directive

"An area that is totally being ignored at the moment is ongoing healthcare and management of their healthcare needs. Currently no attention is paid to it. They are given the so-called A&E access; then that's it."

## Protection & Legal

### Documentation & Evaluations

"So having these evaluations is critical. It offers a level of expertise that I can't provide as someone who is arguing the case. It provides proof and credibility particularly by someone with a degree in psychology, social work, medicine or just an expert."

### Protection Attitude

"It is critical for decision makers who are trained and who are wishing to protect those who they need to protect. Regardless of procedures, if you desire to protect those who need protection- they will be protected."

### Lack of Trauma Awareness

"So many times I have seen an initial screener ask questions and just jot down whatever; then incorrectly used later without interpreter or understanding, or to impeach the client. The training needs to start at the very initial level and within the culture of the protection system."

"There was a lack of understanding, a lack of cultural competency, and a lack of education and expertise and training on all levels. There was maybe one adjudicator who seemed to understand that trauma could affect memory."

## Strengths & Coping

**Body:** "Nature is beautiful. I go hiking and then my mind very very clear. Fresh air, nobody there, not talking, keep quiet, go...My body is also very fresh-going and coming and going."

**Mind:** "Writing helps to keep the pressure down, because I don't keep here in my mind. This, I write down; this is my life. If I cannot write down, then my head is already full."

**Spirit:** "I'm so thankful, I know there is nothing in vain, there is a plan. I'm not going to stay in this situation forever. So accept what is it. Be thankful, grateful and hope. This is my mantra."



## Humanitarian & Faith Based

### Empathy

"Listening and talking to them about whatever. I love to know more about background. Learning reasons why they fled and give advice are important aspects."

### Vicarious Trauma

"I let it out for a while, then its okay. If I am broken, then I can't help them. I am seeing someone for counseling."

### Faith & Hope

"The hope factor is reinforced with faith. Faith, hope and trust, they are the key areas, but love is crucial to the whole of that. So if it wasn't embraced in love, it's pointless."

# Mental Health Services

## Not Prioritized & Needs Attention

“So there’s a lack of understanding that [MHPSS] is actually going to relate to everything else. Also [there is] a lack of understanding amongst legal providers that it is critical to the case.”

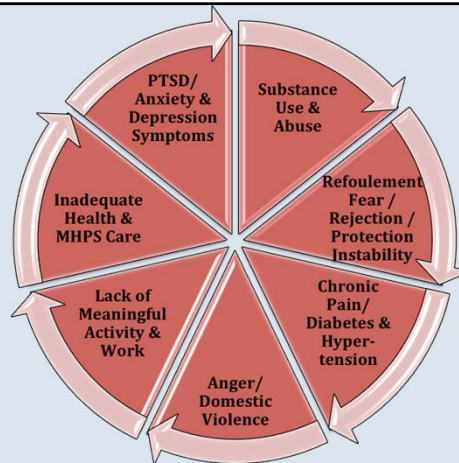
“You have everybody else trying to provide material support, but we also need to emphasize the mental health part of it. There needs to be a provision- like for accommodation. We need to identify it as an issue that needs special attention and focus.”

## Improving Services

- Understand the Community
- Map Services & Resources
- Increase Awareness, Outreach & Competency
- Build Provider Knowledge
- Increase Local Providers

