

Humanitarian Stress

Management:

It is all in the understanding.



HAWs face high stress levels due to their work in conflict, disaster, and development settings.



Prolonged exposure to chronic stress can negatively affect HAWs, their organisations, and the aid sector as a whole (Young et al., 2018).



HAWs and their organisations must be aware of the main categories of stressors and the triggers/events HAWs may experience.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress, in the context of mental health, typically emerges when there is a misalignment between environmental demands and coping resources, leading to a state of imbalance and strain.



Activates the body's stress response system.



Physiological and psychological response.

STRESS



Preparing to cope with possible threat(s).

HAWs often encounter a spectrum of workplace stressors, ranging from **CONTENT**-based factors like workload and interpersonal dynamics to **CONTEXT**-based challenges such as operating in a humanitarian setting. Key themes identified in humanitarian mental health research encompass Work-related, Social connection, Psychological, and Lifestyle factors.

CONTENT

CONTEXT

WORK-RELATED	SOCIAL CONNECTION	PSYCHOLOGICAL	LIFESTYLE
Working With Others	Personal Relationships	Suffering of Others	Physical Health and Safety
Colleagues; Managers; Unrealistic Expectations; Staff honesty, integrity & capacity; Org policies and politics	Separation from loved ones; Loneliness; Lack of intimacy	Lack of impact & funding; Suffering of others; Feeling powerless; Gap between values and action; Self-doubt	Security Concerns; Traumatic events; Health issues; Security restrictions
Organisational		Unfair Systems	Living Conditions
Workload; Org structure and systems; Bureaucracy; Poor Org support; Short deadlines; Large job roles; Lack of recognition; Poor work practice		Corruption; Lack of recipient focus; Aid systems; Inequality	Access to personal services and resources; Difficult living conditions; Relocations; Socio-cultural differences
Work Conditions			
Work-life balance; Job security; Financial insecurity; Excessive travel; Sexism; racism			

HUMANITARIAN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE





Humanitarian Stress Management Continuum

Stress Management Continuum: Humanitarian Working Conditions				
Overview	Working in emergency relief environments will expose you to several situations and conditions that create stress and may lead to a stress reaction. The situation changes constantly, and the mind has to work at full speed to keep on to things. Therefore, both the team and the individual need to acknowledge this and be prepared to deal with stress and its consequences from the very beginning of the mission, thus preventing the stress reaction from escalating into a problem for the individual and the team.			
Stress	Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure			
Stress Management	Stress management is a wide spectrum of techniques aimed at mitigating a person's level of stress , usually for motivating and improving everyday functioning			
Positive Stress	Positive stress, otherwise known as good stress or eustress, is the type of stress response that makes us feel excited. Positive stress can also refer to the times you respond well to a challenge that you experience from a stressor.			
	Some examples of positive stress can include a sense of achievement when competing for a project or operations, working toward an application and/or interview for a new position, deploying to a new office/country, and meeting new people. Positive stress is defined by the effects it produces. These stressors allow us to live outside our comfort zones.			
Negative Stress	Negative Stress (distress) is a type of stress response whereby one experiences negative feelings associated with being “stressed out”. Negative stress can include circumstances whereby an individual responds with anxiety, and physical and psychological symptoms like headaches, tension, insomnia, inattentiveness, or irritability. Prolonged exposure to negative stress can result in chronic stress, which can lead to physical illness and emotional stress, as well as impairing a person’s ability to function			
	Self-Care	Social and Organisational Support		Professional Support
Stages of Stress Management	Mentally Healthy	Common and Reversible Mental Health	Significant Functional Impairment	Detrimental Functional Impairment
	<i>Positive Approach to Stress</i>	<i>Sub-Optimal Approach to Stress</i>	<i>Negative Approach to Stress</i>	<i>Detrimental Approach to Stress</i>
Self-Reflection	"I am concerned but excited regarding my deployment"	"I feel overwhelmed and unsure of the reason(s) for my deployment "	"I am distressed and struggling to function from day to day"	"I am struggling to survive and feel hopeless in everything I do, every moment of the day"
	Belief in the mission	Feeling overwhelmed by a single task	Avoidance behaviours to escape from, challenges, tasks, difficult thoughts, and feelings.	Rapidly and extreme changes in mood and emotion
	Realistic concerns and willingness to educate	Irritable	An unpleasant feeling of guilt and regret stemming from the belief that you could or should have done something different	Frequent panic attacks; Emotionally numb; Paranoia and blame of others

Signs and Symptoms	Motivated to perform in difficult circumstances	Increase in mood fluctuation, and rapid changes in emotion/mood	Feels of withdrawal, reclusive and loneliness	Loss and breakdown of relationships, both professionally and socially
	Willingness to support others	Fatigue, weariness, and lethargic	Constant negative outlook and cynicism regarding professional and social interactions. 77/7	Uncontrollable impulsive behaviours around alcohol and drug consumption; engagement in sexual activities; physical and social self-harm behaviours
	Motivated and responsive to the needs of myself and others	Decrease in performance and motivation	Physically exhausted and emotionally drained	Regular thoughts of self-harm or suicide
	Problem-solving and solutions drive	Seeking perfection in all tasks equally	The regular feeling of anxiety and depression	Chronic anxiety and depression
	Comfortable/confident with self and other	Inability to prioritise	Reduced impulse control around alcohol and drug consumption; engagement in sexual activities; physical and social self-harm behaviours	Inability to focus or hold a singular chain of thoughts
Key Manageable Actions	Key Actions to support each phase of the Continuum [Problem Focused - Emotion Focused]			
	Remain focused on the task(s) , Inc those which are challenging and/or unknown.	Seek regular peer and social support .	Contact staff counselling unit for psycho-social support and guidance in stress management.	Take leave and time out away from direct sources of distress.
	Break down problems into manageable portions	Understand individual signs of stress	Identify your stress and distress indicators	Seek medical consultation , as needed
	Identify and/or nurture social and professional support systems - locally and with friends and family at home.	Self-learning and personal reflection on sources of stress and how to manage/mitigate them.	Make self-care a priority in day-to-day life	Professional Psychotherapeutic Intervention (Thinking / Feeling / Behaving), as needed.
	Maintain a healthy lifestyle : balanced diet, minimal alcohol, exercise.	Psychological first aid through staff counselling or self-lead.	Recognize personal limits and stay within these boundaries	