

Cross-cultural perspectives on psychosocial issues of humanitarian staff care

Issues for national staff working in humanitarian teams

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- *Humanitarian situations affect national staff in specific ways (trauma, needs, reconciliation etc). Risk and Protection factors*
- Humanitarian interventions occur at the
 1. Early warning,
 2. Emergency, and
 3. Reconstruction phases.
- Values and standards - prescription and description. Employment and staff support

Humanitarian situations affect national staff in specific ways

- survivors and participants in the situations that brought humanitarian teams to their country
- may have psychological or physical sequelae, which require trauma recovery
- may have livelihood, safety & other needs, which need material assistance
- may be implicated as oppressed or oppressors, which raises reconciliation and justice matters
- belong to a family and community systems, which affect allegiances

Local Staff

- Event experienced directly
- a•Trauma reaction
- a•Recovery
- a•Support of others
(work with humanitarian team)
- a# possible vicarious trauma
(affected by other's trauma)
- a# possible re-traumatisation
(own trauma being re-triggered)
- # combined effect may multiplied
- a#stress due to conditions etc

International staff

- Event observed from elsewhere
- a•Support of others
(work with humanitarian team)
- a# possible vicarious trauma
(affected by other's trauma)
- a#possible stress due to overwork, conditions etc

Trauma Recovery Grid

Acts perpetrated	Trauma reaction	Recovery goals
Threats, violence, disappearances	Fear, anxiety, helplessness	Restore safety, enhance self care
Death, isolation, dislocation	Loss of loved ones, grief, depression	Connections to others, emotional care
Exposure to massacres	Loss of trust, view of future, dread, horror	Trusted friends, life meaning, self efficacy
Personal boundaries, impossible choices	Guilt and shame, humiliation, anger	Personal dignity and value

Local staff and trauma recovery

- Often directly affected by experiences during the conflict
- Sometimes recruited with little concern about their need to process what they have been through
- Occasionally put at forefront of stressful work eg human rights investigations, psychological support, health trauma
- Consider trauma recovery issues for local staff for their sake and also because their issues may affect the quality of their work

Stress & trauma

- Cumulative, one difficult experience builds on another, strain to stress to trauma, threshold reached which triggers psychological reaction of intrusions, avoidance, anxiety etc
- Familiarity, accommodation, habituation, desensitise. People in a situation which others may not cope, have a repertoire of experience, strategies which enables them to cope
- Usually both approaches operate with local people

Trauma survivor's reactions

- Victim: Fearful, anxious about making decisions, ineffective, "I'm scared this may happen again"
- Rescuer: Guilty, protective, overwork to fix things for others, "I will save you from having to go through what happened to me"
- Perpetrator: Angry, controlling, bully, "I'm not going to let it get out of control again"

The involvement continuum

Too enmeshed	moving too close	moving away	Too detached
'Crusader' Trying to fix	Wanting to know more and more	Observing faculty Professional	Problem solving rather than

everything Excessive responsibility for people's feelings Overly accommodating of people's difficulties	Empathy Responsibility for reactions of others Advocacy for intervention	detachment Maintaining boundaries Involvement in a range of activities	listening, Cynicism Minimizing contact Blaming survivors
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Hierarchy of needs

1. food, water, shelter - physical survival
safety and security
sense of belonging, affiliation, supportive relationships, and care
sense of esteem, respect, recognition, and self-confidence
capacity to contribute - fulfilment and self-

actualisation Livelihood needs

- day-to-day struggle
- potable water
- shelter
- food
- poor infrastructure
- inadequate health services
- limited communications
- transport - wet season
- lack of employment
- socio-economic development

Safety needs

- severity, duration of conflict
- presence of militia, weapons
- ongoing human rights abuses, oppression
- domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault
- poor social cohesion, ethnic grievances
- crime, banditry, drugs, sex industry
- political instability, illegitimate government
- corrupt police, inadequate judiciary

Well being and recovery

Loss, separation, isolation, stress, trauma - challenge people's ability to have personal agency, self actualisation & efficacy