## Multi-disciplinary Partnerships

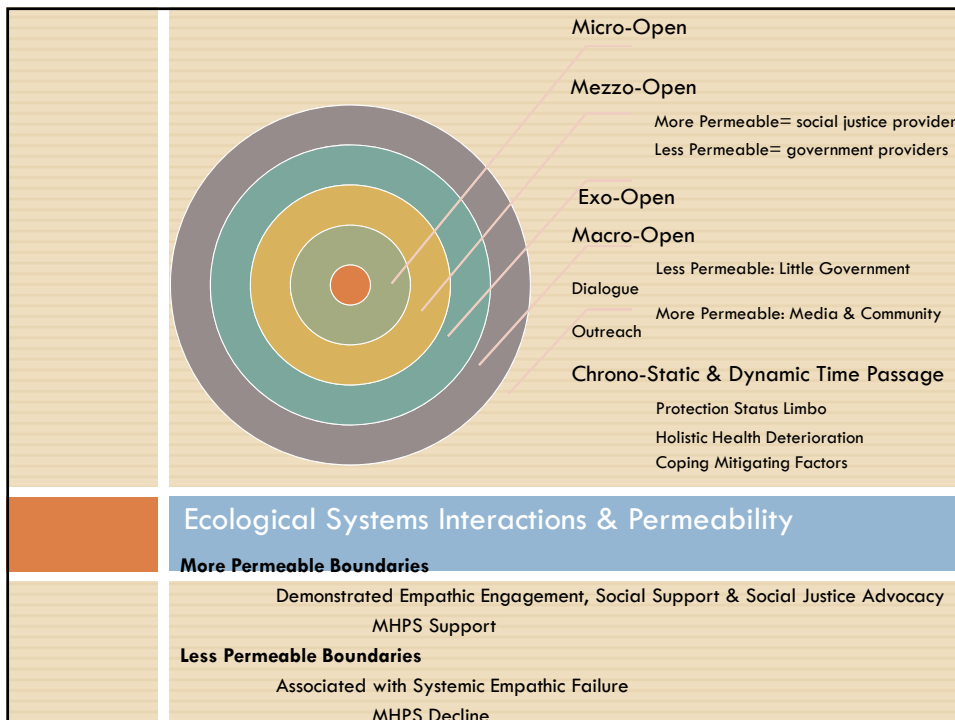
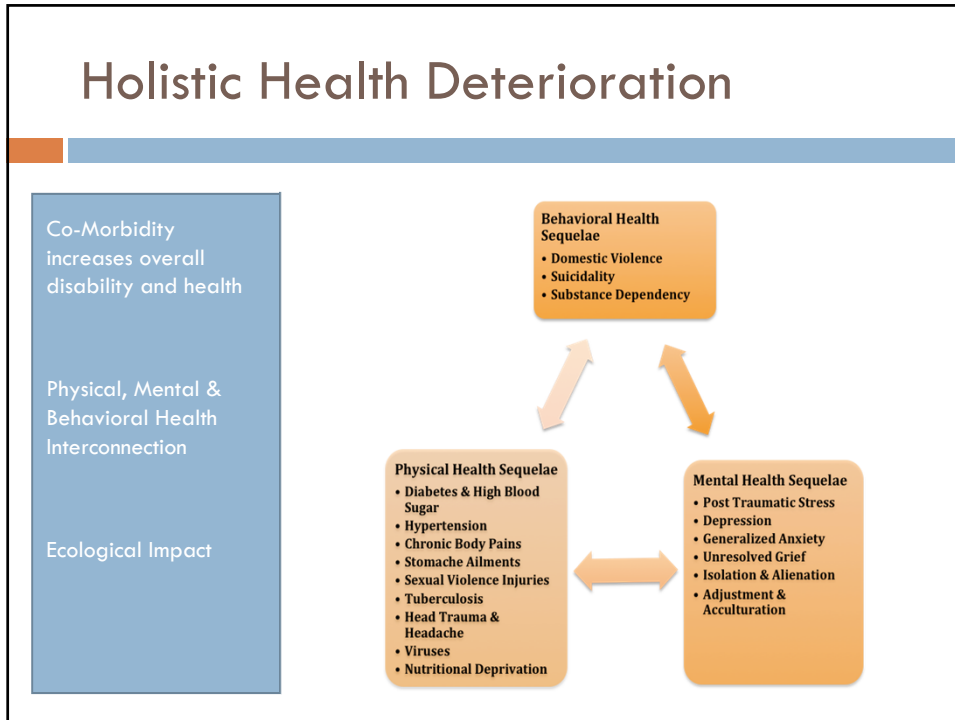
“I feel very good at that time, the team do very good for me, all everybody. I will remember this always.”



