1

Introduction to stress, resilience and self-care

Overview

Stress of different types may have unsuspected or unrecognized consequences for the health and optimal functioning of crisis personnel, and for populations living in places of disaster, violence and conflict. This module introduces many of the ideas and concepts that will be discussed in greater depth in subsequent modules. Its four lessons explore common stressors, stress management, strengths-based resilience, and good practice guidelines for organizations to promote well-being and effectiveness among their staff. The module highlights the importance of recognizing, assessing and managing stress and developing resilience. The self-assessments and other exercises give course participants/crisis personnel the opportunity to understand how, from an early point in their experience, they can themselves explore their own reactions to crisis situations, manage their own stress, and help build their own resilience.

Three core principles guided the development of this module. These principles are: (1) the intrinsic worth and dignity of all human beings;[1] (2) the commitment to staff care and development;[2] and, (3) the relevance of using organizational resources from various sectors for staff well-being (e.g. military, humanitarian, health).[3]

The module is divided into four lessons:

Lesson 1.1 - Understanding stress
Lesson 1.2 - Managing stress
Lesson 1.3 - Strengthening resilience
Lesson 1.4 - Organizations' responsibilities

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[1] UDHR. *About the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Translation Project*. [online] United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner. Available at: ohchr.org/en/udhr/pages/introduction.aspx [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

[2] People in Aid. (2003). *Code of good practice in the management and support of aid personnel.* 2nd ed. [pdf] London: People in Aid. Available at: drc.dk/media/2113064/people_in_aid_code_of_good_practice.pdf [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

[3] O'Donnell, K. and Lewis O'Donnell, M. (2013). *Global member care: Crossing sectors for serving humanity.* Pasadena: William Carey Library.

At the end of the module, readers will be able to:

- Define basic, cumulative, and traumatic stress and core stressors for personnel dealing with violent conflicts and natural disasters
- List different ways to better manage stress in life and work
- Describe the main strategies for further developing resilience
- Discuss organizational responsibilities for stress management

1.1 Understanding stress

Helpers also need help. Taking care of oneself is professional.[4]

Everyone goes through some type of stress every day. Stress results from common experiences such as being stuck in traffic, hearing a dog barking or a baby crying, not having enough money to pay bills, arguments at home, disagreements with colleagues, or worrying about the future. Stress affects everyone emotionally, physically, mentally, socially and even spiritually. Stress is the reaction of the entire person to internal and external demands (stressors).

Stress can be defined as any demand or change that the human system (mind, body, spirit) is required to meet and respond to. Stress is a part of normal life and without challenges and physical demands, life could become boring. Stress becomes distress (or traumatic stress) when it lasts too long, occurs too often, or is too severe.[5]

Personnel involved in humanitarian and peace operations experience many similar, but also entirely different, sources of stress (stressors).

Stress can have negative consequences if it is perceived to be undesirable, occurs in the context of other stressors, and is hard to predict/control. Furthermore, too much stress for too long can result in: physical tension and illness, emotional discomfort and value confusion, relational strains, lower cognitive (e.g. thinking, reasoning, remembering) and work performance, and risky health behaviours, including excessive alcohol consumption, drug abuse and addictions. The stress response (e.g. via stressors that are perceived as threatening) activates the autonomic nervous system, increasing the amount of adrenaline in the blood and the flow of blood to muscles. The resulting state of heightened anxiety, influences the characteristic response that everyone has experienced at one time or another: fight (confront), flight (withdraw), freeze (don't move) or fawn (try to please).

However, stress is not always negative since like any challenge in life, it can motivate individuals to learn, develop new strengths and skills, persevere, take action, and perform

4   IFRC. (2001). *Psychological support: Best practices from Red Cross and Red Crescent programmes.* [pdf] Geneva: IFRC. Available at: www.sld.cu/galerias/pdf/sitios/desastres/psychological_support.pdf [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].
5   McKay, L. (2007). *Understanding and coping with traumatic stress: Online training module one.* [pdf] Pasadena: Headington institute. Available at: www.headington-institute.org/files/understanding-and-coping-with-traumatic-stress_module-1-copy_82697.pdf [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

better. Responding well to life's challenges and stressors, with support from friends and colleagues, reflects and produces resilience.

Stress can look different in everyone, and it is helpful to identify what circumstances in life can contribute to stress. How each individual responds to stress depends on his/her background, values, experiences and current level of perceived support. It is important to note that positive events can also create stress, as seen in the following stress test created by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe.[6]

The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory

Instructions: Go through the list below and mark each statement that is relevant to your life in the previous twelve months. On a separate piece of paper, write down the mean value that is associated with that statement and add up all your points.

Life event	Mean value
1. Death of spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital separation from mate	65
4. Detention in jail or other institution	63
5. Death of a close family member	63
6. Major personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Being fired at work	47
9. Marital reconciliation with mate	45
10. Retirement from work	45
11. Major change in the health or behavior of a family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sexual difficulties	39
14. Gained a new family member (i.e. birth, adoption, older adult moving in, etc.)	39
15. Major business readjustment	39
16. Major change in financial state (i.e. a lot worse or better off than usual)	38
17. Death of a close friend	37
18. Changing to a different line of work	36

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6   Holmes, T. and Rahe, *R. Holmes-Rahe stress inventory*. [online] The American Institute of Stress (AMS). Available at: www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory/ [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

Life event	Mean value
19. Major change in the number of arguments with spouse (i.e. either a lot more or a lot less than usual regarding child rearing, personal habits, etc.)	35
20. Taking on a mortage (for home, business, etc.)	31
21. Foreclosure on a mortage or loan	30
22. Major change in responsibilities at work (i.e. promotion, demotion, etc.)	29
23. Son or daughter leaving home (marriage, attending college, joined military)	29
24. In-law troubles	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Spouse beginning or ceasing work outside home	26
27. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
28. Major change in living conditions (new home, remodeling, deterioration of neighborhood or home)	25
29. Revision of personal habits (dress manners, associations, quitting smoking)	24
30. Troubles with the boss	23
31. Major change in working hours or conditions	20
32. Changes in residence	20
33. Changing to a new school	20
34. Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19
35. Major change in church activitiy (i.e. a lot more or less than usual)	19
36. Major change in social activities (clubs, movies, visiting, etc.)	18
37. Taking on a loan (car, tv, freezer, etc.)	17
38. Major change in sleeping habits (a lot more or less than usual)	16
39. Major change in number of family get-togethers	15
40. Major change in eating habits (a lot more or less food intake, or very different hours or sourrundings)	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Major holidays	12
43. Minor violations of the law (traffic, tickerts, jaywalking, disturbing the peace)	11
Total score:	

Interpretation guidelines:

150 or less	It means a relatively low amount of life change and a low susceptibility to stress-induced health breakdown.
150 - 300	It implies about a 50% chance of a major health breakdown in the next 2 years.
300 or more	It raises the odds to about 80%, according to the Holmes-Rahe prediction model.

Stressors in your life

Below is a list of stressors found in humanitarian settings, and a description of stressors in peace operations. Which of these stressors can you identify in your own life now?

Stressors in humanitarian settings[7]

- Difficult living conditions
- Heavy workload or inactivity
- Relationships/communication: cultural differences, lack of space and privacy, personality conflicts
- Lack of leisure activities, social or cultural life
- Insecurity: war/security incidents, target for attack or robbery
- Threat to well-being/health risks: living under security constraints, threat of after-effects or reoccurrence of disaster, risk of accidents and illnesses, lack of medical infrastructure
- Challenges to a person's values, ideals and beliefs: exposure to acute consequences of war, disasters or human carnage; exposure to the on-going suffering and trauma of victims; corruption, ambiguous situations or motivations; hostility of beneficiaries/ unmet needs of beneficiaries
- Stress related to one's family: problems and lack of communication with family back home; missing loved ones
- Coming home: communication with family, friends, and colleagues; going back to ordinary life
- Financial instability: worry about future job opportunities

Stressors in peace operations

…peacekeeping stressors include witnessing trauma, being the subject of attacks, interpersonal conflicts, the lack of mission amenities, the multinational dimension of peacekeeping, the frustrations of not understanding the local population, despair at preventable death, and not being able to help everyone…Stressors could be categorized as stemming from mission environment or from individuals' values. Generally they revolve around cultural adjustment, language frustrations, sharing personal space, never being alone, boredom, feeling powerless when problems arise at home, social injustices, and civilians and military having to work with each other. How, and to what degree, someone responds to stressors depends largely on the person's own background, experiences, and values, as well as the support provided by his or her colleagues or organization. Few peacekeepers are fully prepared for the impact stressors will have on them psychologically,

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[7]   Adapted from: IFRC. (2009). *Managing stress in the field*. 4th ed. [pdf] Geneva: IFRC, p. 5. Available at: ifrc.org/Global/Publications/Health/managing-stress-en.pdf [Accessed 30 Nov 2016].

and often they are not aware of the impact until much later…The mission environment… might include renegade soldiers, the distant sound of artillery fire, the fear of snipers, knowing that the enemy is not always in uniform, or the possibility of driving over landmines.[8]

Body	Mind
headaches, frequent infections, taut muscles, muscular twitches, fatigue, skin irritations, breathlessness	worrying, muddled thinking, impaired judgement, nightmares, indecisions, negativity, hasty decisions

Stress

loss of confidence, more fussy, irritability, depression, apathy, alienation, apprehension, anger	accident prone, loss of appetite, loss of sex drive, drinking more, insomnia, restlessness, aggression, smoking more
Emotions	Behavior

Figure 1: Stress symptoms

Short questionnaire about stress

This short questionnaire[9] in Table 1 is intended for personnel in humanitarian settings. It aims to help individuals get a sense of their present stress levels.