1. Belonging needs: sense of family, affiliation, supportive relationships, and care of friends
2. Esteem needs: sense of respect, recognition, involvement in productive activity, confidence
3. Transcendence needs: sense of freedom, affinity with home, capacity to contribute, belief in the future, personal fulfilment

Humanitarian agencies and justice

- processes of truth, justice and reconciliation unfold slowly. NGOs have access to survivors of conflict and capacity to do HR inquiry & analysis. Different to the evidentiary requirements for prosecution by police – slow, expensive, proof not truth
- Reintegration of militia and political enemies is always a challenge. NGOs often able to move among govt. and opposition forces. Role in conflict resolution and reconciliation
- May have family associated with perpetrators or victims
- People can be trapped in anger, sadness, fear

Reconciliation and justice issues

National staff may be implicated as oppressed or oppressors both an individual and communal journey

- Efforts to bring about retributive justice for the human rights abuses, murder, torture, sexual offences, crimes against humanity – police, courts, prisons - criminal justice system
- Restorative justice or community reconciliation processes to reintegrate those who committed less serious crimes
- Truth telling - shared recovery of historical memory - community understanding, lessons for future, honours the victims, restitution & compensation procedures

Family and community loyalties

National staff are part of a communal culture

- extended family systems
- traditional village structures
- clans and tribes
- ethnic and religious groups
- political affiliations
- other community systems

These effect allegiances and responsibilities

Some factors in resilience and coping

- Purpose and meaning in life
- Moral understanding of suffering and sacrifice
- Support of family
- Faith in a personal God
- Previous coping with trauma
- Commitment to the cause, struggle for freedom
- Political willingness to resist, social activism
- Solidarity movements

Some factors influencing coping - External

- Severity, duration of trauma
- Social supports
- Family, relatives
- Family size
- Happiness of marriage
- Friends, neighbours
- Church, school, civic movements
- Community services
- Everyday difficulties
- Income support
- Social class
- Employment

Some factors influencing coping - Internal

- Prior coping experience
- Resilience, fortitude
- Values & beliefs related to understanding & engaging
- Personality, sense of coherence
- Intelligence & articulateness
- Age & maturity
- Physical health
- Psychological symptoms incl *perception of* stressfulness, anxiety & depression
- Locus of control
- Active Vs Passive coping styles

Meaning of experience

Trauma challenges sense of mission in life, goals, direction, worthwhileness

- Implicit meaning
- Personal significance
- Situational meaning
- Existential beliefs
- Contextual understanding
- Purpose and coherence

Personal meaning

- Cognitive: beliefs, world views, value schemas
- Motivational: wants, needs, goal striving, commitment
- Affective: satisfaction, fulfilment, happiness

Purpose and coherence - anomie

- May not feel logically integrated or coherent
- Sense of reason for existence, personal identity has been shattered
- Morale, happiness, self esteem, optimism, subjective well being has been shaken
- Sense of confidence, competence, commitment undermined

- Fundamental relationships lost or changed
- Existential meaning, belief in God, the good order etc not as solid

Risk and protective factors - Risk factors increase vulnerability

1. Conflict, violence, oppression, threat, persecution, political instability
2. Social and community fragmentation incl crime, domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault
3. Lack of shelter, food sustainability, clean water, malarial prevention
4. Lack of support for trauma recovery and urgent health needs
5. Demoralization and despair
6. Inadequate income generating projects, general health, education systems
7. Lack of acknowledgment of suffering incl justice and legal closure
8. Pre morbid personality issues
9. Family dislocation

Risk and protective factors - Protective factors support resilience

1. Safety, stability, security, peace, political leadership
2. Community connectedness incl support of cultural traditions & religious beliefs, resilience of peer culture
3. Adequate livelihood – housing, planting crops, good water, health promotion
4. Support for trauma recovery incl psychological and physical well being
5. Hope and purpose
6. Development of education and employment opportunities
7. Truth telling: justice and reconciliation programmes
8. Previous secure psychological attachment
9. Family connectedness

