In Brief

This article explores how promoting enhanced resilience among aid workers could help mitigate the adverse effects of stress and trauma, with a consequent positive impact on both their professional and personal lives.

The inquiry begins with the acknowledgment that aid workers face varied traumatic stressors both during and after their assignments. Drawing from established theories in the literature of psychology, the impact of stress and trauma is defined, and its resulting disconnections — of self from self, self from others, and self from one's worldview — are applied within the humanitarian context and subsequently discussed. It is further argued that internal and external resilience factors are required to support the recovery and reconnection process and enhance personal development.

In the last section of this article, a framework built around the interplay of these factors forms the basis for constructing operational recommendations.

Resilience of Humanitarian Workers

By Pascale Blanchetière
November 2006

List of contents

List of figures

Part 1 - Introduction

Every year, thousands of humanitarian workers are sent to work in disaster contexts, either man-made crises or natural catastrophes. Responding to the population's needs and transforming governments and private donations into practical benefits for the affected population requires strong commitment and professionalism.

Their actions aim to alleviate suffering in the host country, and meeting their objectives can be a source of motivation and satisfaction. However, they also face intricate and dangerous situations that they often have not been adequately prepared for. As a reaction to these stressors, aid workers may develop protective coping mechanisms, valuable in extreme situations, but which can become detrimental to an individual's well-being in the long run.

Based on the double assumption that humanitarian missions put a strain on relief workers, but also provide an outstanding opportunity for personal development, this article argues that enhanced resilience would mitigate the adverse effects of stress and trauma, and impact positively on the aid worker's professional effectiveness and personal life.

1.1 Definitions

Resilience is defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary[1] as the ability of a person to 'withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions'. More than a return to the initial state, it encapsulates the idea of learning from adverse situations, and enhancing one's personality[2]. This perspective, offering an approach to aid workers' management that is both positive and preventive, is found to be more appropriate than stress management.

Stress 'arises when the pressures placed upon an individual exceed the perceived capacity of that individual to cope'[3]. Two types of stress are commonly considered, the first is useful and protective (protective stress), but leads imperceptibly to the second (severe stress), which is unproductive and harmful to the sufferer[4].

1.2 Rationale

The rationale for understanding and enhancing an individual's resilience:

· **For organisations**: successful mission[5], reduced turn-over[6], morale and legal duty
· **For aid workers**: improved personal security[7], enhanced preventive health
· **For primary victims**: getting more empathic support[8]

1.3 Objective of the study

To identify and study possible processes that lead to resilience, by using paradigms from psychology on trauma, recovery and resilience.

To offer operational recommendations based on theoretical frameworks, to aid workers in managing themselves and others, and to NGOs in implementing good practices.

1.4 Structure of the article

Part 1: Introduction, definition and rationale
Part 2: Understanding causes and consequences of stress
Part 3: Understanding disconnection and reconnection process and its application to aid workers
Part 4: Understanding resilience at the individual and environmental level
Part 5: Addressing resilience from both the individual and the organisation's perspective

Part 2 Understanding causes and consequences of stress

2.1 Causes of stress

Before considering theoretical frameworks on trauma and resilience, it is necessary to acknowledge the existing strains on aid workers. For this purpose, drawing from the humanitarian literature[9,10,11,12,13] stress factors are presented below (Figure 1) under four headings: (1) situational factors that are particular to the host country or project area, (2) job related factors that are specific to the aid worker profession, (3) organisational and management factors that encompass some stressors shared with other workers, and also including a distinct one such as the sector culture, and finally (4) personal risk factors that include an individual's particular history, motivations and relations with home. This classification, while not exhaustive offers an overview of the different stressors experienced by aid workers; it is also argued that they are dealing mainly with continuing 'low intensity' trauma rather than discreet obviously dramatic events[14]

2.2 Coping mechanisms

These stressors may be a source of challenges and excitement, a key drive for aid workers; however they can become overwhelming and compel the humanitarian workers to toughen their coping mechanisms. While some protection systems may be qualified as positive such as sharing issues with friends, practicing sport or taking a break, other reactions more adverse are be observed[15]. Aid workers may adopt a **distancing attitude** between themselves and the reality. As one interviewee explains:

'it's like if I had a mechanism where nothing touches me when I'm in the field.[16]'

Another common response is **black and white thinking**, leading to either an over identification or a denigration of the population, and also a simplified analysis of the political situation.

.

