

Foreword

Critical events, such as disasters, conflicts, wars, accidents and health epidemics bring with them social and psychological consequences that often undermine people's ability to carry on with their lives. Traditional approaches to disaster and emergency assistance have often neglected the psychological impact of crises on affected populations.

There is a growing recognition that psychological wounds heal slowly and often go unrecognized and untreated after crises and disasters. Psychological support programmes in disasters and emergencies attempt to redress this issue by focusing on restoring the affected population's capacity to cope with the new situation. Addressing the psychological as well as the physical needs of populations affected by crises has become a prominent concern in international humanitarian assistance, and is now a component of many development programmes, disaster preparedness and relief operations.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has been a pioneer in the development of psychological support programs. Since 1991, the International Federation has been developing the Psychological Support Program. A Federation Reference Centre for Psychological Support was established in 1993 and has since then been a partner in the development of psychological support activities and in assisting National Societies in providing an essential service: psychological support to people in need.

The demand for psychological support is reflected in the increasing number of requests received by the Reference Centre from National Societies wanting to develop psychological support responses. Today, we see that National Societies are implementing psychological support activities as part of disaster response, disaster preparedness, HIV/AIDS or social welfare programmes.

This training manual builds on the experience of psychological support gathered in many different critical events over the last decade by National Societies, and covers more recently developed technical areas as well as recommended methodologies. The manual contains information on the skills and techniques required to provide the kind of support which helps people function under the extraordinary level of stress found in most disaster or critical event situations.

Psychological support is about mobilizing the power of humanity. With a basic understanding of the psychological issues faced by those they will serve as well as the challenges to their own psychological well-being when dealing with people in distress, volunteers will be more prepared for successful interaction, feeling more confident and less anxious about encountering difficult circumstances.

I hope that this publication receives the widespread attention it deserves and that training on psychological support becomes a significant component of Red Cross and Red Crescent efforts whether that is in development, disaster preparedness or relief operations.



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