Instructions: Rate each of the following items in terms of how much the symptom was true of you in the last month. Add your scores and then refer to the general interpretation guidelines at the end of the questionnaire.

	Never (score 1)	Once a month (score 2)	Often (score 3)	Always (score 4)
1. I feel tense and nervous				
2. I have physical aches and pains				

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[8]   Downie, S. (2002). Peacekeepers and peace-builders under stress. In: Y. Danieli (ed.) *Sharing the front line and the back hills: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers, and the media in the mist of crisis*, 1st ed. New York: Baywood, pp.12-13.

[9]   Ehrenreich, J. (2009). Short questionnaire on stress. In: IFRC (ed.) *Managing stress in the field*, 4th ed. [pdf] Geneva: IFRC, pp.16-17. Available at: www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory/ [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

	Never (score 1)	Once a month (score 2)	Often (score 3)	Always (score 4)
3. I am always tired, physically and mentally				
4. The smallest noise makes me jump				
5. My work no longer interests me				
6. I act impulsively and take a lot of risks				
7. I can't get distressing events out of my mind				
8. I am sad and feel like crying				
9. I am less efficient				
10. I have troubles planning and thinking clearly				
11. I have difficulties in sleeping				
12. Doing even routine things is an effort				
13. I am cynical or very critical				
14. I have bad dreams or nightmares				
15. I am irritable, minor inconveniences or demands annoy me a lot				
16. I am spending more time at work (hours/days) than initially				
Sub-totals:				
Total score:				

Interpretation guidelines:

Under 20	Your state of stress is normal, given the working conditions.
21 - 35	You may be suffering from stress and should take it easy. Discuss with your manager and look for ways to reduce your stress level.
36 or more	You may be under severe stress. Ask for help from someone close to you and/or from your supervisor, manager, health officer, a stress counsellor or contact your medical doctor.

1.1.1 Types of stress

Here are some of the types of stress that can affect personnel in crisis situations.[10] These definitions have been selected to give a picture of the complete stress continuum (more on this continuum in Appendix 2). Further discussion on the 'stress' of crisis personnel can also be found in Module 3, Lesson 3.1.

Basic stress is an individual's 'baseline' or underlying stress. This may be caused by various 'ordinary' sources of personal, family and social tensions. It may also be increased by changes in the day-to-day environment, and normally decreases within a few hours, days or weeks of a new assignment.

Cumulative stress results from the prolonged exposure to work and non-work stress factors such as heavy workload, poor communications, the frustration of not being able to meet the needs of the local/community population, having to cope with situations in which one feels powerless, lack of basic comforts, and inability to rest or relax. In most circumstances, this can be managed adequately by people themselves, individually or together with peers, but in more stressful situations such as disasters and armed conflict, cumulative stress can escalate quickly and exhaust normal coping mechanisms for stress. Note that the key to identifying cumulative stress is changes in an individual's behaviour.

Common signs of cumulative stress include:

- Physical symptoms: overtiredness, diarrhoea, constipation, headaches, abdominal and back pains, sleeping disorders, appetite changes
- Emotional signs: anxiety, frustration, guilt, mood swings, undue pessimism or optimism, irritability, crying spells, nightmares, apathy, depression
- Mental signs: forgetfulness, poor concentration, poor job performance, negative attitude, loss of creativity and motivation, boredom, negative self-talk, paranoid thoughts
- Relational signs: feeling isolated, resentful or intolerant of others, loneliness, marriage problems, nagging, social withdrawal, anti-social behaviour
- Behavioural changes: increased alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use, change in eating

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[10]   IFRC. (2009). *Managing stress in the field*. 4th ed. [pdf] Geneva: IFRC. Available at: ifrc.org/ Global/Publications/Health/managing-stress-en.pdf [Accessed 30 Nov 2016].

habits or sexual behaviour, increase in risky behaviour, hyperactivity, avoidance of situations, cynical attitudes
- Challenges to belief systems: feeling of emptiness, doubt in religious beliefs, feeling unforgiven, looking for magical solutions, loss of purpose of life, needing to prove self-worth, cynicism about life
- In a team, the following group reactions may be the effect of cumulative stress: anger towards managers, lack of initiative, clique formation (inner and outer 'circle'), conflict between groups, high turnover of personnel, negative attitude towards workplace, critical attitudes towards colleagues, scapegoat mentality

Culture stress is the normal experience of adjusting to the demands and ways of doing things in a new culture (including national, multinational, and organizational cultures).

Culture shock however is much more intense. It is the overwhelming experience of anxiety, confusion, value dissonance, discouragement, and identity confusion that results from trying to get one's needs, wishes, and preferences met in unfamiliar or unavailable ways in a new culture(s). It is usually understood to be a 'normal and temporary' experience in a new setting and minimized by pre mission orientation, previous cross-cultural experiences, and active involvement in the new culture. (Many people experience unexpected culture shock when re-settling into their home culture. The expectation that things will feel normal leads to frustrations and disappointment when an individual has to adjust to the natural evolution of culture, language and personal development.)

Burnout is related to an accumulation of chronic, unresolved stress over time, from overwork, too high expectations/disappointments, exposure to problems, poor self-care and social support, etc. leading to incapacitating emotional distress and behavioural dysfunction.

> ## Are you burned out?

You may find it interesting to complete the questionnaire on the next page from the Headington Institute to find out if you are having signs of burnout.

Please note: This scale is not a clinical diagnostic instrument and is provided for educational purposes. It merely identifies some of the more common symptoms of burnout. If you have any concerns about your state of emotional health, you should consult with a mental health professional.

Instructions: In the last month, how often has the following been true for you?
Write the number that best fits your experience after each question.
0 = Never   1 = Seldom   2 = Sometimes   3 = Often   4 = Always

Question	Ranking
1. I feel tired or sluggish much of the time, even when I'm getting enough sleep	
2. I find that I am easily annoyed by other people's demands & stories about their daily activities	
3. I feel detached, & like I don't really care about the problems & needs of other people	
4. I am having more and more trouble being interested in my work	
5. I feel sad	
6. I have become absent-minded. I forget appointments, deadlines & personal possessions	
7. I find myself avoiding people and don't even enjoy being around close friends & family members	
8. I feel drained; even routine activities are an effort	
9. I've been experiencing physical problems like stomachaches, headaches, lingering colds, & general aches & pains	
10. I have sleeping problems	
11. I have difficulty making decisions	
12. I feel burdened by responsibilities & pressures	
13. I have little enthusiasm for work and when I think about my work my feelings are mostly negative	
14. At work, I consistently fall short of expectations that I have for myself or that others have for me. I'm less efficient than I feel I should be	
15. I've been eating more (or less), smoking more cigarettes, or using more alcohol or drugs	
16. I feel like I can't solve the problems assigned to me at work	
17. I feel like my work is insignificant/doesn't make a difference	
18. I feel 'used' & unappreciated at work	
19. I get easily frustrated & irritable over small inconveniences	
20. I have trouble concentrating & completing tasks at work	
21. I feel like I have too much (or too little) to do at work	
22. I work long hours (more than 10/day) or don't have at least 1 day off work each week	
23. I find myself involved with conflicts at work or with family	
24. I have trouble caring about whether I complete my work or do it well	
25. I feel like my coworkers are largely incompetent/not doing their jobs well	
Total score:	

Interpretation guidelines:

0 - 25	A score in this range suggests that you're probably in good shape and experiencing little burnout.
26 - 50	A score in this range suggests that you may be experiencing low to moderate degree of burnout.
51 - 75	A score in this range suggests that you may be experiencing moderate to high degree of burnout.
76 - 100	A score in this range suggests that you may be experiencing a very high degree of burnout.

Compassion fatigue is a special type of **burnout,** experienced by those who deal with people's problems, characterized by physical and mental tiredness and a lack of motivation to be in a helping role.

