

CONFRONTING STRESS AND TRAUMA

An Online Resource Kit for Humanitarian Aid Workers and Peacekeepers

Psychological trauma and trauma-based disorders and diseases affect hundreds of millions of children and adults, and include those who are witnesses, as well as those who are direct victims of traumatic events. A bold guestimate of the prevalence is 500 million PTSD cases, based on a relatively reliable 7% U.S. prevalence rate applied to the total world population of seven billion. This is not an outlandish figure given the rising exposure to traumatic events and circumstances the world is witnessing.

At high risk are field staff involved in humanitarian and peace operations (crisis personnel), and those involved in development activities, especially in conflict and disaster zones¹. A 2016 UNHCR study among its professional refugee workers, for example, found that 36% of its staff is at high risk for trauma. Additionally, 47% of their staff experience difficulty sleeping, and 57% report symptoms of sadness, unhappiness, or emptiness.

Psychological trauma is pervasive among humanitarian aid workers and peacekeepers. Surveys indicate that over 70% of aid workers consider the debriefing and support they receive to be insufficient. With such a high rate of distress among staff, it is crucial for organizations to accelerate and expand their psycho-logical resources and services.

The aim of this project is to facilitate the widespread use of the recently completed GIST-T training manual, *Confronting Stress and Trauma: A Resource Kit for Personnel Dealing with Violent Conflicts and Natural Disasters* by adapting it to an e-learning platform and translating it into several languages. GIST-T has found modest funding for the instructional design online of the English version of the training manual and is now seeking further grants for the Arabic and French versions.

In that online form, this Resource Kit will provide broad access to practical information on stress and trauma symptoms, consequences and therapies, including the three WHO-approved approaches— Psychological First Aid (PFA), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with a Trauma Focus (CBT-TF), and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy. It will offer proven techniques of self-care, and clear instructions about when to seek professional help. As such, it will offer support and guidance to crisis personnel who suffer from vicarious traumatic stress—a result of interacting with, or helping, others exposed to traumatic experiences—or who have directly experienced an extremely distressing and traumatic event themselves.

This Resource Kit is distinctive. Several organizations offer online courses on stress and trauma topics. However, this modular Resource Kit is more comprehensive in scope, more easily and rapidly scaled up, and designed for more diverse audiences, including humanitarian workers, peacekeepers, scouts, doctors and students. It offers up-to-date scientific and professional information on stress and trauma. And it can be facilitated online by mental health professionals, or it can be used for self-paced learning. The authors created the Resource Kit to provide practical solutions, taking into account the uncertainty and complexity faced by the various target populations.