

# HOW does it work?

## Program components

<b>Caregiver sessions</b> <b>Goal:</b> Normalise and manage stress; Improve parenting confidence and skills to develop positive parenting strategies; Enhance resources to deal with stress	<b>Child sessions</b> <b>Goal:</b> Improve mental health outcomes; Better deal with stress; Reduce challenging behaviour	<b>Family sessions</b> <b>Goal:</b> Improved communication and relationships; Decreased coercive parenting
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## Program process to address underlying causes

**Decrease risk factors:** Favourable attitudes towards coercive parenting strategies; Poor family management skills; High levels of stress; Environment favoring early initiation of drug use and of conflict and violence

**Increase protective factors:** Improved family interaction; Enhanced relationships, non-violent discipline, prosocial involvement, caregiver social support

## Short term participant and family impact

Improved caregiver confidence in family management skills	Improved child behaviour	Increased capacity to cope with stress
Improved caregiving in parenting skills	Reduced aggressive and hostile behaviors	Improved mental health outcomes in children and parents

## Long term impact

Reduction in violence	Reduction in substance abuse	Reduction in risky behaviours	Improved mental health for caregivers and children
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# Structure of the strong families programme

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
<b>Caregiver pre-session</b> Understanding Strengths and Stresses	<b>Caregiver session 1</b> Using love and limits	<i>In parallel</i>
	<b>Child session 1</b> Learning about stress	
	<b>Family session 1</b> Learning about each other	<b>Caregiver session 2</b> Teaching children what is right
	<b>Child session 2</b> Following rules and appreciating parents	
		<b>Family session 2</b> Supporting values and dreams




The Strong Families Programme was developed and piloted in Afghanistan thanks to the generous support of the US-INL. To date, this programme has further been piloted in Central America, Central and West Asia, East and West Africa thanks to the support of Sweden, France and the US-INL.

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**STRONG FAMILIES PROGRAMME**  
 A family skills prevention programme for families living in challenged settings

# Value of family skills programmes



Family skills programmes support caregivers to be better parents and strengthen positive age-specific and age-appropriate family functioning and interactions. They promote a warm child-rearing style where parents set rules for acceptable behaviours, closely monitor free time and friendship patterns and become good role models while helping their children to acquire skills to

make informed decisions. Owing to these changes, these programmes are effective in preventing a wide range of social and health problems, including preventing substance use, violence against children and youth violence, and crime. Family skills programmes additionally provide positive effects on the mental wellbeing of parents and reduce parental and occupational stress and support the development of children with fewer behavioral and emotional problems. Inspired by this body of knowledge UNODC Drug Prevention and Health Branch, Prevention Treatment and Rehabilitation Section has been actively promoting and piloting such evidence-based programmes globally since 2010 in over 30 low- and middle-income countries.

- 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages SDG 3.5
- 4 QUALITY EDUCATION** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all SDG 4.1, SDG 4.5, SDG 4.7
- 5 GENDER EQUALITY** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls SDG 5.2
- 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels SDG 16.1, SDG 16.2

# Families living in challenged settings

Globally, many families live in challenged settings, posing significant difficulties on their everyday lives. Challenges can be living in rural or underserved areas with inadequate access to safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity or schools, high unemployment etc. Other challenges include a history of invasion and war that leaves families internally displaced, migrating, living in refugee camps or in conflict/post-conflict situations. Proper parenting skills in these circumstances are even more crucial and specific family skills tailored to these stresses need to be prioritized.



# Purpose, goals & philosophy of the Strong Families Programme

The Strong Families (SF) Programme is a family skills programme for challenged settings, that provides an evidence-informed prevention response building family skills that benefits the health and safe development of children from both genders. It can be easily adapted to serve families in challenged settings in different contexts.

SF helps caregivers and children, living in such settings, to deal with difficulties and daily stresses and challenges. A main component of this program is to strengthen the family structure and functions to help as such families prevent drug use, violence and other negative social consequences in their children. It is a universal within this selective subgroup of families and is best suited for families with children aged between 8 and 15 years.

The Strong Families Programme was developed by UNODC to meet the following characteristics:

- Brief in number of sessions:** Families in challenged settings find it hard to attend more than a limited number of sessions of around 90 minutes. Strong Families was therefore developed to be brief (light touch) covering overall 3 sessions in 3 consecutive weeks implicating caregivers, and 2 sessions of which the caregivers are joined by their children, first in parallel caregiver and child sessions followed by a joint family session.
- Evidence-Informed:** In line with the recommendations of the UNODC WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention and capitalising on the experience generated from the global initiative of UNODC in adaptation and piloting of evidence-based family skills programmes in low- and middle-income countries, since 2010.
- Feasible for the human resource infrastructure available in low resource settings:** The programme requires an infrastructure that is easy to mobilise and train. The nominated facilitators of the materials do not need to have specific technical skills and can be trained in 2 days

by certified trainers. This makes it easier to be integrated within the infrastructure existing in such settings. The facilitator’s manual was designed to be easy to follow to ensure fidelity of implementation with minimal technical supervision.