Traumatic stress is caused by events that are shocking and emotionally overwhelming situations that may involve actual or threaten death, serious injury, or threat to physical integrity.[11] Such events are generally, but not necessarily, outside the range of usual experience: life is perceived to be under immediate threat, and the individual feels out of control, or he/she witnesses or is subject to an extreme stressor such as violence or a disaster. On occasion this can lead to more serious psychological difficulties. Immediately after a traumatic event, most psychological responses show up relatively promptly. For some they range from mild and transient, whilst for others they can be extremely strong and disabling. **Primary traumatic stress** results from directly experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. **Secondary or vicarious traumatic stress** (see below) results from interacting with, or helping, people who have been exposed to traumatic experiences.

Vicarious trauma is caused by exposure to often large numbers of traumatized and vulnerable populations. Vicarious trauma relates to the psychological impact on individuals indirectly exposed to some traumatic event.[12] Exposure to fatalities, grief, loss, large-scale disasters, human atrocity, and extreme violence and brutality often results in hearing detailed, and at times harrowing, stories. For crisis personnel there is risk of vicarious trauma even though they themselves have had no direct exposure to traumatic events. Vicarious trauma can sometimes cause initial distress and disturbance that can be strong enough to impact on daily functioning. Vicarious trauma is often linked with compassion fatigue and burnout.[13]

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur after exposure to an extreme stressor(s) where there is the threat to self or others of death, serious injury or sexual violence. It is accompanied by intense fear, helplessness, and/or horror. The traumatic event(s) can be persistently re-experienced through internalized negative beliefs, and through

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[11]   International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS). (2015). *What is traumatic stress?* [online] Available at: www.istss.org/public-resources/what-is-traumatic-stress.aspx [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

[12]   Pearlman, L. (2014). *Transforming vicarious trauma*. [video online] Headington Institute: YouTube. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXuCBnX23Po [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

[13]   See: American Counseling Association. *Vicarious trauma fact sheet #9*. [online] Available at: www.counseling.org/docs/trauma-disaster/fact-sheet-9---vicarious-trauma.pdf?sfvrsn=2 [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

four broad types of symptoms:[14]

- Intrusive and distressing recollections, dreams, or flashbacks
- Psychological and physiological distress when reminded of the stressor
- Avoidance of things associated with the stressor
- Persistent symptoms of heightened anxiety such as difficulty falling asleep, irritability, hyper-vigilance, and difficulty with concentration

These symptoms usually occur within one month of experiencing the traumatic event, although 'delayed expression' of symptoms can also occur.[15]

Types of stress

17 months ago, Joseph, a 31-year old physical therapist, moved his young family to Luanda, Angola. His dream of working with an international NGO was realized and he was excited about the possibility of helping those whose bodies and lives have been damaged by landmines. His supervisor has been critical of how he conducts his intake-interviews with the landmine victims. Although Joseph felt he wanted someone to talk to about the horrific stories he was hearing, he was reluctant to bring this up as he heard his supervisor often yelling at his co-workers. Three weeks ago, he noticed his heart was beating very fast and he felt shaky when he thought of asking his supervisor for time off to look after his young son, after his wife was injured in a car accident. Consider the following questions: From the information given above, would you say Joseph is at risk of burnout, compassion fatigue, cumulative stress, PTSD or vicarious trauma? Give your reasons. If possible, discuss your findings with others. Do their conclusions match your own?

1.1.2 Positive and negative stress

Stress is not always negative; it can be profoundly positive and can promote growth and development. The differences between positive stress (eustress) and negative stress (distress) are summarized below.

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[14]   WHO and UNHCR. (2015). *mhGAP humanitarian intervention guide (mhGAP-HIG): Clinical management of mental, neurological and substance use conditions in humanitarian emergencies.* [pdf] Geneva: WHO, p. 28. Available at: apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/162960/1/9789241548922_eng.pdf [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

[15]   APA. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders.* 5th ed. Arlington: DSM V APA, pp. 271-273.

| Positive stress (eustress)	Negative stress (distress)
• Improves performance • Perceived to be within normal coping abilities • Motivational • Focuses energy and resources • Exciting • Rewarding • Is short-term	• Reduces performance • Perceived to be outside normal coping abilities • De-motivational • Draining of energy and resources • Unpleasant and uncomfortable • Can lead to mental and physical health problems • Can be long-term
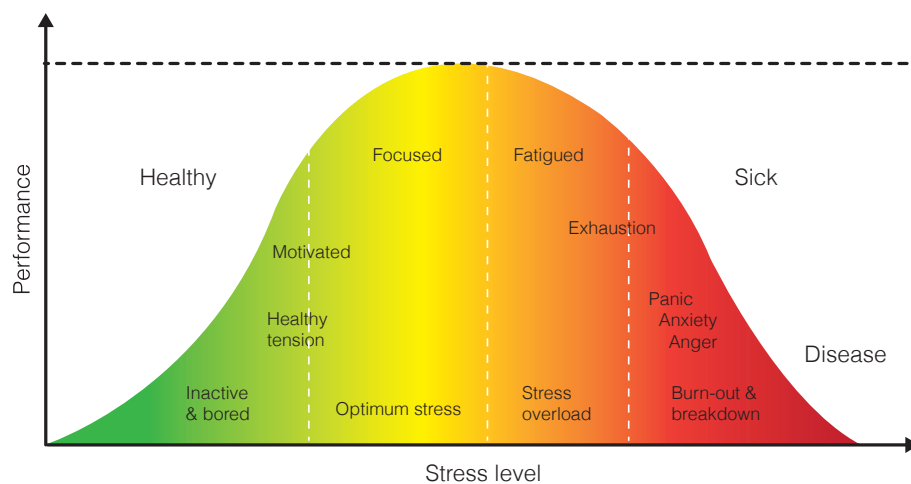
Figure 2: Yerkes-Dodson stress curve[16]

The stress curve in Figure 2 relates stress levels to performance levels, and shows how rapidly performance declines from a high if anyone is pushed (or pushes him/herself) into stress overload - with potentially serious consequences for his/her health, well-being and even employment.

The mindset of those in the optimum stress zone is often connected to hope and optimism, while the overloaded zone tends to be characterized by thoughts that are rooted in helplessness and hopelessness.

This stress curve shows that stress becomes negative when it goes on too long, is too severe or occurs too often. All living systems are designed to have periods of activity and rest. When this natural cycle is out of balance, bodies and minds become susceptible to experiencing either extremes of the stress curve.

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16   Yerkes, R.M. and Dodson, J.D. (1908). The Relationship of Strength of Stimulus to Rapidity of Habit Formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*, 18, pp. 459-482.

1.1.3 Window of tolerance

Experiences, values, background and level of perceived support all influence how an individual experiences events and gives them meaning. Perception is also influenced by factors such as a person's level of hunger, tiredness, isolation and mood. A useful way of understanding how well an individual is able to cope with stressors is to imagine a window of tolerance. Developed by Pat Ogden and Minton in 2000, using this concept highlights the fact that responses to stress are not static, but change continuously. Figures 3 shows the range of arousal over time within which an individual functions well, or even optimally. However, the upper and lower levels of tolerance itself can shift depending on many factors, as already mentioned.
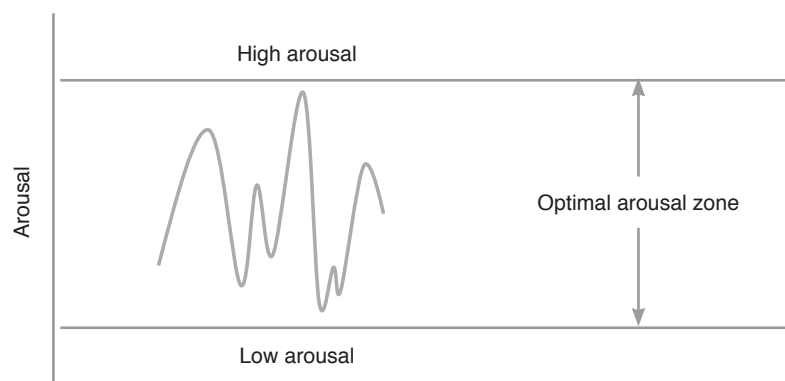

Figure 3: Window of tolerance - optimum arousal

When any individual is under too much duress, stress, or feels overwhelmed, he/she may exceed the upper or lower level of tolerance. At the same time, his/her window of tolerance may shrink, thus causing him/her to experience hyper-arousal of the fight/flight response, or the hypo-arousal of the freeze/collapse response.
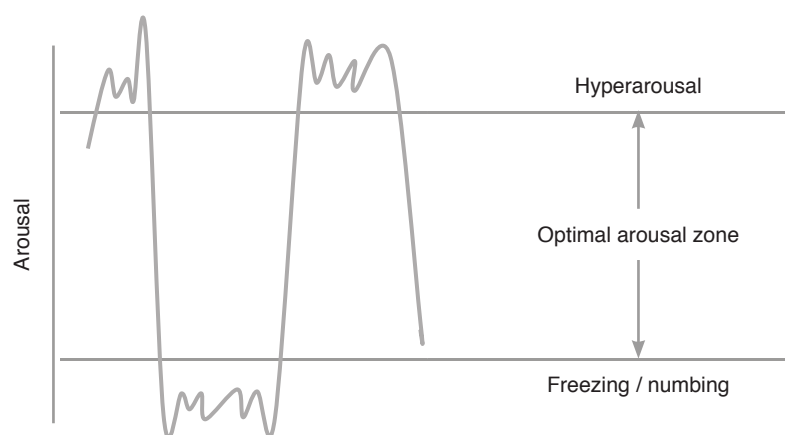

