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# Using Diverse Distribution Platforms to Support Young Children's Coping Strategies in the Midst of Crisis and Conflict

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## ABSTRACT

Evidence firmly establishes the link between early childhood interventions and the mitigation of the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Given the long-term effects of conflict and displacement on children's healthy development, educational mass media can offer critical learning opportunities to mitigate both the impact of learning disruption and the effects of ACEs. This paper will highlight three different ways media, and its diverse distribution platforms, can support young children's understanding and use of coping strategies in the face of significant adversity. Using examples of diverse distribution to reach refugee and migrant children in the United States and across Latin America and the Middle East, this paper will highlight the ways media can support children and families affected by displacement and conflict to develop critical coping strategies. Lessons learned in developing and adapting coping strategies for diverse contexts and platforms include learnings for content curation and implementation, engagement of local and regional advisors, and importance of a network of on-the-ground implementing partners. These findings offer guidance for those developing content and programs for children in conflict and crisis, in particular creators of children's media and outreach programs.

## KEYWORDS

Early childhood development; education in conflict and crisis; coping strategies; media interventions

## Introduction

For crisis and conflict-affected settings, existing evidence establishes the link between early childhood interventions and the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Bouchane, 2018). Further, because of an association between exposure to traumatic events and physical and mental health outcomes, conflict and displacement can affect developing brain architecture and influence the physiological response to stress and disease (Shonkoff, 2012). For the more than 36.5 million children affected by conflict and displacement around the world, the depths of these long-term effects present significant risks to their healthy cognitive, social, and emotional development (UNICEF, 2022).

Educational mass media offers critical learning opportunities, at scale, to mitigate both the impact of learning disruption and the effects of ACEs for children affected by conflict and displacement. Research widely recognizes that mass media supports children's learning at scale globally and across a range of educational outcomes (Borzekowski et al., 2019; Cole & Lee, 2016; Fisch & Truglio, 2000; Kennedy et al., 2021; Mares & Pan, 2013). Those effects

are further enhanced when content is co-viewed with a parent or primary caregiver (Fisch et al., 2008; Foulds, 2023; Meng et al., 2020; Morgenlander, 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2016; Salomon, 1977). Since the emergence of COVID-19, and its related restrictions and lockdowns, media plays an even more critical role in supporting children and their families (Yoshikawa et al., 2020).

Given the role that media can play in children's healthy development and potential for early childhood interventions to mitigate the effects of ACEs, this paper will highlight three different programmatic models that use media to support young children's coping strategies in the face of significant adversity. These models include hybrid implementation via digital media to support Venezuelan migrants in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru; broadcast media to support refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria; and direct distribution through implementing partners to support migrant children on the border in the United States. Through these case studies, this paper will highlight the ways children's media creators and outreach program designers can develop relevant content to support children and families affected by displacement and conflict to develop critical coping strategies.

## **The Intersection of Coping Strategies and Educational Media for Young Children**

While coping is understood as a conscious attempt to regulate one's emotions, cognitions, behaviors, physiology, and environment in response to stressful stimuli, coping regulatory processes are both supported and challenged by an individual's biological, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Compas et al., 2001). Most established coping literature tends to surround adult definitions and conceptualizations of coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). As such, there is a need for the exploration and study of youth coping, particularly in young children during crisis and conflict. Despite there being few studies that explore child and youth coping, three general domains have been identified. This includes task-oriented coping, such as finding solutions and taking action to reduce or remove the stressor. A second domain is emotion-oriented coping, which includes the use of emotions to manage stress and seeking support from others. A final domain is avoidant coping strategies, covering responses that distance or remove the individual from the stressor or the emotional and mental states related to it (Delvecchio et al., 2022; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016; VanMeter et al., 2020).

