

STRESS FACTORS IN HUMANITARIAN FIELD LIFE

Very often humanitarian workers leaving on their first mission are not well informed about the actual difficulties they may encounter. The CPH has made a list of them, helped by hundreds of humanitarian workers met in the course of trainings or debriefings, as well as through hundreds of e-mails which the Support Team has received in recent years.

According to the country, the programme, the cultural context... the degree of stress may range from minimal to more serious and even dangerous. Nevertheless the aim of such a list is to give an awareness of the potential stress factors faced by humanitarian workers.

Difficult life conditions:

Climate, diet, uncomfortable accommodation, lack of space and intimacy, lack of activity, leisure or social and cultural life

Personal balance and health risks

Constraints due to security reasons
Anxiety and fear of the after effects of a disaster
Risk of accidents and illness (road accident – malaria – AIDS)
Lack of medical infrastructure
No proper insurance

Tensions in the team:

Too much work versus enforced inactivity
Bad communication system (radio, computers...)
Managerial problems

Relational and communication problems:

Cultural differences
Personality conflicts amongst colleagues
Jealousy on the part of the population
Belonging to or representing an NGO not well thought of by the population
Moral or sexual harassment

Insecurity:

War situation
Security incidents
High risk of aggression and/or robbery
Movement restrictions due to anti-personal mines
Threats from the local authorities
Curfew
Mine fields

Situations questioning values and beliefs of aid worker

Exposure to acute consequences of a war, a disaster or a massacre
Constant exposure to the sufferings of traumatized beneficiaries
Corruption, ambiguous situations or motivations
Unmet needs of hostile beneficiaries

Ethical stress through sexual abuse of the victims, corruption, paedophilia...

Stress from private life:

No fulfilling emotional relation and/or sexual solitude

Stress coming from the expat's family back home or accompanying

No news or lack of communication with the family back home

Back home

Difficult communication with family and friends

Financial instability

Getting back to "ordinary" life

Difficulty finding work and housing

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