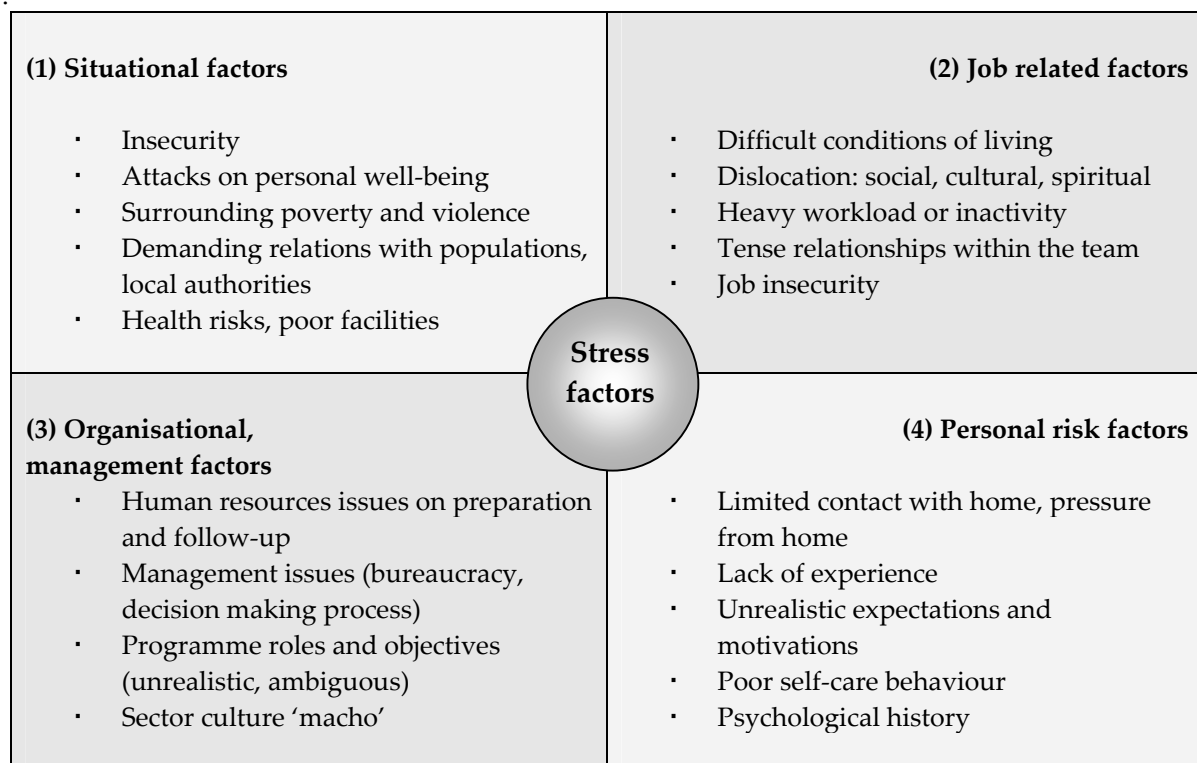| (1) Situational factors	(2) Job related factors
· Insecurity · Attacks on personal well-being · Surrounding poverty and violence · Demanding relations with populations, local authorities · Health risks, poor facilities	· Difficult conditions of living · Dislocation: social, cultural, spiritual · Heavy workload or inactivity · Tense relationships within the team · Job insecurity
(3) Organisational, management factors · Human resources issues on preparation and follow-up · Management issues (bureaucracy, decision making process) · Programme roles and objectives (unrealistic, ambiguous) · Sector culture 'macho'	**(4) Personal risk factors** · Limited contact with home, pressure from home · Lack of experience · Unrealistic expectations and motivations · Poor self-care behaviour · Psychological history

Stress factors

Figure 1: Stress factors experienced by aid workers

Finally, a third pitfall is the **self-destruction behaviour** with poor diet, excessive intake of alcohol and other substances, or poor health care including unprotected sex. While these coping mechanisms may serve an immediate purpose in the short term, they are clearly harmful in the long run.