Figure 4: Window of tolerance - arousal exceeding upper and lower levels

HYPER-AROUSED
Fight / flight response

Anxiety, overwhelmed, chaotic responses, outbursts (emotional or aggressive), anger / aggression / rage, rigidity, obsessive - compulsive behavior or thoughts, over-eating / restricting, addictions, impulsivity

CAUSES TO GO OUT OF THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE:

Fear of unconscious thoughts, feelings — it is unsafe, I do not exist, abandonment, rejection
Trauma-related core beliefs about self are triggered - emotional dysregulation occurs

Widening the window for psychological flexibility

**COMFORT ZONE
EMOTIONALLY REGULATED**

Calm, cool, collected, connected

**ABILITY TO SELF-SOOTHE
ABILITY TO REGULATE EMOTIONAL STATE**

Staying within the window allows for better relationship interactions

TO STAY WITHIN THE WINDOW:

Mindfulness - being present, in here and now, techniques for self-soothing, calming the body and emotional regulation, deep slow breathing, recognize limiting beliefs, counter with positive statements about self, new choices

Feign death response, dissociation, not present, unavailable / shut down, memory loss, disconnected, auto-pilot, no display of emotions / flat, separation from self, feelings and emotions
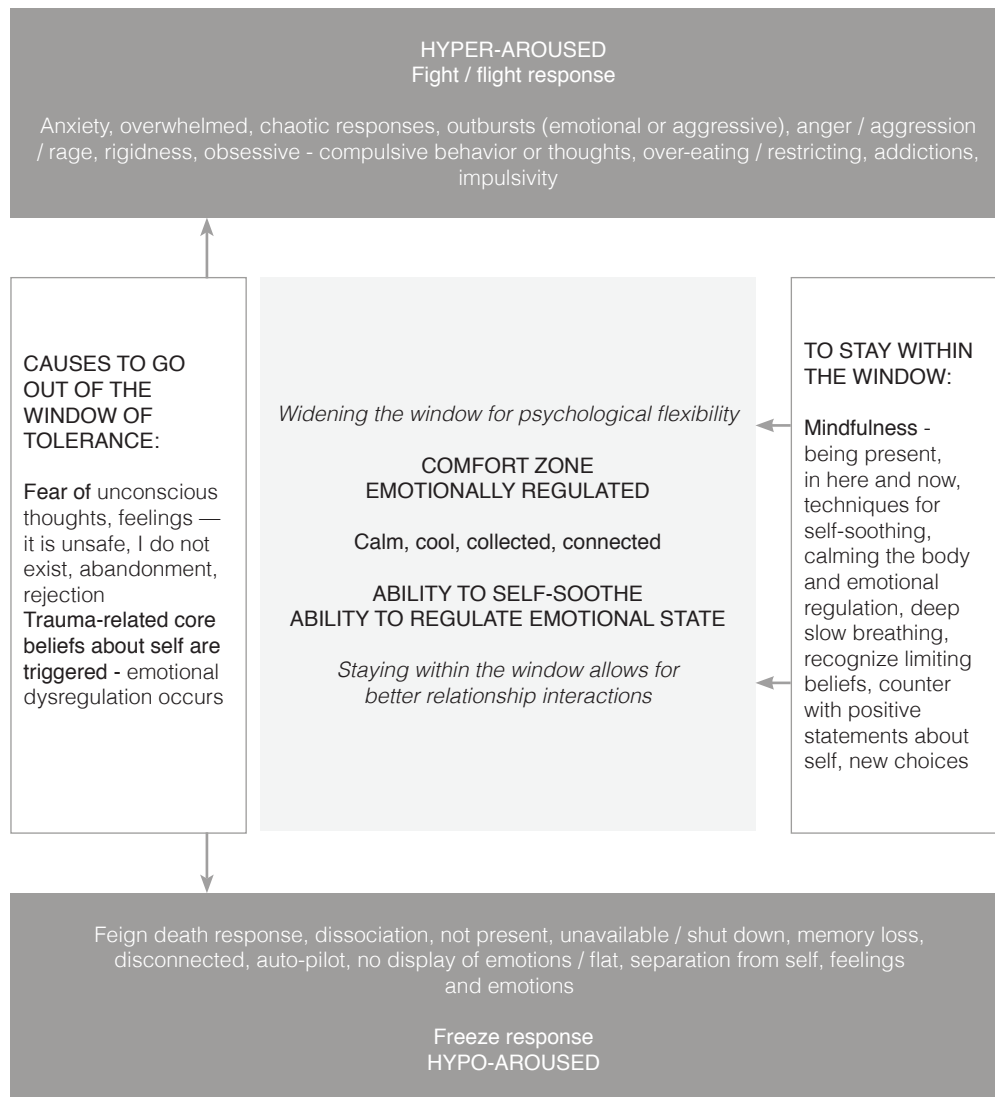
**Freeze response
HYPO-AROUSED**

Figure 5: Window of tolerance - widening the comfort zone for increased flexibility

Figure 5 explains the dynamics of getting into hyper- or hypo-arousal, as well as some techniques for staying within one's window of tolerance.

1.1.4 Reactions to stress and trauma

People can often have strong reactions following a traumatic event. These reactions are usually temporary. Some of the common reactions during the first hours after an event may be:

- Shock, disbelief, feeling of being overwhelmed
- Strong emotional reaction or detachment
- Confusion, difficulty in making decisions
- Physical reactions: nausea, dizziness, intense fatigue, sleeping difficulties, muscle tremors

Additional reactions during the first days and weeks may be:

- Persistent, intrusive recollections (flashbacks) of the incident, nightmares
- Tendency to avoid certain aspects of the incident (places, thoughts, emotions, activities)
- Hyper-alertness accompanied by a startle reflex, quick temper and sleeping problems

All these stress reactions, however worrying they may be, are normal consequences of a critical incident and a high stress level. Even the most robust, experienced crisis personnel can experience them.

Stress and families: Stress in one family member impacts the family as a whole. Multiple geographic transitions for many different missions are common sources of stress. Learning how to navigate transitions well by crisis personnel and their families is an important skill to develop. For more practical help in this, see the resource section on the Families in Global Transition web site[17] (e.g. 'moveable marriages', family culture shock, repatriation). The American Psychological Association (APA)[18] affirms that the ways a parent manages stress serve as a model for how their children will manage stress. By modelling a balanced lifestyle and promoting open communication about stress, it is possible to involve families in stress management in a manner that builds family relationships and is beneficial for both the peacekeeper and their families.

Stigmatization: Many humanitarian aid workers and peace operations personnel, even after recognizing that they suffer from nightmares, lack of focus, irritability and worsening personal relationships, are very reluctant to seek help. They are afraid of the stigma attached to mental

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[17]   FIGT. (2015). *Moving and living abroad: A complete handbook for families.* [Blog] Families in Global Transition (FIGT). Available at: www.figt.org [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].
[18]   APA. (2010). *Managing stress for a healthy family.* [online] American Psychological Association (APA). Available at: www.apa.org/helpecnter/managing-stress.aspx [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

ill health, which the wider society perceives as a mark of shame, and with disapproval. The fear that they will be ridiculed, seen as weak, and confront rejection, means that they often try harder to disconnect from their feelings, but end up being disconnected from themselves and those who are important to them. Creating this armour of denial leads to the perpetuation of the 'cowboy' culture that many crisis workers come across or experience themselves around the globe.

Most humans will do anything, including suffering pain, in order to not feel shame. This presents a significant problem when someone is experiencing burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or PTSD. The need to avoid being ashamed of oneself and feeling shamed by others keeps many from accessing the support they need to find relief and healing. Others may feel afraid of repercussions from either a perpetrator or a supervisor if they make known the abuse or violence they have endured. Furthermore, the widely held stigma that seeing a mental health professional means that one is 'crazy', keeps many people from seeking help. The person who is suffering from stress and trauma symptoms may not trust that the mental health professional will maintain confidentiality. Organizations often respond when someone has reached a crisis level and is no longer able to function, which can often be quite costly with evacuations and hospitalizations. It is recommended that organizations support their staff to regularly self-assess their level of stress and trauma, and then respond pro-actively rather than reactively.