Data has shown that psychological stressors can lead to the development of psychopathologies, such as anxiety and depression, in adults (Monroe & Simons, 1991) and children (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995; Cicchetti & Toth, 1992). However, studies have indicated that coping may moderate and mediate the development of future psychopathologies (Compas et al., 2001). In the case of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children ages 4–5, researchers found that preschoolers who utilized task-oriented coping displayed fewer changes in mood and behavior during quarantine than preschoolers who used more emotion-oriented coping strategies (Delvecchio et al., 2022). In a similar vein, there is a wealth of research supporting the importance of social emotional learning to children's holistic development, and these benefits are of even further importance in crisis contexts where children are at risk of prolonged stress that can hinder their health over time (Goto et al., 2021; Slone & Mann, 2016; Umiltà et al., 2013). Fortunately, research also supports the idea that healthy

coping and co-regulation practiced early and to combat stress can help intercept its long-term negative impacts. The development and adoption of healthy coping strategies in young children during stressful times may support healthy development as it may promote effective coping patterns in adulthood and healthy development. Given the importance of the development and utilization of effective coping skills in children, it may be beneficial to explore wide reaching platforms to promote healthy coping mechanisms.

## **Media and Its Diverse Distribution as a Coping Strategy for Children**

There is emerging evidence that the act of engaging with media itself – regardless of the content – is itself a coping strategy (Nabi et al., 2017; Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). In a scoping review of relevant literature, evidence demonstrates that media – from television, mobile phones, video games, and social media – as a coping strategy is widespread and represented across multiple scientific disciplines, including communication, psychology, and medicine. Pulling from studies including samples of college students and other adult populations experiencing heightened stress levels, like cancer patients, existing evidence also showcases diverse conceptualizations and applications of these strategies, in which media has served as a stress and coping strategy and to support mood management and emotion regulation (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). Evidence also suggests that children who use media as a coping strategy have or require a higher level of digital literacy than the norm for their peers (Vandoninck et al., 2012). This may prove to be a valuable skill in children given the recent advancements in digital media and artificial intelligence.

Reflecting on the focus on adults in the existing coping literature, missing from the existing evidence on media use as a coping strategy is the exploration of its use among young children, particularly those experiencing significant adversity. Existing literature largely focuses on older children, tweens, and adolescents. However, recent work has explored children’s and adolescents’ use of media as a coping strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has highlighted tweens and teenagers in the United States increased use of media during COVID-19 as a coping strategy to relieve stress, support mood management, and connect with others (Drouin et al., 2020; Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022).

## **Educational Media to Support Children’s Coping Strategies**

The power and promise of educational mass media to support children’s coping strategies, especially those experiencing extreme adversity, is that mass media offers a readily scalable modality (Baggett et al., 2010). Available to the whole family, media-based interventions may offer promise for supporting children’s emotional knowledge and regulation skills. As such, educational media designed to support children’s coping strategies has the potential to provide a greater overall public health benefit relative to those interventions that target only those immediately affected by trauma or adversity (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Though the evidence on media use as a coping strategy for young children is limited, there is a small body of work that has demonstrated a causal link between viewing educational television, engaging with digital media, and children’s application of emotion regulation coping strategies (Baggett et al., 2010; Global TIES for Children, 2023).

Traditionally, for many interventions designed to support emotion development and regulation, families that need them the most are often the ones least able to participate. Media content distributed across diverse platforms, however, supports increased equitable access. Moreover, co-viewing with children and parents also supports adults' acquisition of these skills (Foulds, 2023). Mass media, thus, can play a critical role in supporting children's social and emotional development, as they make sense of the world around them in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Yoshikawa et al., 2020).

Despite the known value of media in supporting young children's coping strategies, there has been less of a focus on generating evidence on the association between educational media and young children's socio-emotional learning (SEL) (Martins, 2015; Rasmussen et al., 2016). In a meta-analysis on the positive effects of television on children's social interactions, there were consistent positive effects for those who watched prosocial content relative to those who did not (Mares & Woodard, 2005). It should be noted, however, that while there is a general dearth in the literature on the link between mass media and prosocial behavior, this absence is even more pronounced outside of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) contexts, as most literature has focused on the United States, and countries in Western Europe and Asia-Pacific (Mares & Woodard, 2005).

### **Global Case Studies in Supporting Children's Coping Strategies in the Face of Crisis and Conflict Across a Range of Distribution Mechanisms**

Sesame Workshop (SW), the nonprofit organization behind the American children's television show *Sesame Street* and its international co-productions, produces television and video content watched by more than 180 million children around the world. Globally, children, families, and early childhood practitioners are also reached through extensive partnerships with on-the-ground implementing partners who have integrated SW content into their community engagement programming. SW has extensive experience supporting the needs of children affected by adversity globally, leveraging both traditional broadcast, digital platforms, and direct parent and provider engagement. In the United States, an evaluation of *Sesame Street's* post-9/11 episode about loss found that children who viewed the episode were significantly more likely to know positive strategies for dealing with loss, such as talking about their feelings or drawing pictures of the people they lost (Kotler et al., 2016). SW resources to support coping strategies designed for families in the United States in the face of general challenges, military deployment, grief, divorce, and parental incarceration found similar positive effects (Cohen et al., 2014; Oades-Sese & Lau, 2015a, 2015b; Oades-Sese et al., 2021; Topp et al., 2013).