2.3 Consequences of stress

Pressure in an humanitarian environment is inevitable and a certain degree of stress can be positive, as it increases one's performance and helps to solve problems[17] However, undue and prolonged stress may cause perturbing symptoms to the individual, as categorised below into five categories with examples[18]:

- **Physical:** tiredness, inability to relax
- **Emotional:** mood swings, guilt and shame
- **Behavioural:** irritability, relationship problems
- **Thought patterns:** indecisiveness, self-critical thoughts
- **Spiritual/philosophical:** loss of purpose, loss of hope

These symptoms may generate different types of stress (basic, cumulative, burnout). Particular stressful incidents may generate acute stress disorder and lead in some cases to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; finally these symptoms may develop into illness in the long term. However, the literature shows that the impact of stress when overcome may also be positive and considered as a personal development[19], such as a new sense of purpose of life or the discovery of new strengths. Further insights of this personal enhancement are presented in Figure 2.

2.4 Return phase

Coming back from humanitarian missions, aid workers may face new types of challenges[20]. Socially, they need to reconnect with their friends who may not understand their experience; professionally they have to adapt their skills to a different environment, yet look for challenging goals. They will have to solve material issues, such as accommodation and financial support. Finally, integrating their intense experience may require psychological support, often after the organisation's contractual liability is over and they are left without structured support.
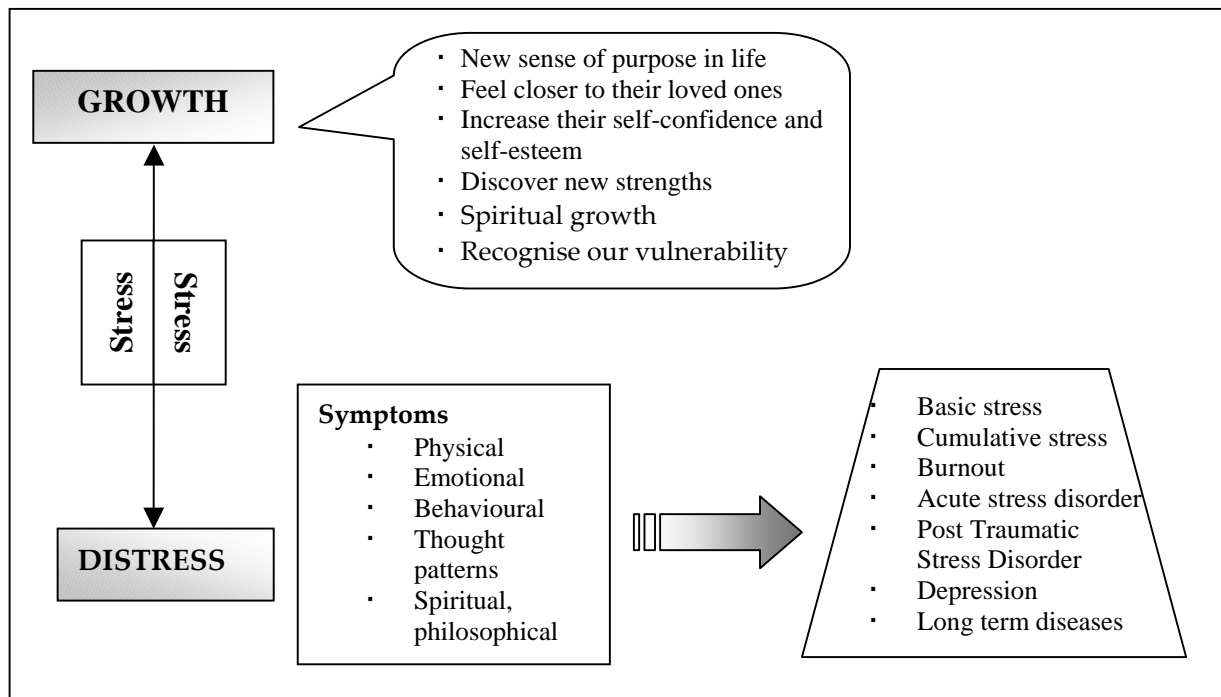

Figure 2: Impact of stress on an individual

Part 3 Understanding dissociation and the reconnection process and its application to aid workers

3.1 Overviews of trauma and recovery theories

Based on cognitive and psychodynamic theories derived from the seminal work of Janet and Freud, researches on trauma victims (in particular the studies of Horowitz[21]), explain that stress reactions are caused by an incongruence between the representation of the event and the internal set of beliefs one holds (called also inner schemata). This conflict of meaning is usually accompanied by a conflict of emotions. A victim may feel powerless while facing the danger, and altogether have a sense of powerfulness as a survivor over death.