Managing stress within families

Having read the APA information on managing stress within families (referenced below), which methods do you consider to be most relevant for you when you are posted in the field, as well as for when you are back home? If you have been through the transitions of multiple missions and have had to carry on long-distance relationships, do you have other observations to add? List them and if you are part of a group, bring them up for discussion to share with others.

Going further: For more information on supporting family members, see the practical training module from the Headington Institute/Lisa McKay.[19]

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[19]   McKay, L. (2009). *Family matters: Self-care for family members of humanitarian workers*. [pdf] Pasadena: Headington Institute. Available at:
www.headington-institute.org/files/family-matters-moduletemplate2_edited_85407.pdf   [Accessed   30 Nov. 2016].

How do you know when you are experiencing stress?

How do you know when you are experiencing stress? What are some of the signs that you notice in yourself - physically, emotionally, relationally, mentally? If there is an opportunity, this may be something that you can discuss in a group with colleagues. When was the last time that you went through a significant period of stress? Did you realise this at the time? What were some of the things you did to help yourself?

Optimizing self-care based on coping styles

Watch the video: Optimizing your self-care based on your coping style[20], produced by the Headington Institute. This video helps you understand three types of coping styles in response to high stress and/or critical incidents. Understanding your coping style in response to stress can help you more effectively 'recharge' and 'restore' on a daily basis to stay healthy. Which style or styles do you typically use?

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[20]   Ashimoto, F.C. (2015). *Optimizing your self-care based on your coping style.* [Blog] Headington Institute. Available at: www.headington-institute.org/blog-home/448/optimizing-your-self-care-based-on-your-coping-style [Accessed 30 Nov. 2016].

1.2 Managing stress

I've managed my stress levels pretty well in the past. But we saw some really horrible things in the places where I worked. I've seen rotting bodies. I've seen people who died of dysentery and cholera in the camps. How do you process that?… That's not the norm. We're not prepared for that…it pushed me to my limit in terms of trying to manage those experiences while in the middle of it. As a result of those experiences I attended stress management and stress debriefing courses which helped me a lot…[21]

As previously mentioned, stress is a reaction to circumstances that can either have positive or negative impacts on well-being and functioning. Everyone responds differently to stress, and stress itself varies in intensity and type. However, regardless of the origin or specifics of the stress, there are some helpful pointers for how to manage stress.

The care an individual takes of his/her body can impact how that individual's body then responds to stress. For instance, eating balanced meals, getting adequate sleep, exercising regularly, maintaining personal hygiene, and limiting the use of alcohol and tobacco, provides the body with the resources to deal with stress in a more productive way. Additionally, the following activities can be beneficial when managing stress: making use of leisure time and hobbies, staying in communication with family and colleagues, taking advantage of training opportunities, seeking out counselling, and maintaining spirituality. In times of stress, it is important to support oneself and others by recognizing signs of stress and using/referring to supportive resources such as stress counsellors. In both Module 4 and Module 5 there is also discussion on colleagues using a peer-to-peer support approach (also known as the Buddy System) to offer each other psychological support.

Stress management training is both useful and strategic for crisis personnel. Stress management is a skill that will help at all stages of field operations. It begins with understanding the nature and impact of stress and the types of stressors an individual is likely to experience in the field. Then the individual needs to monitor his/her stress levels and use practical tools for dealing with stress (e.g. breathing exercises, peer support, on-going balanced lifestyle). As the following quote states, training UN peacekeepers in different disciplines, such as stress management, enhances their effectiveness when other lives rely on their responses in stressful situations.

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[21]   McLeod, H. (1998). Staying Sane and Healthy in an Insane Job: How One Relief Worker Kept Her Wits. *Together*, p. 16.

UN peacekeeping is continuously evolving. Peacekeepers face new challenges that arise from an ever-growing list of tasks mandated by the Security Council and complex, difficult political and operational environments. All peacekeeping personnel - military, civilian, international and national - must have the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform their duties. The selection of qualified personnel for deployment in peacekeeping operations is a critical factor in mandate implementation. But the unique nature of UN peacekeeping makes training in a variety of disciplines essential in all phases of peacekeeping, from pre-deployment through transition and drawdown. Peacekeeping training by troop- and police-contributing countries, and by the UN itself, is a strategic investment in enhancing peacekeeping as a tool for advancing key UN objectives as reflected in the Organization's Charter: peace, security, human rights and 'better standards of life in larger freedom.'[22]

Self-care and life-style balance inventory

Please note: This scale, designed by the Headington Institute, is not a clinical diagnostic instrument and is provided for educational purposes. It merely examines some of the more effective physical, psychological and spiritual methods of staying balanced and preventing burnout. If you have any concerns about your state of emotional health, you should consult with a mental health professional[23].

Instructions: In a typical month, how often has the following been true for you? For each question, write the number that best fits your experience on the line after the question using the following guide:

0 = Almost never 1 = Seldom 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Almost always

Question	Ranking
1. I have at least one full day off work each week	
2. I take some time for myself to be quiet, think, meditate, write and/or pray	
3. I work no more than eight hours a day when not in the field	
4. I exercise for at least 25 minutes five days a week	
5. I do something I find fun (e.g. play a game, go to a movie, read a book etc.)	

[22]   ITS. (2013). *Training: A strategic investment in UN peacekeeping. Global peacekeeping training needs assessment, final report 2012-2013*. [pdf] New York: Integrated Training Services (ITS). Available at: repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/89581/2012-2013%20Global%20TNA%20Report. pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

[23]   Adapted from: Headington Institute. (2015). *Self-care and lifestyle balance inventory (self test)*. [online] Pasadena: Headington Institute. Available at: www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/286/ self-care-and-lifestyle-balance-inventory-self-test [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

Question	Ranking
6. I practice muscle relaxation, yoga, stretching, meditation or slow-breathing	
7. I share how I am feeling with at least one friend or my partner	
8. I sleep well and get 7-8 hours of sleep a night	
9. I am careful about what I eat and eat a balanced diet	
10. I drink at least two litres of water a day	
11. On balance I have more positive emotional experiences than negative	
12. At the end of the day I can leave the pressure of work behind	
13. I slow down when I am becoming tired, run-down and vulnerable to illness	
14. There are people who care about me that I trust, to whom I can talk if I want	
15. I do something I find creative or expressive	
16. I feel I have the training and skills I need to do my job well	
17. I stand up for myself, saying 'no' when I need to	
18. At work I take a brief break every two hours and switch tasks regularly	
19. I spend time with trusted others who are part of a community of meaning and purpose (e.g. church group, community volunteers, work colleagues, book group)	
20. I feel good about my ability to communicate with others	
21. I spend my time and energy doing what is really important to me in life	
22. I believe in my ability to accomplish goals, even when I encounter difficulties	
23. I set realistic goals for my life and work towards them	
24. I take good vacations	
25. I am able to let go of mistakes I have made	
26. I am able to manage conflict constructively	
27. I am able to let go of grudges	
28. I drink more than 1-2 alcoholic drinks, smoke, or use other recreational drugs most days (1) 3-6 times a week (2) less than 3 times a week (3) almost never	
Total score:	

Interpretation guidelines:

From 0 to 29   A score in this range suggests that your self-care skills
                     and lifestyle balance strategies may be poor, and that you
                     could probably benefit from developing a plan to change
                     your lifestyle and improve your self-care.

From 30 to 59	A score in this range suggests that your self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies may be average, and that you could possibly benefit from developing a plan to improve your self-care, especially if you have more stress than is typical for an adult.
From 60 to 84	A score in this range suggests that you may have good self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies in place, but could benefit from preparing for times of high stress by adding some additional practices.
85 and above	A score in this range suggests that you may have good self-care skills and lifestyle balance strategies in place for building resilience.

Based on your results, list a few practical ways that you can improve your self-care. What are a few of the main things that you already do that help you stay healthy and balanced? Can you increase or enhance any of these activities?

Breathing exercise

This exercise[24] is a stress management tool. It helps you to slow down your respiratory rhythm so that you feel more relaxed, physically and mentally. After a stressful experience this exercise can also help you to calm down, reduce anxiety, and lessen any other symptoms of stress.

- Sit with your feet well-grounded on the floor and your body muscles as relaxed as possible
- Breathe in slowly, without forcing, as if inhaling through a straw or a flute while counting from one to five until your lungs are filled. Hold the air briefly
- Then breathe out slowly, without forcing, as if expiring through a straw by counting down from five to one
- Pause briefly with your lungs empty, and then repeat the entire breathing exercise again until you are feeling calm

You can also think of something peaceful or imagine something beautiful while breathing.

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[24]   IFRC. (2009). Op. cit., p. 19.

Breathing zone app

Download Breathing Zone App[25]. This App is another useful relaxation tool. It guides you in consciously changing your breathing speed and depth.

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[25]   Breathing Zone. (2015). *Breathing zone app.* [online] Breathing Zone. Available at: www. breathing.zone [Accessed 1 Dec 2016]. Also available on AppStore, GooglePlay and Mac Apple Store.