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 1. *Early warning,*
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 3. *Reconstruction phases.*
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Humanitarian interventions occur at the

1. Early warning, preparedness planning
2. Emergency phase, crisis
3. Reconstruction, Post conflict, capacity building

1. Early warning, preparedness planning

- Local staff are the ones who get information out

- Are often at great personal risk and cost
- Engage in the day to day struggle
- May be specifically targeted and oppressed

Humanitarian organizations

- ICRC – c. 1863, 10,000 personnel
 - Caritas – post WW1, 154 national agencies, more personnel, public, budget than any UN agency
 - Oxfam (10 national organizations)
 - Concern (late 60s), MSF (late 60's), SCF (post WW1), IRC (1933), JRS (1981) etc
 -
1. Protection, monitoring human rights (early warning)
 2. Relief (emergency)
 3. Development (reconstruction)
 4. Campaigning & advocacy (all stages)

Early warning - preparedness planning

- Protracted humanitarian & security crises mitigated or prevented by proactive early interventions
- Analysis & advocacy role of humanitarian agencies in secondary prevention approaches
- Attend to causes of displacement: privation, bigotry, fear etc
- Anti war, pro human rights, equitable development campaigns
- Address international causes (trade, aid etc) to structured violence in some states
- Intervene when self interest is threatened – economic, regional stability etc
- Wealthy donor nations readily fund humanitarian work at their frontiers to 'keep the poor away'
- High GDP countries take expensive and absurd measures to deter asylum seekers
- Generosity which nations with low GDP expected to show when mass displacement erupts into their borders

2. Emergency phase, crisis

- Protection of people, military presence
- Access to food drops, sheeting for shelter
- Health sector eg water sanitation, disease control, malarial education, medical triage, trauma counselling
- Engineering for essential infrastructure
- Security protocols by UN forces, safety issues
- Recruit quickly, form teams haphazardly
- Massive interventions, quick fix, largely logistics
- Relate with internationals rather than locals
- Lack of coordination, duplication of efforts, fragmented programmes, rarely durable

- Dilemmas cooperating with other actors

Emergency phase: humanitarian agencies

- Can cooperate with local communities, church, students, women's groups, workers' rights groups, local NGOs
- Have local staff unaligned and well motivated
- Few resources so match needs to resources effectively and creatively
- Often have credibility, mobility, flexibility. Capacity to be innovative and responsive to changing circumstances
- Can monitor Human Rights directly
- Often more effective than UN, military or transitional Government structures

Emergency phase: some issues

- Dual economies – internationals bring large amounts of \$\$ into situation where no recurrent income. Hard for locals. Too large to be absorbed locally.
- Resentments - may build when VHF radios, sat. phones, land cruisers, lap tops, mobile phones, coffee shops, imported food, tents, VCRs etc **BEFORE** local houses are rebuilt, rice crops are planted, hospitals are repaired, schools re-roofed, water pipes connected etc

Emergency phase: some issues

- Security issues in a crisis affect local staff differently to internationals – their homes in unsafe areas while internationals in protected compounds, locals remain behind when foreign govts go to great lengths to evacuate their nationals
- Language – like a “Tower of Babel” – many languages and ways of proceeding. Language is seldom that of the local people
- ‘Bridge builders’ between INGOs, military and local community. Can become ‘triangulated’ between internationals and locals - hard to help each side understand perspectives of the other

3. Reconstruction programmes

- Civil society foundations
- Participatory democracy
- Governance & administration
- Political process & elections
- Institutional building
- Sustainable development
- Community development
- Capacity building
- Economic planning

- Land & property reform
- Health systems
- Education systems
- Psychosocial programs
- Law and order
- Truth commissions
- Reconciliation programs
- Reintegration of militia
- Peace building
- Vulnerable groups (women household heads, disabled, unsupported children etc)