Dissociation

When becoming overwhelming, this incongruence may be controlled by mechanisms such as denial, emotions repression and mind dissociation. This dissociation works as a shield for a part of the victim's mind against the threat[22]. Despite its protective role, dissociation can become maladaptive with adverse effects if maintained too long[23]. In her studies of rape survivors, Herman[24] explains also that dissociation occurs not only with oneself, but also with others and the society at large. Unable to share a common set of beliefs with others, the victim disconnects herself from her social environment, leading in some cases to the irrevocable destruction of the identity formed prior to the trauma.

Recovery

Based on these theories, recovery occurs when the individual is able to match the representation of the event with his internal meaning (called also cognitive completion). Moreover, the dialogue and the reconnection with self, and others are key factors to enhance the recovery process.

Resilience factors

Along this journey, as schematised in Figure 3 below, an individual is influenced by different factors increasing his vulnerability (V) or strengthening his resilience (R)[25]. Individual factors, intrinsic to the person are built on experiences during formative years. Five categories are defined here: cognitive, emotional, behavioural, relational and spiritual factors. The environmental factors encompass here the social network, the organisation and the society as a whole.
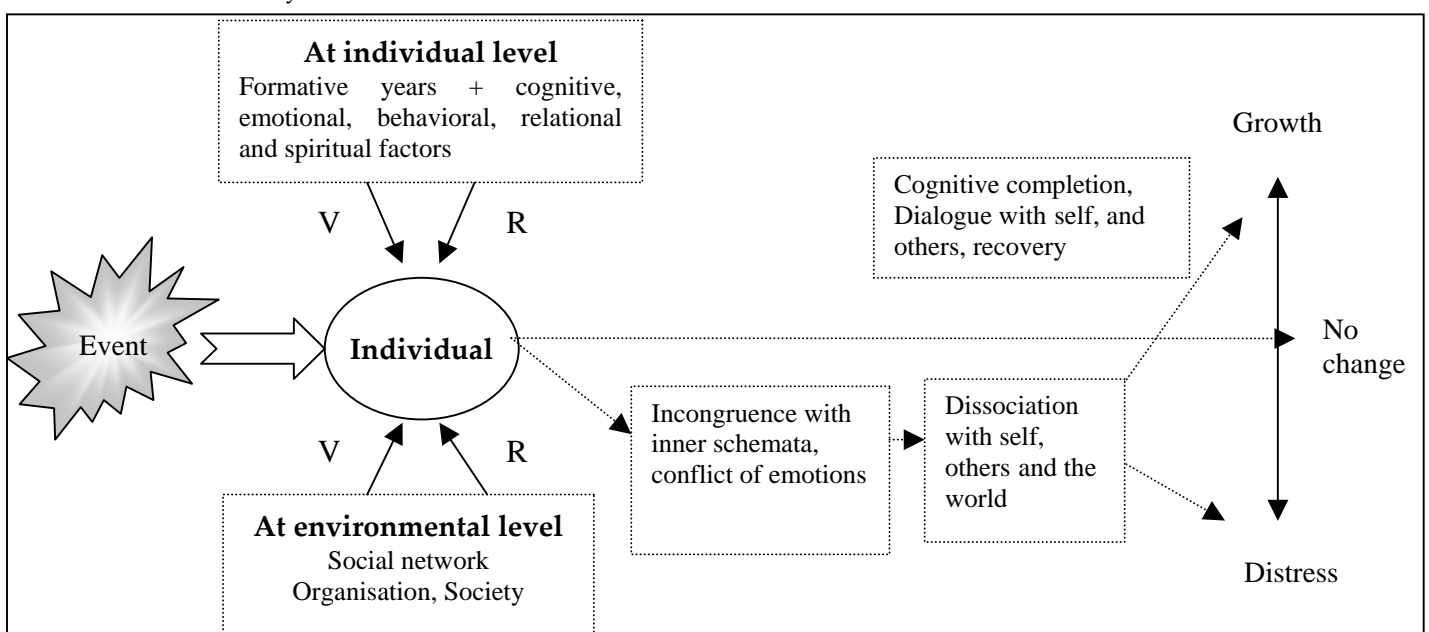

Figure 3 Dissociation and reconnection process after traumatic event

Commenting on the figure above, it is necessary to mention that different pathways are possible in the course of the 'psychological transition from crisis to either a positive or negative aftermath'[26]; this includes also the possibility to 'remain unscathed'[27]. The steps described in this process of disconnection and recovery may not cover all possible reactions of individuals facing traumatic events.

Moreover, the applicability of these theories to non-western individuals is argued. Bracken and Petty[28] explains that our view of the world is embedded in our social practices and not generated by our inner schemata, and express their concern about promoting such theories to other cultures.