1.3 Strengthening resilience

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I feel the suffering of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out. (Anne Frank[26], August 1944 - shortly before being arrested and taken to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp where she later died from typhus).

Human resiliency is the ability to engage with and grow through life's challenges and adversities. It involves character strengths, social support, coping skills, and core beliefs and values including life purpose and spiritual meaning.

Resilience is necessary to face the challenges in crisis situations and to maintain one's health and effectiveness. Eriksson et al. researched stress, trauma, and burnout for World Vision field staff from over 30 countries. Their findings emphasize the need for resilience:

Staff need to have healthy personal resilience in order to survive and in order to continue contributing to the critical work of their organizations... for each of the mental health risk adjustment measures (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and burnout) 30-50% of staff scored in the moderate to high-risk range. This is a significant number of people who are working and 'surviving' while experiencing considerable emotional distress. These staff may not be incapacitated by these symptoms presently, but we cannot deny the effects that depression, burnout, and PTSD can have on relationships, work, and personal health. An NGO's commitment to people includes the welfare of beneficiaries around the world, but it also includes the well-being of staff who commit their lives to serving and saving others.[27]

Other key factors contributing to personal resilience identified by this study are 'a strong

[26]   Frank, A. (1995). *1947 The diary of a young girl: The definitive edition*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.

[27]   Eriksson, C., Bjork, J. and Abernethy, A. (2003). Occupational stress, trauma and adjustment in expatriate humanitarian workers. In: J. Fawcett, *Stress and trauma handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments*, 1st ed. Monrovia: World Vision, p. 95.

commitment to a positive lifestyle, including healthy physical habits, strong spirituality, adaptive coping, and a strong sense of support from your beliefs, family, and friends.[28]'

Strong social relationships in particular are a key protective factor and a source for resilience:

> One of the most effective ways both to protect and to flourish is to maintain excellent social relationships within and outside the work environment. Our findings suggest that strong relationships afford the best protection in traumatic and stressful environments.[29]

Coping skills are both needed and honed in the refining context of crisis situations. A person can often feel stretched both personally and professionally regardless of his or her level of experience. Some skills can be taught while others are 'caught' in the process of working in demanding settings. Examples of important skills that foster resilience, in addition to stress management, include skills in building positive relationships, communicating cross-culturally, handling interpersonal conflicts, seeking peer support, delaying gratification, using humour, and maintaining optimism.

At certain times, the demands of work can infringe significantly on personal lives. If this continues for too long, or occurs too often, it can result in a diminished ability to be at rest, relax and feel pleasure. If an individual's sense of pleasure lessens, it is crucial for him/her to take stock of how much effort he/she is making in contrast to how much reward is being received from these efforts. The capacity to feel pleasure, including a sense of gratification, is a key factor in maintaining an individual's innate resilience.

Research has shown that an internal locus of control, or having a sense of agency is another key component in resilience. The belief that actions can cause a different outcome leads to an outlook that is positive and hopeful.

> The data shows that exposure to potentially traumatic events does not predict later functioning. It's only predictive if there's a negative response. We can make ourselves more or less vulnerable by how we think about things.[30]

Finally, core beliefs and values (human worth and dignity, sense of duty) and/or a strong personal faith and spirituality (transcendent purpose, meaning, religion) are additional ingredients for resiliency. Wrestling with the tough issues of life - including difficult experiences in humanitarian and peace operations (e.g. death, misery, injustice) - is an important part of the coping process.

> If you become a humanitarian worker you will almost certainly grapple with your own beliefs and expectations, and questions of meaning and purpose. During a workshop I gave recently in Kenya, I asked humanitarian workers from many different organizations what question - any question - they would have answered if such a thing were possible. Almost all the questions people raised were linked to spirituality: Why do innocent children suffer? How does the concept of God fit together with the injustice in this world?

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[28]   Ibid., p. 95.
[29]   Ibid., p. 6.
[30]   Konnikova, M. (2016). How people learn to become resilient. [online] *The New Yorker*. 11th November. Available at: www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/the-secret-formula-for-resilience [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

Why do people turn against each other, and kill each other? I feel like I've lost my own faith - how can I reconnect with my spiritual self? What is the essence of love or of hope?

Thinking through what has challenged us and engaging with these sorts of questions is important. It is important because the answers help give our lives and experiences context, meaning, and purpose. It is important because just asking such questions can help grant perspective and remind us that life is bigger than any particular moment or experience. It is important because the process can help us identify 'soul food' that connects, anchors, refreshes, orients, and encourages us. In the long run, all of this is essential for helping us cope with the challenges of humanitarian work and maintain positive vitality and energy.[31]

Resilience scale

This online tool consists of 25 items, rated on a seven-point scale, related to resilience (e.g. perseverance, following through with plans, purpose, accomplishments, maintaining perspective). It usually takes no more than five minutes to do. After completing it, you will receive immediate and confidential feedback (one paragraph report) that you can print. Be sure to go back over the 25 scale items to identify areas where you are especially low or high. Note that this tool continues to be researched for use with different populations. Hence we encourage you to use your results as a springboard for reflection and growth rather than as an exact measure of your resiliency.[32]

Active relaxation

The tool below[33] involves increasing and then decreasing some physical tension in order to help relax. It can be done while sitting, standing, or lying down.

- To begin, take a few seconds to be aware of your body and any physical sensations
- Breathe in, hold your breath, and strongly tense all the muscles of your face, neck and throat for as long as you can

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[31]   McKay, L. (2010). *Spirituality and humanitarian work: Maintaining your vitality*. [online] Pasadena: Headington Institute. Available at: www.headingtoninstitute.org/files/spiritualitymoduletemplate2_ready_74911.pdf [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].
[32]   See: *The resilience scale*. [online] Available at: http://www.trueresilience.net/briefresiliencescale.aspx [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016]. See also: Windle, G., Bennett, K., and Noyes, J. (2011). A Methodological Review of Resilience Measurement Scales. [online] *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 9(8). Available at: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3042897/ [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].
[33]   Adapted from: IFRC. (2009). Op. cit., p. 19.

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- Breathe out, relaxing all your muscles
- Take a few seconds to observe how you feel
- Breathe in, hold your breath, and tense just your arms and hands
- Breathe out, relaxing all your muscles
- Continue with all the different parts of your body: back, chest, belly, buttocks, legs and feet, one after the other
- At the end, tense all the muscles of your body at the same time, holding your breath for as long as you can
- Breathe out and relax. Observe what is going on in your body
- Remind yourself that, through doing this, you will be able to better recognize physical tension during the course of the day, and to respond in a more relaxed way

List a few examples of how you have developed resilience in the past year. What helps you? List some ways you can use the material in this lesson to support others in your setting.

7-Minute workout

Watch the videos: Scientific 7-Minute Workout and Advanced 7-Minute Workout.[34] This free mobile app offers a step-by-step guide with animated illustrations of the exercises, as well as a timer and audio cues to help you get the most out of your seven minutes. Keeping physically fit is an important way to manage stress and build resilience.

PTSD positive?

Read Jim Rendon's (2012) Post-Traumatic Stress's Surprisingly Positive Flip Side.[35]

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[34]   Reynolds, G. (2015). The scientific 7-minute workout. [Blog] Well Workouts, *The New York Times*. Available at: well.blogs.nytimes.com/projects/workouts/ [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].
[35]   Rendon, J. (2012). Post-traumatic stress's surprising flip side. *The New York Times Magazine*. 22nd March [online]. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/magazine/post-traumatic-stresss-surprisingly-positive-flip-side.html [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

1.4 Organizations' responsibilities

Life is increasingly hazardous for refugees and relief workers alike… Refugees are most in need of assistance at the very same moment when relief (workers) are most exposed to personal danger.[36]

The nature and circumstances of humanitarian relief work warrant preparing workers for trauma and stress in the field, and providing psychological support during service.[37]

…we are first traumatized by our experiences and, subsequently, undergo secondary traumatization by way of neglect/abandonment/denial by our employer, the UN…[38]

Managing stress and developing resilience are not just personal responsibilities. Organizations have major responsibilities too. Organizations such as those in humanitarian and peace operations send personnel into potentially adverse situations and thus have a crucial, ethical responsibility to do all they can to prepare and support them.[39] The very places that are the neediest are also often the riskiest for personnel in peace and humanitarian operations. This thinking is in line with the following principles: 'Human resources are an integral part of our strategic and operational plans;' 'Learning, training, and staff development are promoted throughout the organization;' and 'The security,

[36]   UNHCR. (2000). Too High a Price? [online] *UNHCR Refugees Magazine*, 4(121). Available at: www.unhcr.org/publications/refugeemag/3b69138b2/refugees-magazine-issue-121-high-price-life-increasingly-hazardous-refugees.html#_ga=1.121526728.1396897516.1477308676 [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