Reconstruction: problem indicators

- History of unresolved previous conflict
- Security issues eg presence of paramilitary, weapons incl landmines, ongoing human rights violations
- Geopolitical stability
- Unstable political system, little democratic experience, lack of legitimacy for government
- Housing and property rights
- Inadequate or corrupt police, courts
- Poor social cohesion, intercommunal disharmony
- Ethnic grievances, 'religious' tensions, "scapegoating"
- Declining, uncertain economy
- Financial dependency on drugs or arms
- Poor social infrastructure, undeveloped social services
- Unemployment esp youth
- Lack of livelihood resources
- Crime, banditry, drugs, sex industry

Post conflict – some examples

1. Whose security?
2. Reconstruction & capacity building
3. INGOs and local NGOs
4. Cross-cultural interactions
5. Perception regarding advantages
6. Gender issues
7. Time constraints
8. Dealing with corruption
9. Paternalism
10. Lack of equality
11. Relationships

Post conflict – whose security?

- Security like justice, sustainability etc is essentially a contested concept. Supported by humanitarian law and human rights & refugee conventions etc. But also national interests and role of US (post cold war and post Sept 2001)
- Security national (sovereignty, legal statehood), societal (economic sustainability, environmental protection, civil society mechanisms) and human (vulnerable individuals and groups protected)

Reconstruction & capacity building

- Internationals import programmes, may fail to listen to locals or understand local context
- Donors & humanitarian agencies leave quickly after massive interventions usually before foundations for political, social and economic development in place
- Limited understanding of & little preparation for challenges of transition. Complex period once the emergency has been managed but before durable change can be expected
- Lives in transition – much has changed in the conflict. ‘Change management’ for locals is different to internationals – the issues are very personal

INGOs and local NGOs

- Local NGOs are often ‘cannibalised’ when their personnel are recruited to visiting INGOs
- Local NGOs have been on scene, profound knowledge of local situation, ‘embedded’ in religious and cultural institutions of civil society but often pushed aside by INGOs who arrive with superior technical capacity and material resources
- Local NGOs are the ones to pick up the pieces when INGOs depart but may have been consumed & destroyed during the crisis intervention stage
- Some INGOs sensitive to developing local networks (eg intro IT & other technical support, training in management, human rights investigation and advocacy etc)

Cross-cultural interactions

- Cross-cultural interactions are complex - language for communication & organizational ways of proceeding led by internationals rather than culture of the local worker
- Internationals may not be as sensitive to the community development needs as national staff
- Acknowledging & creating opportunities to examine cross cultural issues - a step in supporting local staff. Team building exercises for national and internationals to introduce cultural issues & in-country stress issues etc.
- Expats seeking information from local staff and recognizing them as experts is helpful (rather than expats acting as they have a lot to teach and little to learn)

Perception regarding advantages

- perception among locals that national staff get paid well, drive around in cars, use mobile phones, attend special ceremonies, etc. Most of these ‘benefits’ will be gone once the job is gone!
- often regarded as having opportunities, money, and influence “you were lucky to get this position, share the benefits with us”
- local staff often feel pressure from family and friends who expect they will share rewards. Expectations include finding jobs, helping with scholarships, assisting financially
- difficult position; making a bit of money but not enough to satisfy needs of relatives and friends. But think they are neglecting their ‘duty’ to family or friends. Pressure can be such that local staff engage in unethical or illegal practices to satisfy demands on them

Gender issues

- female staff members given significant responsibility. In some cultures, difficult for men to accept and they disregard the authority of the woman
- organization might be aware of cultural circumstances, but still choose to give a position to a woman because she is best candidate
- stress and anxiety for female staff. She recognizes the expectations of employer to do the job she has been given. But realizes it is almost impossible to carry out because of attitudes of male co-workers
- she might also be the victim of abuse, primarily verbal but also physical and psychological

Time constraints

- Members of humanitarian organizations, can be quite committed to their mission - work 12 or 14 hour days - if need is urgent, no family, energy of youth, in an area where little recreation
- Local staff often cannot devote so much time to their jobs. Even if they wanted to, they have families and other responsibilities. They have to rebuild family home, plant crops etc. Can feel guilty leaving work while international counterparts are still at work
- additional pressure to stay behind – interpreting skills for medical operations, meetings with other agencies

Dealing with alternative economies

- Internationals are concerned about corruption
- Organizations may refuse to pay ‘bribes’ to local officials so ‘things get done’
- If local staff refuse to pay bribes or go against the ‘customary way of doing things’, other locals might accuse them of thinking of themselves as ‘better’. This can lead to a sense of alienation
- Sometimes national staff may pay out of their own pockets rather than say they were not able to carry out their job!