Outside of the United States, recent research has demonstrated the impact of mass media and media-integrated educational programming to support young children's coping strategies. A study of co-viewing *Ahlan Simsim*, the SW co-production available across the Middle East and North Africa, found that families who regularly co-viewed *Ahlan Simsim* reported improved emotional vocabulary and increased emotion regulation among both children and parents. Co-viewing *Ahlan Simsim* also sparked conversations at home about new emotional vocabulary, expressing feelings, and practicing coping techniques (Foulds, 2023). More significantly, a recent causal study of *Ahlan Simsim* in Jordanian public kindergarten classrooms found positive impacts from viewing on children's emotion

identification and application of breathing strategies to manage strong emotions (Global TIES for Children, 2023).

In line with the literature on building children's foundational SEL skills to mitigate the effects of adversity, learnings from SW's content and programming to support children's coping strategies globally has led to the development of a global framework to guide the creation of content related to children's emotional well-being. The approach is grounded in the perspective that children's socio-emotional development and learning are integrated processes and grounded in children's socio-ecological context (Sesame Workshop, 2023a). SW's approach to SEL is rooted in child development and relies on modeling SEL through caregiver supported and strengths-based programming, leveraging children's lived experiences and cultural contexts. This approach explores the intersections of executive function, emotional development, cognitive development, and social development to support children's self-regulation and coping. Self-regulation skills help children notice and manage their emotions and behaviors, as well as the emotions and experiences of others (Sesame Workshop, 2023b).

Also guiding SW's approach to content creation and distribution around coping strategies for young children is the nurturing care framework. For children to reach their full potential, the nurturing care framework identifies the five distinct, though interrelated, components of a nurturing care environment: opportunities for early learning; responsive caregiver; safety and security; good health; and adequate nutrition (World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank Group, 2018). The framework offers guidance for developing an environment that is responsive to children's developmental needs and provides opportunities for early learning, grounded in caregiver-child interactions that are emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating (Britto et al., 2016). A nurturing care environment becomes an even more critical for children exposed to adversity during their early years, as severe and prolonged stress can affect brain architecture and influence the physiological response to stress and disease (Bouchane, 2018; Shonkoff, 2012). Prolonged adversity without adequate adult caregiver support to mitigate its effects can have lifelong implications for physical and psychosocial health (Bouchane, 2018; Panter-Brick et al., 2009). Nurturing care interventions designed to support children's resiliency have the potential to mitigate the negative effects of ACEs on children's long-term cognitive and socio-emotional development. In addition, interventions that support responsive relationships between caregiver and child can also buffer a child from the effects of stress, while also helping both children and adults strengthen their resiliency skills to prevent the long-term negative effects of ACEs (McCoy et al., 2022; Sanders et al., 2020).

It is the intersection of children's emotional well-being and nurturing care that will be highlighted in the following case studies. This section will first provide a discussion of how content delivered via traditional broadcast TV supported children affected by the Syrian crisis. This is followed by a discussion of leveraging digital media in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru to support young Venezuelan migrants on the move. Finally, a discussion of delivering resources through direct service programming and partnerships that reached children and families along the U.S./Mexico border. These case studies will discuss the ways in which SW has adapted its core approach to supporting children's coping strategies, leveraging diverse distribution platforms to reach families where they are, as well as lessons learned in adapting and distributing content. Each case study will include a summary of data sources used to inform content creation and distribution, with more in-

depth discussions of research methods available in Kohn et al. (2021) and Foulds, Rodriguez, et al. (2021) for the Middle East and Latin America, respectively. In line with the Sesame Workshop model, SW invests in a range of research activities through the life of a program. These include needs assessments with families, curriculum advisories with local and regional experts, consultations with possible and confirmed partners on-the-ground, child-centered formative research on prototype content, ongoing monitoring of inputs and outputs, performance evaluations, and efficacy studies. As SW has expanded its scope to support the needs of children around the world, these array of research methods continues to be the grounding force in creating relevant educational media content that meets families where they are (Foulds & Bucuvalas, 2019; Foulds et al., 2023; Foulds, Khan, et al., 2021; Kohn et al., 2020, 2021).