[37]   Connorton, E., Perry, M.J., Hemenway, D., et al. (2011). Humanitarian Relief Workers and Trauma-related Mental Illness. *Epidemiologic Reviews, Oxford Journal*, [online]. Available at: epirev. oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/12/15/epirev.mxr026.full [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

[38]   Welton-Mitchell, C.E. (2013). *UNHCR's mental health and psychosocial support*. For staff. [pdf] Geneva: UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service. Available at: www.unhcr.org/51f67bdc9. pdf [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

[39]   HPN. (2010). Operational Security Management in Violent Environments. [pdf] *Good Practice Review*, 8(New ed.). London: Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN). Available at: odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/GPR_8_revised2.pdf [Accessed on 1 Dec. 2016]. See also: Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). (2007). Mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings. [pdf] Geneva: IASC. Available at: who.int/entity/hac/network/interagency/news/iasc_guidelines_mental_health_psychososial.pdf?ua=1 [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

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good health, and safety of our staff are a prime responsibility of our organization.'[40]

> Effective pre-mission training must begin with instilling awareness of the need for security and psychosocial support in the culture of organizations. Patched together, ad hoc, or solely programmatic efforts will have only minimal impact. Security and support must be integrated, both structurally and functionally, into the mainstream of pre-field mission operations; mission planning, staffing, and budgeting.[41]

> National staff do not receive the security and support afforded their international colleagues, including remuneration and insurance, nor are they as respected for their credentials, experience, and knowledge of local culture. Most of all, when missions leave or evacuate, they stay, often in danger to themselves and their families. Indeed, international protectors and providers report feeling outrage, incompleteness, and guilt when locally-recruited colleagues and their families are left to this fate.[42]

Crisis personnel often experience similar organizational stressors. The following quote discusses the contribution that organizational culture can make to the stress of workers.

> [T]he most stressful events in humanitarian work have to do with the organizational culture, management style and operational objectives of an NGO or agency rather than external security risks or poor environmental factors. Aid workers, basically, have a pretty shrewd idea what they are getting into when they enter this career, and dirty clothes, gunshots at night and lack of electricity do not surprise them. Intra-and inter-agency politics, inconsistent management styles, lack of teamwork and unclear or conflicting organizational objectives, however, combine to create a background of chronic stress and pressure that over time wears people down and can lead to burnout and even physical collapse.[43]

Staff management and care by organizations (defined below as 'member care') is also influenced heavily by the way an organization instils values, reinforces certain work habits, and establishes social and work environments. These influences either help or hinder staff adjustment, growth, and performance. Field leaders and managers in particular are influential through their leadership styles, management practices, and the behaviours they model. They too need special support, encouragement, and skills in order to stay healthy and do their work well.[44]

Physical first aid is something many people learn and is seen as essential training for crisis personnel. Psychological first aid (PFA) needs to be elevated to the same status by organizations sending personnel into situations of crisis where PFA is frequently needed. This

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[40]   McKay, L. (2011). *Building resilient managers in humanitarian organizations: Strengthening key organizational structures and personal skills that promote resilience in challenging environments.* [pdf] London: People in Aid. Available at: www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/pubs/resilience(2).pdf [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

[41]   Danieli, Y. (2002). *Sharing the front line and back hills: International protectors and providers – peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers and the media in the midst of crisis.* London: Routledge, p. 383.

[42]   Ibid., p. 386.

[43]   Fawcett, J. (Ed.) (2003). Op. cit., p. 6.

[44]   For more information see: McKay, L. (2011). Op. cit., pp. 25-26 and pp. 40-42. Good member care is thus reflected in a supportive organizational ethos as much as it is in comprehensive organizational programmes for all its members, such as a human resources department.

topic is presented in Module 7.

Member care is synonymous with staff care - care for those who belong to an organization. It is the commitment to provide and develop supportive resources by organizations and workers themselves, for the well-being, protection, development, and effectiveness of personnel. In addition to field personnel, it also focuses on everyone connected to the organization, including home office staff and families. Member care seeks to implement an adequate flow of care from recruitment through end of service. The goal is to develop resilience, skills, character, and mutual support which are key to helping personnel stay healthy and effective in their work. Member care thus involves both developing inner resources (e.g. perseverance, stress tolerance) and providing external resources (e.g. team building, logistical support, skill training). It is guided by the commitment to value staff as humans with intrinsic worth and not just as resources with strategic worth. It is also committed to the integrity of the organization and its purposes in addition to the well-being of staff and their needs.[45]

1.4.1 Supporting organizations to support staff

…the full organizational benefit of attention to stress and trauma management will be gained when learnings and techniques are applied to groups or teams. Programme objectives and organizational plans will be more achievable where aid workers have strong social relationships, are members of cohesive teams, are blessed with consultative leadership, and are adequately skilled to do the job for which they have been employed.[46]

Crisis personnel always serve in cross-cultural settings and are therefore often subject to a variety of extreme stressors. Natural disasters, wars, sudden relocation, imprisonment, sickness, and protracted relationship conflicts are but a few of the examples. The very places that are in most need are often the riskiest for international and national field staff. While self-care and mutual support are foundational for staff well-being, the sending organization plays a central, crucial role. Organizations that send personnel/volunteers (local and international) into potentially adverse situations have an ethical responsibility to do all they can to prepare and support them. This thinking is in line with Principle 7 from the People in Aid Code of Good Practice,[47] which states, 'The security, good health, and safety of our staff are a prime responsibility of our organization.'

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[45]   O'Donnell, K. (2011). *Global member care: The pearls and perils of good practice*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, p. 10.

[46]   Fawcett, J. (Ed.). (2003). Op. cit.

[47]   People in Aid. (2003). Op. cit.

Different responses to the same event

Think of an example of an event that was traumatic for one person, but not as traumatic for another. How can this difference be understood and explained?

The provision of support to mitigate the possible psychosocial consequences of work in crisis situations is a moral obligation and a responsibility of organizations exposing staff to extremes. For organizations to be effective, managers need to keep their staff healthy. A systemic and integrated approach to staff care is required at all phases of employment - including in emergencies and at all levels of the organization to maintain staff well-being and organizational efficiency.[48]

One tool that can help organizations to support their personnel with stress management in crisis situations comes from the Antares Foundation.[49] These widely-used guidelines consist of eight core principles and several key indicators: written policies to prevent and mitigate stress, staff screening and preparation, stress monitoring, on-going support, and support during crises, end of assignment, and post assignment (described below). UNHCR, for example, uses these guidelines in its staff care programme as part of their 'institutional responses…to mitigate distress and enhance resilience of staff in response to stressors encountered during the course of providing humanitarian assistance'.[50]

Leaders, managers, and staff in humanitarian and peace operations can benefit by reviewing these guidelines. They can be used as a grid to understand and improve the formal and informal ways that staff care is practiced. Managers and leaders in particular have influential roles in monitoring stress levels and providing on-going support for staff (Principles 4, 5). Skills in stress management for self and others can be built into training programmes for all staff with additional training for leaders and managers.

Senior leaders in peacekeeping must be capable of integrating the efforts of all components, managing staff and working with colleagues with a wide variety of professional, institutional and cultural backgrounds…effective management in the peacekeeping context requires peacekeeping managers to fully meet the UN managerial competencies (leadership, vision, empowering others, building trust, managing performance and judgment and decision-making).[51]

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48   IASC. (2007). Op. cit., p. 87.
49   Antares Foundation. (2012). *Managing stress in humanitarian workers: Guidelines for good practice*. 3rd ed. Amsterdam: Antares Foundation. Available at: antaresfoundation.org/guidelines#. VOHuXCxIIQM [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].
50   Welton-Mitchell, C.E. (2013). Op. cit., p. 5.
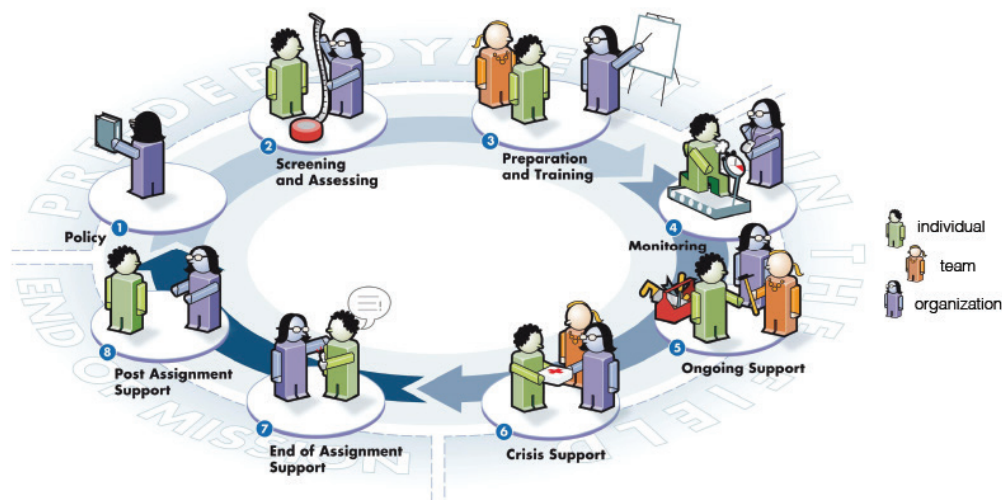51   ITS. (2013). Op. cit.