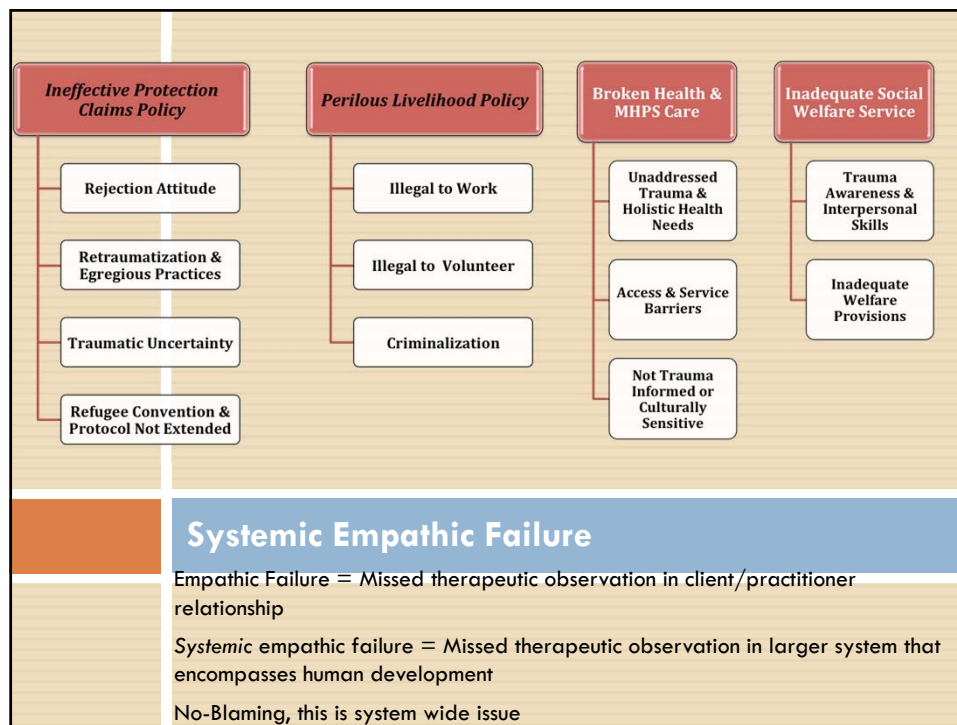
## Cycle of Ecological Holistic Health Deterioration

“I like working hard very much. I don’t like to sit down I like to sweat. Before this job, my friends and I drinking many bottles a day; now, just little. I like doing something. My life is no good in Hong Kong last eight years. No working- just sleeping, eating and drinking; eight years-no good.”

# Holistic Health Deterioration







In order to prevent violence and heal from its damage, an *empathic transformation* must occur within daily human relationships within the various institutions of the ecological system as well as in public policy

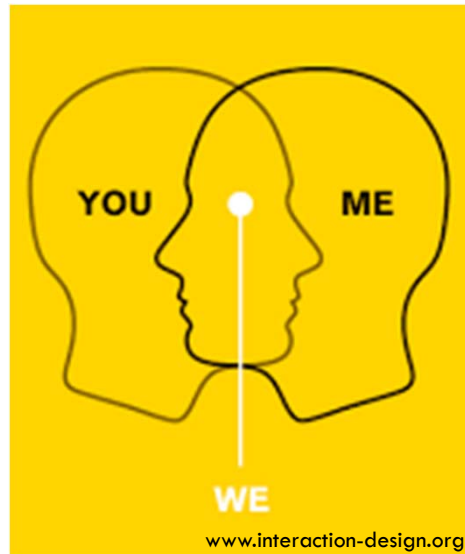
Fear is often behind empathic failure as human beings objectify others into an enemy that is in need of being contained and even eliminated.

-Dr. Richard Mollica

## The Role of Empathy

“Empathy underlies virtually everything that makes society work-like trust, altruism, collaboration, love, charity. Failure to empathize is a key part of most social problems-crime, violence, war, racism, child abuse, and inequity, to make just a few” (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010).