### ***Using Mass Media to Help Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq Cope with Challenges***

In March 2011, after a violent government crackdown on public demonstrations in Syria led to intense conflict and civil war, Syria remains one of the world's largest refugee crises. More than 6.8 million Syrians have been forced to flee their country and another 6.9 million people remain internally displaced. The vast majority – approximately 5.2 million refugees – have found refuge in neighboring countries. Women and children comprise more than two thirds of those displaced (USA for UNHCR, 2022). *Ahlan Simsim*—or “Welcome Sesame” in Arabic – is an innovative program from Sesame Workshop and International Rescue Committee (IRC) that brings together in-person and digital programming alongside broadcast television to provide early childhood care and education to a generation of children and families affected by the Syrian crisis. The broadcast television program, also called *Ahlan Simsim*, has reached over 27 million children ages 3–8 across the Middle East and North Africa, including 57% of displaced Syrians across Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq (Sesame Workshop, 2023b; Kohn et al., 2021).

### ***Adapting Coping Strategies for Content Creation***

In line with the SW model, SW conducted a series of needs assessments with 265 Syrian and host community caregivers and practitioners working with young children in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria before developing a curriculum framework for the TV show (Kohn et al., 2020). The finding of these assessments revealed both the need and demand among parents and practitioners for children's media content to address children's SEL needs. Stressing the need for trauma-informed content, practitioners prioritized SEL content above all other curricular domains.

Bearing these findings in mind, SW proceeded with the next stage of the development process – the educational content seminar – with a commitment to a trauma-informed approach and a sharper focus on SEL as the critical focus of our show. The *Ahlan Simsim* education and production teams worked closely with local mental health professionals from across the Middle East to craft a curriculum for the *Ahlan Simsim* television show. Guided by findings from the abovementioned needs assessments, regional content and creative workshops brought together local advisors and creative professionals to help to identify the educational focus for the show and explore creative ideas for the show's characters, setting, storylines, songs, educational taglines, and other elements (Kohn et al., 2020). The goals of

these workshops were to establish the curricular focus of Season 1 of *Ahlan Simsim*, identify storylines, brainstorm new *Ahlan Simsim* character ideas, and draft initial script outlines.

A discussion on culturally contextualized resiliency led advisors in Jordan to encourage a limited focus of the first season to helping children identify and express emotions. Additional conversations in Lebanon confirmed that the topic is relevant across the four target countries, with advisors reinforcing the need for a “vocabulary of emotions” among both refugee and host community children, as even children who have not experienced the direct effects of war are often still vulnerable to the effects of intergenerational trauma. The teams pursued this further by concentrating discussions on core emotions, such as love, joy, surprise, anger, fear, sadness. In a series of structured activities, participants explored how to best identify and express emotions within the cultural context(s), and how to use a range of strategies, like belly breathing and counting, to regulate these emotions.

Building on discussions with educators, the teams guided participants through activities designed to elicit ideas for how to explore emotions in the mass media content. From there, the team brainstormed ideas for characters, stories, setting, taglines/catchphrases for regulation strategies, and the title of the series – while exploring similarities across the varied cultures in *Ahlan Simsim*’s target countries and audiences. The teams realized that to fully convey the emotions in the curriculum, they would need to supplement the puppet characters with even more expressive and nuanced animated characters to ensure that the physicality of expressing emotions would be comprehensible to young children (Cole, 2018).

Subsequent formative research validated this approach. In a study informed by the advisories, researchers read Arabic-language children’s storybooks to caregiver-child dyads and stopped at predetermined points to ask the child questions related to the emotions displayed at that moment in the story. Findings confirmed the results of the needs assessments and advisors’ recommendations – research results showed that children struggled to find the emotional vocabulary needed to identify more advanced emotions, such as anxiety, frustration, guilt, or jealousy. Instead, children displayed limited emotional vocabulary, often resorting to phrases or actions to describe a feeling. The study also revealed that caregivers of young children face similar emotional vocabulary limitations (see Kohn et al., 2020 for a full summary of the study results).