For the purpose of this study, acknowledgement is made about possible limitations for cross-cultural generalisation, and most of all the essential role of social environment is recognised in both the construction of the meaning and during the process of recovery.

3.2 Existing conflicts for aid workers

Conflict of meaning

The applicability of these paradigms to the humanitarian sector requires considering the specific components of meaning and the existing conflicts occurring for an aid worker. Allan[29] proposes four constituents for meaning: purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth. She also explains that, together with one's perception of belonging to a social group, the capacity to provide meaning to an action will have an impact on one's identity.

Further details of existing conflicts within the humanitarian sector are provided in Figure 4. Previous episodes in the humanitarian history can illustrate this incongruence. Looking at goals' issues, we can cite the example of the Ethiopian famine in 1984 when the government purposely manipulated NGO food distribution to fit its resettlement programmes[30]. More recently, humanitarian values have been challenged after the South-East Asian tsunami in December 2004, when available funding in 2005 for tsunami-affected people was overwhelming, almost indecent when compared to existing support for other crises out of the media focus such as those in DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo).

Conflict of emotions

Aid workers may experience also different conflicts of emotions, such as feeling *powerless* facing the immensity of humanitarian needs, feeling *guilty* for benefiting from better living conditions or for being able to evacuate when situation becomes dangerous, feeling superior or *powerful* because one has control over people, as employees or aid recipients, feeling of *frustration* when plans are disrupted by security problem, and also feeling of *anger* towards the differences in priorities with the local government, or due to the organisation bureaucracy.
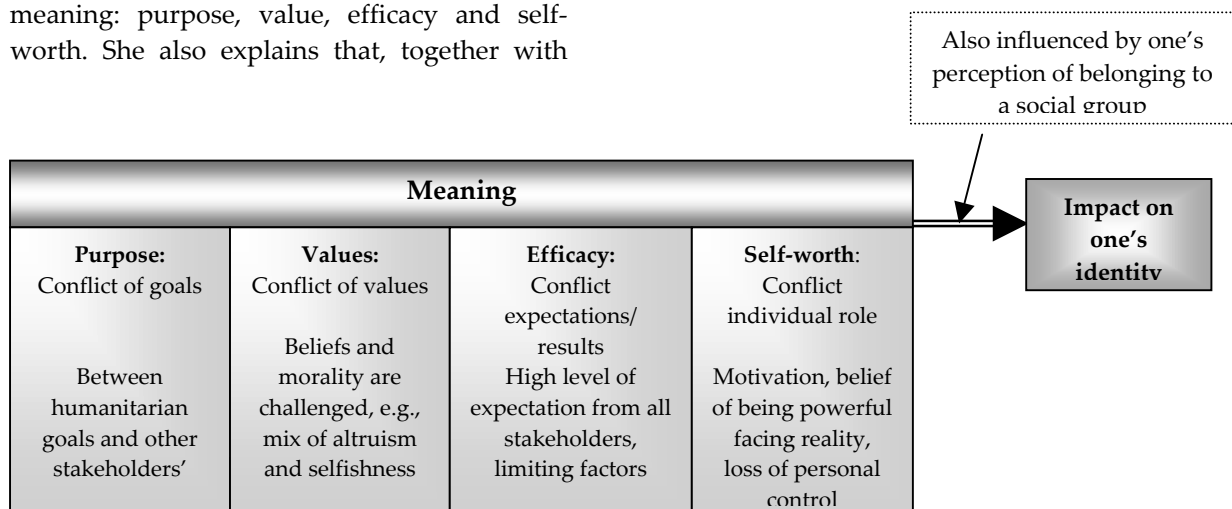
Meaning				Also influenced by one's perception of belonging to a social group
Purpose: Conflict of goals	**Values:** Conflict of values	**Efficacy:** Conflict expectations/ results	**Self-worth:** Conflict individual role	**Impact on one's identity**
Between humanitarian goals and other stakeholders'	Beliefs and morality are challenged, e.g., mix of altruism and selfishness	High level of expectation from all stakeholders, limiting factors	Motivation, belief of being powerful facing reality, loss of personal control	

Figure 4 Different conflicts in the process of giving meaning to the humanitarian action

Control system

As explained earlier, when these conflicts become overwhelming, natural control mechanisms intervene to protect the individual[31][32]:

· **Emotional numbness** implies the repression of one's emotions rather than accepting them

· **Meaning sliding** encompasses a new interpretation of realities that remove the sense of incongruence (e.g. black and white thinking, increased sense of self-worth)

· **Denial** modifies or even removes the perception of the threat

· **Mind dissociation** ensures the wounded part of the mind is disconnected from the rest; this can be a natural process or be provoked by substances such as alcohol.