- Selective, yet covers a large spectrum of families:** The programme focuses on the most essential family skills required for those living in such settings, accordingly it allows to reach a large spectrum of families without being restrictive to families with special needs. At the same time, it allows for disseminating information on where families with such special needs could get access to care.
- Light in material needs:** The rollout requires minimal and low-cost material easy to prepare per session (such as paper and pens, balloons, ropes, etc) and does not require the need of any supportive audio-visual equipment such as DVDs, DVD players, projectors, etc...
- Open source to further encourage and facilitate sustainability:** The programme, unlike many other family skills programmes in high-income countries, is free of any charge or copyright fee, to allow benefitting counterparts to have national ownership to bring it to scale at minimum cost.

## Philosophy of Strong Families

- All families have strengths and skills.
- Even in difficult times caregivers do the best they can to love and care for their children.
- Families are made stronger by sharing their challenges as well as the things that work for them.
- The challenges families have faced often makes them stronger and give them more resilience and wisdom.
- The programme offers ways to make caring for children easier and more effective.
- Each family knows what is most likely to work in their situation.

# Preliminary results

While Strong Families was originally designed and piloted in Afghanistan, it has evolved to a global version that can be applied (and is piloted) on families in challenged settings in many other countries. Preliminary data on its initial stages of implementation in Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee reception centers in Serbia showed significant changes on reducing child behaviour and well-being, such as emotional or conduct problems and improved parental functioning, such as parental consistency or positive en-



couragement for example. These findings reflect the previously described positive impact of the programme on the improved caregiver confidence in family management skills, improved caregiving in parenting skills, increased capacity to cope with stress, improved child behaviour, reduced aggressive and hostile behaviours and hence improved mental health outcomes in children and parents overall. The Strong Families programme showed significant impact on both, girls and boys and their respective caregivers.

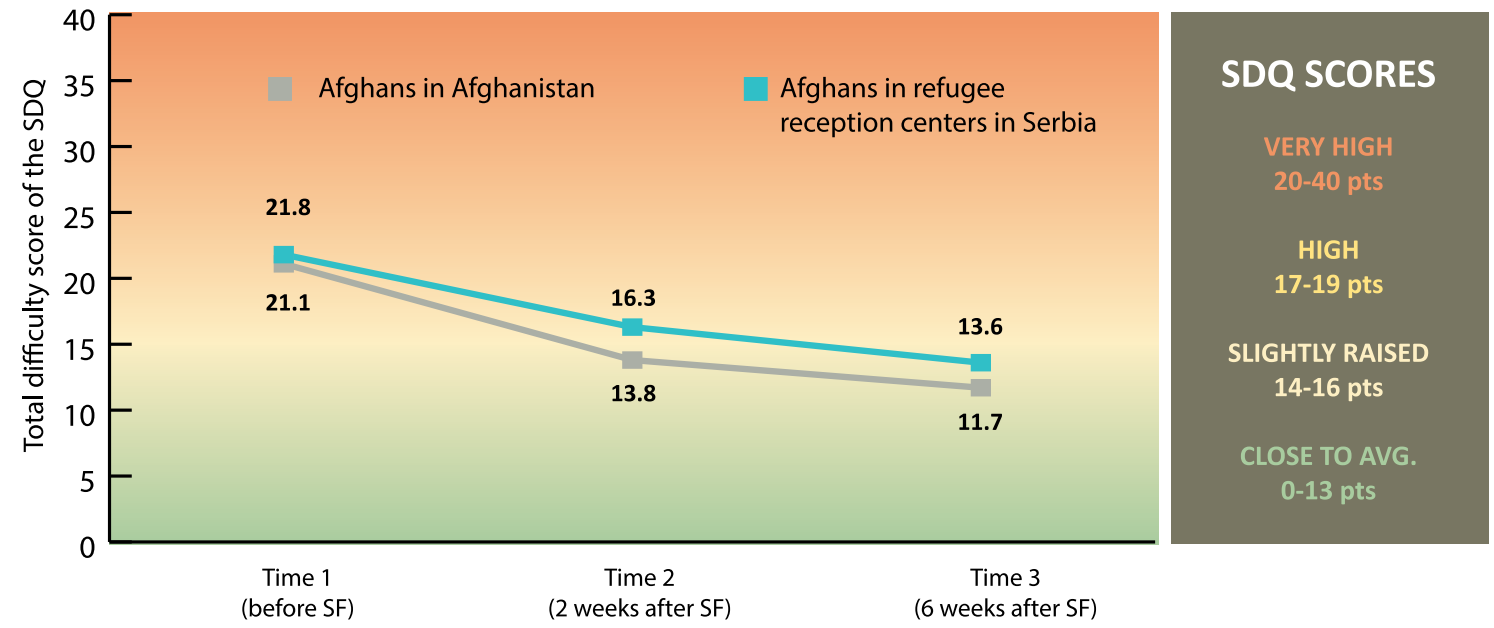


Figure: Amongst children with high or very high (≥17) total difficulty scores of the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) at baseline, as assessed by the caregivers in pilot studies in 3 cities in Afghanistan (n=41 out of 72 families overall) and in Afghans in 3 refugee reception centers in Serbia (n=9/21 families) in 2018 a significant decline in the scores was found before and after the Strong Families programme, which even declined further after 6 weeks post programme [Findings submitted for peer-reviewed publication]