### **Lessons Learned**

Aside from validating the importance of multiple forms of participatory research to inform content development, one salient and generalizable lesson that emerged from the content and creative workshops was the importance of following the lead of local and regional expert advisors to ensure content is both culturally relevant and trauma informed. The value of these experts was most clearly highlighted in developing a combination of strategies that covered both autonomous coping strategies (belly breathing, counting to five) and strategies supported by a nurturing adult (ask for help). For example, when discussing the coping strategy “Imagining a safe space” as a calming tool, one advisor noted in a crisis context, children may imagine a home that they had lost, potentially upsetting children further. Additionally, it was important to highlight culturally relevant strategies in the show than export Western psychological frameworks. It was through this approach the team identified key communally oriented strategies, such as “Ask for help from the community” that align with regional norms of community support. Overall, engaging with mental health



professionals with cultural knowledge and specific experience working with children affected by displacement in the Middle East was critical to creating a responsible, impactful, and strengths-based final product at scale.

### ***Using Hybrid Distribution Methods to Help Venezuelan Children on the Move Cope with Challenges***

Over seven million Venezuelans have left their country in pursuit of safety and economic opportunity after the collapse of their economy in 2014 and the rapid deterioration of basic living conditions. While spanning a decade, the migration crisis intensified in 2018 with a massive exodus of Venezuelan nationals to neighboring countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. The effects of COVID-19 coupled with increasing barriers to transnational movement – both due to sanitary measures and pressures to curb migration – compounded limiting access to services for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan families living in exile. Young children were particularly affected given the closure of early learning services, many of which also provided critical lifelines to health, nutrition, and protection. As disruptions to educational services prolonged, SW and its partners saw an opportunity to test innovative approaches to reach the highly mobile migrant population with engaging, evidence-based educational content. By curating a selection of available resources from its extensive library of video and print materials, the team could innovate existing technologies and leverage access to services available to migrant and host communities.

### ***Adapting Coping Strategies for Content Creation***

Similar to *Ahlan Simsim*'s approach, SW implemented a series of research activities to inform content development, content curation, and implementation as part of pilot planning. This included an initial diagnostic survey to assess the targeted communities' access to technology and willingness to engage with digital solutions to support learning (Foulds, Rodriguez, et al., 2021). In addition to this survey, SW conducted a series of consultations with local implementation partners. From those data sources, the SW team curated 300 videos, activity sheets, infographics, and other text and image-based resources were created around four thematic pillars:

- “Emotions” focused on social emotional learning, particularly emotion regulation and management;
- “Learning Everywhere” supported academic skills by making everyday activities playful;
- “Health” focused on healthy habits, disease prevention, and self-care;
- “Community” supported a positive sense of self and belonging.

This curated list was then loaded onto microcomputers (Next Unit of Computing devices), which emit their own Wi-Fi signal to provide users free access to its content without data access. The assets were also programmed into a parent-facing WhatsApp chatbot allowing users to search content based on their needs on a dedicated website.<sup>1</sup> Local implementation partners trained adult users of their services so that caregivers could access and download children's content for use at home (Foulds, Rodriguez, et al., 2021). Throughout this implementation, the SW

team engaged in additional research activities: beneficiary and provider surveys, in-depth interviews with caregivers and providers to assess perceptions of program, quantitative in-person monitoring records, and back-end device log data (see Foulds, Rodriguez, et al., 2021 for a full summary of these research results).

In addition to these digital means of distribution, the SW team worked with implementing partners to adapt their operational spaces (shelters, community kitchens, children's hospitals, libraries, and formal and, when re-opened, non-formal early learning centers) to integrate printed play materials. These materials included a storybook library focused on SEL, posters, and play activities that could be used with provider facilitation. The SW team provided training to service providers to ensure alignment between the content provided and their existing programs and educational mandates.

Focusing on the power of play as a coping strategy, additional in-person programming provided caregivers tools to lead guided play with their children, strengthening the bond between children and adults and fostering playful learning skills to be used in everyday life. As part of the program adaptation, the SW team developed a set of play activity cards for family use, being mindful of the living conditions and ability to engage families on the move on a repeated basis. Participating formal and non-formal learning centers were also provided with educational materials to facilitate play-based activities with children and caregivers.