- look beyond ourselves
- understand the others' perspectives & actions
- can guide our own actions (Zakaras & Flowers, 2013)
- passive reflection of another
- active effort to get inside another (Gerdes & Segal, 2009, p. 116)

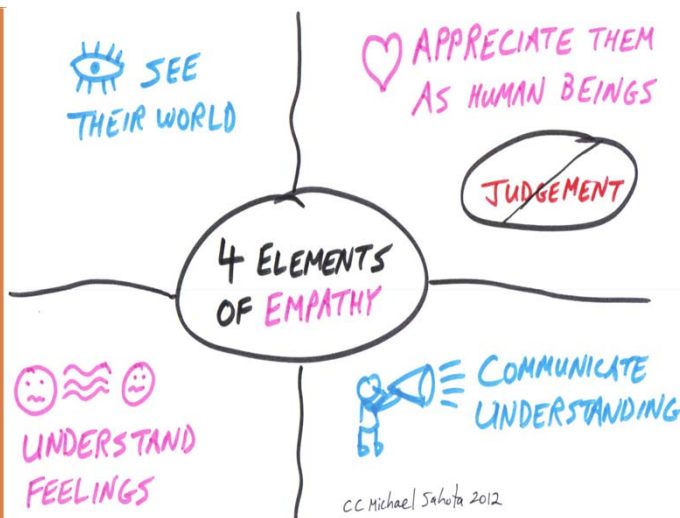


## Social Work Empathy Model (Gerdes & Segal 2009)

Affective (feeling and mirroring, appreciating someone's struggle)

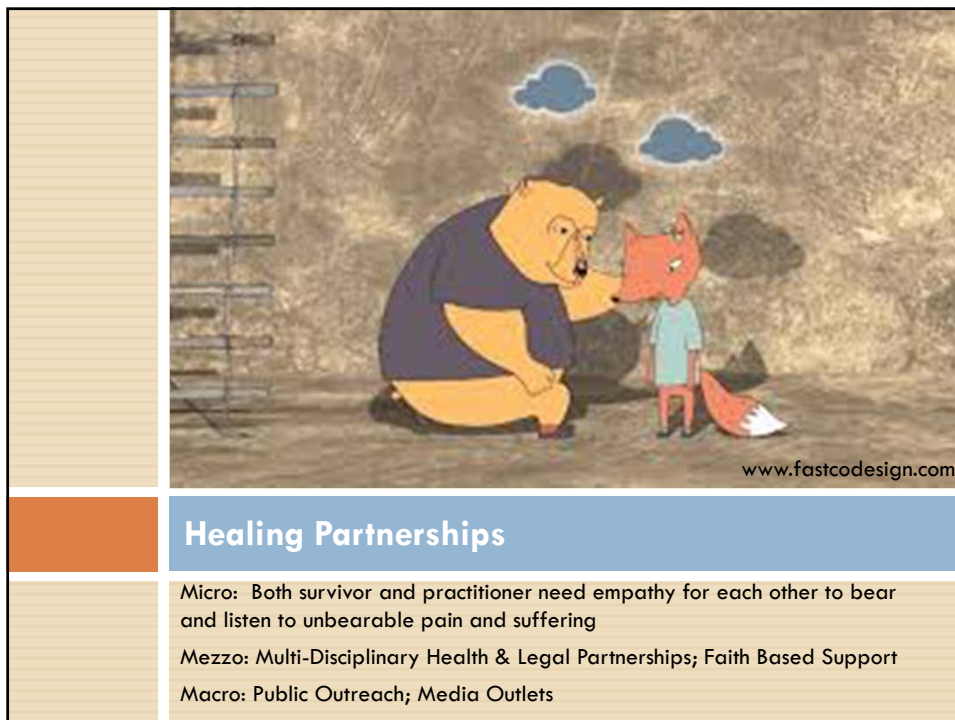
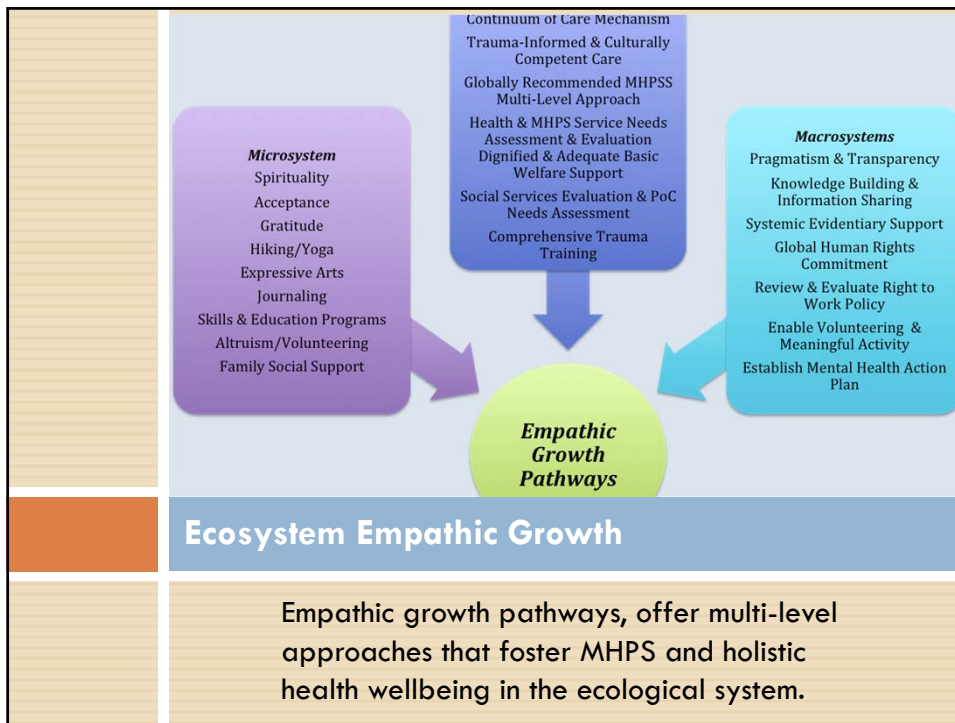
Cognitive (understanding self / others; increased interaction, getting to know someone; recognizing trauma signs)

