

## MAXIMIZING IMPACT THROUGH AN INTEGRATED MENTAL HEALTH AND PARENTING INTERVENTION



Evidence shows that caregiver mental health is a major driver of parenting behaviour and child well-being, particularly in high-adversity settings where families are exposed to trauma and daily stressors. This project aimed to co-develop and test an intervention to simultaneously address caregiver mental health and parenting outcomes among displaced communities on the Thailand-Myanmar border.

### Parenting on the Border | A trauma-informed parenting and mental health intervention

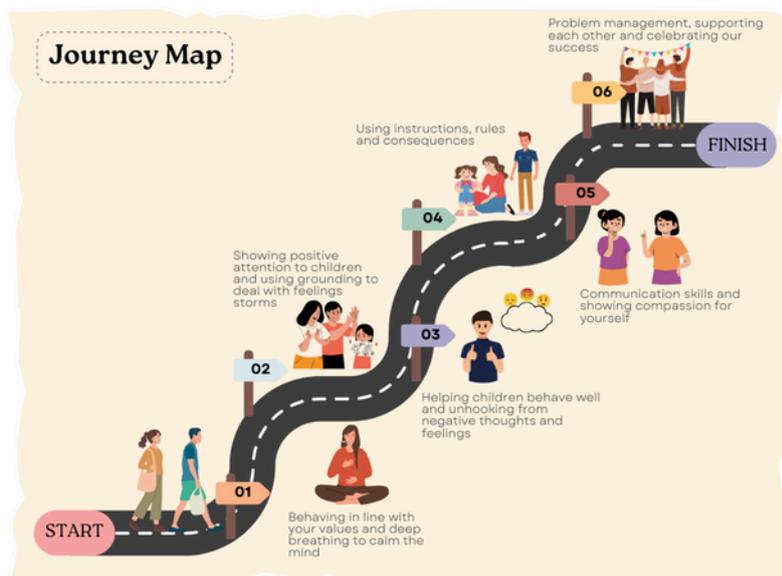


*Parenting on the Border* is a 6-session group caregiver intervention integrating evidence-based and culturally responsive parenting and mental health skills. This brief reports new results from a randomized controlled trial of the *Parenting on the Border* intervention (n=477 caregivers). **Use of physical and psychological violence decreased by 52% and 31% respectively** among caregivers receiving the intervention. Caregivers in the intervention group also reported **greater improvements in positive parenting, engagement in early learning, family functioning, caregiver psychological distress, post-traumatic stress, and psychosocial well-being** compared to the control group.

#### High adversity context increasing risk of poor mental health and violence against children.

-  81% of caregivers had no legal status in Thailand
-  70% did not have enough food for their family in the last 30 days
-  46% had experienced war or political violence
-  51% reported clinical levels of psychological distress
-  69% reported using physical violence to discipline their child in the last 30 days

*Parenting on the Border* integrates skills from evidence-based interventions such as Parenting for Lifelong Health and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Every session combines psycho-education and skills-building on parenting and mental health, equipping caregivers with practical tools to manage difficult emotions and use positive parenting, communication, and problem-solving techniques during stressful situations. *Parenting on the Border* leverages multimedia content from *Being Family* - an evidence-based film intervention shown to improve parenting and family outcomes [1] - to enhance caregiver engagement and learning. The intervention is delivered by community-based non-specialist facilitators, promoting local capacity strengthening, sustainability, and scale-up.



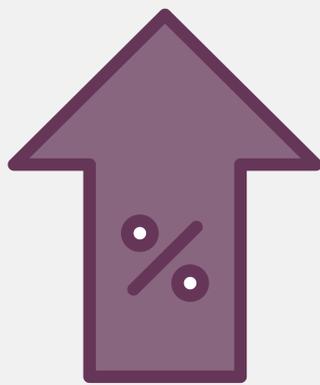
[1] Sim, A., Lwin, K. Z., Eagling-Peche, S., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Vyas, S., Calderon, F., ... & Puffer, E. (2025). Effectiveness of a universal film intervention in reducing violence against children and increasing positive parenting among migrant and displaced caregivers from Myanmar: a community-based cluster randomised trial. *The Lancet Regional Health-Southeast Asia*, 33. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lansea/article/PIIS2772-3682\(24\)00176-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lansea/article/PIIS2772-3682(24)00176-8/fulltext).

[2] Sim, A., Puffer, E., et al. (2025). Parenting on the Border: Study protocol for a randomized controlled trial of a trauma-informed, edutainment-enhanced intervention to improve parenting and mental health among migrant and displaced caregivers in Thailand. *SSM-Mental Health*, 100516. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666560325001288>

# Evaluation Results

We conducted a randomized controlled trial with 477 caregivers, randomly assigning half to receive the *Parenting on the Border* intervention and the other half to receive information about locally available services. All caregivers were assessed at baseline, one-month post-intervention, and 6 months post-intervention [2].

Intention-to-treat results show that caregivers who received the *Parenting on the Border* intervention had **significant improvements** on multiple parenting, mental health, and family outcomes compared to the control group.



## Increase in

- Positive parenting behaviour
- Engagement in children's early learning
- Parenting knowledge
- Family functioning
- Caregiver well-being
- Emotion regulation
- Psychological flexibility



## Decrease in

- Use of physical violence (-52% at 6 months)
- Use of psychological violence (-31% at 6 months)
- Belief in need for harsh punishment
- Psychological distress
- Post-traumatic stress

Results also show trends towards reduced emotional and behavioural difficulties among children of caregivers who received the intervention. There were no observed impacts on parental self-efficacy or social support.

*In this program, we learn to control our emotions so as not to hurt the children's feelings. Everyone has emotions that often come with stress...the economic situation, bad business, health issues, living situation, the stress of being here in another country, all of those feelings made us stressed...in this program, we learn to do breathing exercises to calm our minds...when we have a very heavy mind...we put all these thoughts on a cloud and let the thoughts go far away and we don't keep these thoughts in our minds...those are the things I like about the training.*

- Male caregiver

*Before the program, I was harsh with my children. I also discipline them by hitting them. I hit them when I felt so angry. Now, I control my mind when I feel angry. I do deep breathing exercises. After doing that, I can control my mind by not speaking harshly. Then, I speak gently to the children. Those are the changes..*

- Female caregiver

## Conclusion

*Parenting on the Border* is one of only a few interventions to simultaneously target caregiver mental health and parenting outcomes in a low-resource, high-adversity setting. Trial results show **improvements in caregiver mental health and well-being alongside large and sustained reductions in physical and psychological violence against children.**

Investment in sustaining and scaling this intervention is needed to support the safety and well-being of families living in conditions of insecurity, poverty, or displacement.

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