### ***Lessons Learned***

While the *Ahlan Simsim* work revealed important process learnings – the importance of engaging local and regional advisors to develop culturally relevant, trauma-informed coping strategies – the lessons learned from the work to support coping strategies among Venezuelan migrants and host community yielded more specific guidance on content topics and how to best support content implementation. Across the target countries, back-end and partner monitoring data revealed that the SEL content was the most viewed, downloaded, and requested content. Due to this demand, additional SEL content was included, and interfaces were adjusted to facilitate ease of access. While the activities sought to provide access to existing assets from SW's library, the eagerness of Venezuelan and host community families for resources that address social-emotional challenges brought about by adverse experiences highlights the importance of continuing to create educational content and learning activities that concretely address these challenges in real-life and real time.

In addition, to support content utility and impact, the SW team created provider lesson plans. These included accessible, joyful, play-based activities that could be implemented on the move with easily available resources and simple instructions to help overcome dispositional barriers in overtaxed families. Working together with providers to align the content offerings with their educational or service provision guidelines also helped overcome initial concerns about the pertinence of the content and the uses of media as part of family engagement strategies.

### ***Using Direct Implementation to Help Migrant Children on the Border in the United States Cope with Challenges***

Since 2013, hundreds of thousands of people from Central America, including thousands of unaccompanied children, cross into the United States seeking refuge and asylum due to violence and poverty in their home countries. In 2018, the U.S. government implemented

stricter restrictions on immigration, with children bearing a significant burden of the policy changes. Then, in 2020, border closures in response to COVID-19 further exacerbated the situation, and children and families were denied the opportunity to make their asylum claims under due process (Save the Children, 2023). SW, through its US-based *Sesame Street in Communities* initiative, identified a gap in ECD programming and services available to families with young children. Given this need, SW leveraged relationships with on-the-ground service providers and organizations, relationships that lay a foundation for rapid, effective, and thoughtful distribution of resources via partners, especially in high-stress situations or uncertain times.

### **Adapting Coping Strategies for Content Creation**

The need for rapid response presented challenges to conducting any diagnostic or needs assessment research prior to content curation and implementation. In lieu of that work, as discussed in both the work in the Middle East and Latin America, the US-based SW team relied on the guidance of on-the-ground implementation partners. Based on those consultations, the team curated a set of family-facing resource designed to help families cope with the trauma of forced displacement, process and communicate their experiences, and develop a sense of belonging in new places. These resources included articles for caregivers, paired with videos and printable activities for children. Despite the heavy subject matter, all resources were and are designed to be entertaining and effective. Producers and curriculum developers adapted trauma-informed goals and coping strategies from *Sesame Street*'s characters and storylines to be relevant to displaced children and families. For example, in the video, "Give Yourself a Hug," *Sesame Street* characters show how a self-hug helps them when they are having big feelings. Such a strategy supports autonomous coping for children and families on the move because it can be done any time and any place, requiring no material resources, facilitation, or the presence of a nurturing adult to implement. Other resources aimed to be equally accessible by highlighting strategies that promote a sense of safety, security, comfort, playful learning, and using movement or imagination to help cope with uncertainty or a traumatic event.

Recent content focuses on helping children and families identify their strengths, acknowledge the changes brought upon by resettlement and displacement, find opportunities for learning, and celebrate who they are and who they could become in their new or "for-now" home. Importantly, this content also supports host community members, encouraging hospitality and optimism. In one video, *Sesame Street* characters put the finishing touches on a "welcome bag," which includes items for a new family moving to the neighborhood, specially crafted and thoughtfully given by their friends. Expanding upon resources aimed toward community members, the SW team also developed self-paced, free digital courses aimed at providers supporting families. These resources offer instruction around trauma-informed responses, plus strategies and tools to bolster positive relationships and foster resilience skills in young children and families affected by crisis.

### **Lessons Learned**

Building on the process lessons learned in the Middle East and the content curation and implementation lessons learned in Latin America, the work with migrant children on the border in the United States yielded valuable lessons on the role of implementing partners.

To help young children on the border seeking refuge and asylum due to violence and poverty in their home countries develop critical coping skills, SW relied on relationships with on-the-ground local, state, national, and global partners. These relationships laid a foundation for rapid, effective, and thoughtful distribution of resources via partners, especially in high-stress situations or uncertain times. Through these relationships, it became clear that when creating media-based resources for families experiencing displacement and resettlement, and the providers and community members who support them, content should be designed in a way that is useful in a variety of settings, both resourced and under-resourced. In addition, these relationships underscored that providers need facilitation cues and guidance so they can adapt the key messages, ideas, and recommended coping strategies to their environment in the time they have with children and families.