Conscious Decision Making (active component for responsible action, care and social justice; showing you are concerned)



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### Empathic Sharing Spaces

Micro: Self- Empathy, Active Learning, Understanding Viewpoint; Needs Assessments  
 Mezzo: Increased Dialogue with HKSAR Providers;  
 Macro: Increase Public & Policymaker Dialogue/ Education; Media Spaces  
 Alter Misconceptions & Reduce Discrimination

courtesy understanding  
 humanity literature  
 decency students kindness  
 learn teach  
 tolerance  
**empathy**  
 equity  
 graciousness  
 unselfishness **compassion**

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### Trauma-Informed Care & Practice

Organizational structure and treatment framework understanding recognizing, & responding to all types of life trauma

Holistic and Integrative Health Services  
 Baseline Health Documentation for Continuum of Care and Protection  
 University/NGO partnerships

**Specialized Services**

- Individual & Group Counseling/ Trauma Therapy
- Torture Rehabilitation
  - Medication
- Behavior Health & Crisis Intervention
- Residential Care

**Focused Non Specialized Support**

- Therapeutic and Wellness Activities
- Body-Mind-Spirit Coping Promotion
- Targeted Support Groups
- Psychoeducation Workshops
- Stress Reduction & Mind-Body Therapies

**Strengthening Community & Family Support**

- Skills Building & Education Programs
- Recreational & Sports Programs
- Men's Women's & Children's Programs
- Community-Initiated Groups
- Collectives, Arts & Crafts Inspired
- Altruism-Giving Back & Volunteering in Local Context

**Basic Services & Security**

- Humane Social Welfare Provisions
- Trauma Informed Protection Claims & Legal Service
- Integrated Health & MHPSS Evaluation & Care
- Humanitarian Case Support
- Spiritual & Faith Based Support

**Adopt a MHPSS Framework**

- Not everyone needs same level of care
- Dignified Basic Services & Security
- Strengthen social support
- Wellness services & Specialized Care

**Legal Pragmatism**

- Fair, Empowering, Multi-Disciplinary Process & Different Worldviews Welcomed & Encouraged
- IP Evaluations
- Increased Transparency, Dialogue, Timelines Reduce Traumatic Uncertainty

	
	<b>Livelihood</b>
	<p>Review Right to Work Policy: Contribution towards self efficacy; reduced host costs; does not take host jobs; decreased social welfare dependence</p> <p>Initiate Altruism: Legal Volunteering ensuring meaningful and purposeful time; People want to give back, it's good for everyone</p>

	 <p><a href="http://empathybeginswithme.com">empathybeginswithme.com</a></p>
	<b>Thank you for your kind attention!</b>