Figure 6: Managing stress in humanitarian workers – guidelines for good practice. From Antares Foundation

Principle 1: Policy

The agency has a written and active policy to prevent or mitigate the effects of stress. The policy reflects the agency's understanding of the impact of stress on its staff and on the agency's ability to serve its beneficiaries. It integrates staff support into the organization's operational framework. It describes specific policies, programmes, and practices to create a comprehensive supportive environment for all staff. It carries a commitment to examine all aspects of the agency's operations with respect to their effect on managing and mitigating stress in staff. (Note: This principle is especially pertinent for leaders in the UNDPKO and all UN agencies as they provide and develop staff support services, including stress management. It is also relevant to the leadership of larger or smaller NGOs with personnel who often work under highly stressful conditions.)

Principle 2: Screening and assessing

The agency systematically screens and/or assesses the capacity of staff to respond to and cope with the anticipated stresses of a position or contract. Screening of all staff is recommended prior to hiring to ensure that they have the appropriate skills and personal capacities needed for work with the organization. A more thorough assessment, aimed at designing appropriate training, making appropriate assignments, and planning for individual support needs, should be carried out prior to assignment to a specific job or project.

Principle 3: Preparation and training

The agency ensures that all staff has appropriate pre-assignment preparation and training in Psychological First Aid. This preparation includes a briefing on the stress factors anticipated in the specific job or assignment, education about stress and understanding trauma symptoms, and how to manage and reduce their effects, as well as self-assessment tools and exercises.

Principle 4: Monitoring

The agency ensures that staff response to stress is monitored on an on-going basis. Monitoring

can be done through informal observation and periodic routine inquiry by managers, routine administration of questionnaires to staff, or periodic informal or formal group stress evaluation sessions.

Principle 5: On-going support

The agency provides training and support on an on-going basis to help its staff deal with their daily stresses. The agency holds managers accountable for creating a proactive culture of stress reduction, and by creating channels for anonymous feedback on managers' performance. Team building, resolution of team conflict, organizational practices that reduce stress, as well as encouragement of individual staff members' stress management activities are valued and given concrete support. Managers are also aware that staff may experience stress or other forms of emotional distress (e.g. depression) arising from outside the workplace and that this stress also requires support. (Modified from original)

Principle 6: Crisis support and management

The agency provides staff with specific and culturally appropriate support in the wake of critical or traumatic incidents and other unusual and unexpected sources of severe stress. Experiencing a critical or traumatic event very commonly causes lasting distress in those who experience them. Typical responses include, but are not limited to, anxiety, somatic complaints, depression, PTSD, destructive or self-destructive behaviour, and difficulties in interpersonal functioning (e.g. within the team). Even in the absence of direct exposure to a specific horrific experience, repeated exposure to accounts of the gruesome or terrifying experiences of others may cause secondary or vicarious traumatization, which has effects much like those of direct traumatization. In addition, multiple stresses can add up; the effect of experiencing several directly and indirectly traumatic events and other stresses over the course of their service can have an impact on staff greater than that of any individual incident.

Both in the wake of critical incidents and in the context of other sources of severe or repeated stress, a well-implemented organizational response as well as the provision of individual psychosocial support is central. The agency ensures it is promptly informed about any extremely traumatic experience or other severe stressful incident that happens to one or more staff members and it is prepared to respond immediately.

Principle 7: End of assignment support

The agency provides practical, emotional and culturally appropriate support for staff at the end of an assignment or contract. Leaving an assignment, ending employment with an agency, returning home, or transferring to a new assignment can often be an underestimated and challenging experience. Staff members need to be adequately prepared. In some cases, the end of an assignment or contract can be anticipated. In other cases (e.g. after an emergency evacuation) it is completely unexpected. Uncertainties about funding and other operational issues can cause stress, even when, for example, contracts are renewed or projects continue.

Principle 8: Post assignment support

The agency has clear written policies with respect to the on-going support it will offer to staff who have been adversely impacted by exposure to stress and trauma during their assignment. The effects of stress encountered during an assignment do not magically disappear when the staff member ends the assignment. Follow-up by the agency, with referrals to services and development of peer support networks, may reduce the on-going stress. While laws in

many countries may provide a minimal level of protection or support for disabled workers, the agency itself evaluates what support it owes its staff.

Organizational application

Using the eight principles above, list the strengths and weaknesses of the stress management capacity in your current organization.

Workplace strengths

Gallup research identified 12 of the key items that measure the strength of a workplace. The results show that having a strong workplace led by effective managers produces positive experiences needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented staff. The 12 statements below summarize the research[52]. On a scale of 1-5 (low to high) rank each statement below based on your experience in your current workplace. Which items have your lowest and highest scores?

1. I know what is expected of me...	1	2	3	4
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right…	1	2	3	4
3. I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day…	1	2	3	4
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for good work…	1	2	3	4
5. My supervisor, or someone at work seems to care about me as a person…	1	2	3	4
6. Someone at work encourages my development…	1	2	3	4

[52] Adapted from: Buckingham, M. and Coffman, C. (1999). *First, break all the rules: What the world's greatest managers do differently*. New York: Simon and Schuster, pp. 27-29.

7. My opinions at work seem to count…	1	2	3	4
8. The mission of my company makes me feel my job is important…	1	2	3	4
9. My co-workers are committed to doing quality work…	1	2	3	4
10. I have a best friend at work…	1	2	3	4
11. In the last six months, someone has talked with me about my progress…	1	2	3	4
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow...	1	2	3	4
13. I have troubles planning and thinking clearly	1	2	3	4
Total score:				

Slow breathing exercise

Watch the video: Slow Breathing Exercise for Stress Relief (from Changi Hospital in Singapore).[53] This short video introduces another helpful approach to managing stress and increasing relaxation through breathing.

53   SingaporeHealth. (2011). *How to lower stress through slow breathing*. [video online] SingHealth Healthy Living Series. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0lwfu7zycQ [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].

Summary of key messages

- Stress is normal but it can easily become a more serious problem if it is not recognized and dealt with at all levels of management and stages of work, especially in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

- There is a continuum of types of stress that ranges from healthy normal to dangerously destructive. The continuum includes: basic stress, cumulative stress, vicarious trauma, burnout (including compassion fatigue), traumatic stress, and PTSD. There is also culture stress and cultural shock that may occur when someone is adjusting to a culture that is not his/her own.

- It is important to create an organizational culture that acknowledges the reality of stress, the normalcy of stress reactions, and the need for stress management in all work situations, but especially in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Helpers (all personnel) also need help, and taking care of oneself is professional.

- Psychological first aid (PFA) needs to become an essential training for all personnel being sent into situations of crisis. Stress management tools include self-tests to measure exposure and reactions to stressors of all kinds and advice on when and where to seek higher-level advice.

- Managing stress well and developing resilience are both required for effectiveness in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

- Resilience emphasizes using/developing personal strengths as challenges and adversity are faced in everyday life and field operations settings. Resilience is bolstered by both personal strengths and social support: coping skills and on-going learning, perseverance and maintaining perspective, core values and beliefs, and peer and organizational support.

- Mutual support and good organizational management are especially important for mitigating stress and encouraging high performance in humanitarian and peace operations.

- Member care (staff care) is both a mentality and a programme focusing on the well-being and effectiveness of personnel. It is an investment of supportive resources in view of both the intrinsic worth and strategic value of staff.

- Organizations that send their staff into risky areas have an ethical and practical responsibility for the safety and support of their personnel. In peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, this responsibility involves member care programmes that especially emphasize stress management and resiliency development from pre-mission briefings through to post mission debriefings.

Additional resources

Further reading and resources

Downie, S. (2002). Peacekeepers and peace-builders under stress. In: Y. Danieli (ed.) *Sharing the front line and the back hills: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers, and the media in the mist of crisis*, 1st ed. New York: Baywood, pp.12-13.

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McKay, L. (2011). *Building resilient managers in humanitarian organizations: Strengthening key organizational structures and personal skills that promote resilience in challenging environments.* [pdf] London: People in Aid. Available at: www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/pubs/resilience(2).pdf.

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People in Aid. (2003). *Code of good practice for the management and support of aid personnel.* [online] London: People in Aid. Available at: http://www.peopleinaid.org/code/

Sphere Project. (2014). *Core humanitarian standard on quality and accountability.* London: People in Aid, HAP International. Available at: corehumanitarianstandard.org/