## Conclusion

There is immense need, and even greater potential, for media across diverse distribution platforms to support families of young children affected by conflict and crisis develop coping strategies to mitigate the effects of this adversity. There is comparable need and potential for media to also support the development and/or maintenance of a nurturing care environment to reinforce the those coping strategies. Media, however, is only effective in these capacities if it can reach families where they are. As the examples provided here demonstrate, diverse media platforms have varying potential in how they can engage children and families experiencing displacement.

The distribution models highlighted – direct service, hybrid implementation, and broadcast media – also suggest that the distribution platform can, and should, inform the types of coping strategies modeled for children and their families. The nurturing care framework that guides SW’s approach to content creation and distribution around coping strategies is grounded in the importance of nurturing caregiver-child interactions. The manifestation of this is most easily observed in the hybrid and direct implementation models found in Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and the United States.

Educational mass media for children, however, does not assume that children are co-viewing content with a nurturing adult caregiver, even though co-viewing is ideal for educational impact. As such, supporting children’s coping strategies relies more heavily on the medium – more expressive and nuanced animated characters to ensure that the physicality of expressing emotions is comprehensible to young children – as well as strategies that focus more on children’s autonomy to implement the strategy, as in the case of belly breathing. This distinction between supporting children’s use of autonomous coping strategies and those that require the support of a nurturing caregiver in educational mass media emerged as an important finding from a recent causal study of *Ahlan Simsim*. Where there were positive effects from viewing on children’s emotion identification and application of breathing strategies to manage strong emotions, there were no effects on regulation strategies that required the support of a nurturing adult (Global TIES for Children, 2023).

The power of supporting children’s coping strategies at scale via mass media is clear, as are the limitations. As such, there is an important need for content that fills those gaps in mass media distribution. Via hybrid and direct implementation, collaboration with local implementation partners to develop relevant and appropriate content serves as a critical distribution pathway to best support a child’s socio-ecological environment and fill those

gaps. As highlighted here, families, providers, and other key community members experiencing crisis and conflict received culturally relevant and timely interventions through resources created with and distributed through implementing partners.

The realities of families affected by crisis and conflict, particularly those on the move, also provided critical lessons learned in how media stakeholders must select distribution platforms that can evolve as the crisis and families' needs change. Lessons learned from these case studies highlighted the need for multi-platform content that can be adapted and/or accessed in an offline setting. Children and families who may most benefit from content and materials that support developmental coping strategies may not always be able to access it given their frequent movement. Leveraging diverse distribution mechanisms and making use of community spaces to meet where families they are, as well as innovating to explore new digital methods of distribution, are necessary to reach families on the move.

Despite the depth and breadth of content and distribution strategies to support coping strategies for young children affected by crisis and conflict, there are limitations that provide opportunities for future innovation. Emergency response requires quick action and leveraging existing resources. Emergency response, unfortunately, does not always allow for the depth of cultural adaptation discussed in the case of *Ahlan Simsim* in the Middle East. More work is needed to explore culturally informed coping strategies to guide both content creation and distribution plans. In addition, identifying ways to ensure that both content and platform are accessible to children with disabilities, and how their unique needs may require further innovation of the most appropriate, necessary, and relevant coping strategies and distribution methods. Finally, more rigorous evaluation is needed to better understand the impact of these approaches as well as to continue to dive deeper into the links between coping strategy uptake and distribution platform.

Even bearing in mind these limitations and opportunities for additional learning and innovation, the programs highlighted here lay a critical foundation for the potential of media to support young children's coping strategies amid crisis and conflict. Using diverse distribution platforms – satellite broadcast, digital, and direct implementation – to reach families experiencing crisis provides a wealth of opportunities for media creators and outreach program developers to meet families where they are as they navigate significant adversity. Through the breadth and depth of available distribution platforms that allows media platforms to adapt to families, rather than families having to adapt to the platform, means that critical services and interventions can meet a family's needs in the moment, a necessary element for impactful programming globally.

## Note

1. The website is available here: <https://jardin.sesame.com/>

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