‘Paternalistic’ attitudes

- Local staff often feel they are treated like children by international counterparts. Not done on purpose, but out of desire to be caring, ‘we will take care of you because you have suffered so much’
- perception that since they are regarded as children, they are not given responsibility or their opinion is not counted. Can lead to a sense of low self esteem and dependence
- “mwana wa mzungu” (child of the foreigner) derogatory phrase to refer to local staff working with expatriates, denotes that ‘acting’ like their foreign employers and giving themselves ‘airs’

Lack of equality

- Internationals may insist that local counterparts have same rights as they, but a sense of inequality is always there. Their quality of life is different
- Even if an expatriate and a local share the same position, the expatriate will usually have the better salary, the better living conditions and the better access to medical service
- The expatriate usually pay the salaries and have the power to employ and exit staff
- Expatriate staff have option to leave in times of strife or once their contract is completed

Relationships

- Even when strong friendships develop between expatriates and local staff, often true mutuality is lacking
- Attachments can be strong in crisis situations. Uncharacteristic intimacies can develop in the shared vulnerability
- Local staff may be reticent do enter into deeper relationships with international counterparts. They have lost many relationships already and fear investing in another
- Some even support lonely expats. They try to address the need of the expatriate for support!
- Expat eventually leaves. For local staff who have ‘lost’ loved ones in the past, another loss can be hard

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Setting standards

- Sphere project: Humanitarian charter and minimum standards
- Guidelines on the protection of refugee women and children, Procedures & criteria for determining refugee status, guiding principles on internal displacement
- Interaction (US) ECRE (Europe) ACFID (Australia) etc

Values and standards

- Important to have principles for standards of care especially in the difficult situations
- Degrees of prescription and description: standards guide reflection and legislative requirements
- Value of teams being innovative, adaptable, according to needs on the ground
- Independence of agency is useful in situations where national administration is weak
- What is needed for doing the right thing by the people, not just risk management liabilities of agency

Employment

- Employment conditions different for international and national staff
- The ‘employee life cycle’ for local staff in a humanitarian mission may require distinctive procedures
- Motivations, sacrifices, personal costs, degree of involvement and personal investment

Guidelines for staff care

Antares and CDC “Minimal standards for staff support by humanitarian agencies”

1. written plan for reducing staff stress
2. screens staff before hiring & assignment
3. pre-employment briefings & training
4. ongoing support to deal with expectable stress
5. ongoing monitoring of stress in the field
6. responds to critical incidents, unusual stress
7. stress debriefing at end of assignment
8. practical and emotional support after assignment
9. written policy for what is provided to those adversely affected by work trauma

Staff support services (1)

1. People Development Role (activities within line areas, compliance with agency standards & objectives, Organization Development, Strategic planning)
2. Management of culture (Understanding agency vision, history and ethos, Appreciating the values and shaping the mission & future directions, Integration of strategic objectives)
3. Selection Recruitment Induction (Advertising, Job Specifications, Selection, Interviewing, Assessment, Recruitment, Engagement, Employment Contracts, Classification systems, Induction, Probation)

Staff support services (2)

4. Performance Management and Rewards (Remuneration, Motivation, ownership & commitment, Performance measures, key objectives, target setting, individual competencies, Job evaluation, Bonus or reward systems)
5. Training and development (Team – competencies, objectives, development, Individual – reviews, personal and career plans, Succession planning)
6. Administration (Policies, Accountability, Reporting, Industrial relations, OH&S, Risk Management, Equal Opportunity, Payroll, Work Environment, Personnel Records, Staff Communication)