These conflicts of meaning, and of emotions and related protective measures lead to several ways of disconnection of self from the self and have an impact on one's identity.

3.3 Disconnection with others

Similarly, these conflicts and subsequent control mechanisms may affect the relations aid workers have with others.

Black and white thinking towards beneficiaries: Barron[33] explains that these reactions 'simplify complex situations for some individuals and allow them to preserve their role in a situation with clear moral boundaries'. This shift of meaning may support the integration of the situation's representation, but also implies behaviours such as bitterness, cynicism, loss of consideration, or over-attachment towards local population.

While belonging to a social group is considered as a support, aid workers may work in isolated places; they may find it difficult to give meaning when the mission is unsuccessful[34], or feel overwhelmed when they have to leave their colleagues behind (at the end of a mission or due to security evacuation).

Finally, disconnection with family members and friends at home occurs (see re-Entry Syndrome, box 1 below) and may challenge the capacity to give meaning to one's action and impact one's identity[35].

3.4 Disconnection with worldview

Aid workers during their experience acquire a new vision of the world and may find it difficult to reintegrate it in their previous life. In some extreme cases, such as witnessing exactions on population, they may lose their sense of moral order or their spiritual beliefs[36]. They may also lose sense of their own role: they are often considered as representing larger institutions (the organisation/their home country/the West etc…). They may forget their action is not neutral and interact with local politics. Finally, they may experience a sense of "specialness" for intervening in dangerous places.

**Box 1: Re-Entry Syndrome
from an article by McCreesh**

Re-Entry Syndrome is a psychological response experienced by many people returning home from field work in a different culture.

After an initial couple of days of euphoria, many returned aid workers experience feelings of loss, bereavement and isolation. They feel that no one really understand what they have been through and what is more, people are not that interested. RES is a problem because people may turn to drugs and alcohol to 'cope', and this may also affect friends and family.

Enhanced awareness about the syndrome is important before, during and after the mission. Upon their return, aid workers need to relax, describe their experience by writing articles for local newspaper or conducting presentations. They may also look for groups of returned workers with whom they can share common emotions. They also need to re-engage with their own community. Excess consumption of alcohol, drugs or food must be avoided, as this will only bring short-term compensation. Rush decisions like going back to another mission does not solve the problem either.
Take your time!

Part 4 Understanding resilience for humanitarian workers

The two previous parts have presented and explored the causes and consequences of stress based on trauma literature. In order to deal with these strains and reactions and ensure long-term well-being versus short-term coping mechanisms, aid workers may call upon resilience factors for support[37]. Deeper exploration into these resilience factors both at individual and environmental level is proposed in this part; an overview is presented in Figure 5.

4.1 Resilience factors at individual level

These factors are developed from different frameworks and documents (mainly Paton's [38] risk management framework and Apfel and Simon's[39] article on war-affected children). These qualities are built on foundations laid down during formative years, but can be enhanced throughout one's life with awareness and conscious change. As explained previously (Figure 3), these factors should limit the impact of trauma, and support an individual during the reconnection process.

Cognitive factors
Overcoming cognitive dissonances due to contradictions in humanitarian industry by:
· Gaining understanding of the complexity of the contextual features (politics/ security/ other stakeholders' interests and priorities/ etc…)
· Giving sense and meaning to the mission and to one's action
· Having optimistic but realistic expectations and motivations

Emotional factors
Building up sufficient inner resourcefulness and agency to cope with overwhelming emotions without repressing them completely
· Identifying one's emotions, and naming them
· Learning how to contain them, knowing when they start and finish
· Being given the permission to "feel"

Spiritual factors

Giving a coherent sense to one's action by:
· Having goal and being determined to achieve them
· Sustaining a vision of moral order, possibility and desirability to its restoration
· Creating space and contacts to develop one's spirituality

Behavioural factors
Refraining from pitfalls of some coping mechanisms by:
· Identifying one's coping systems and physical reactions (e.g. sleeping, drinking, eating habits)
· Comparing superficial and short-term effects versus long-term well-being

Relational factors
Enhancing social abilities by:
· Displaying positive sense of humour
· Developing a meaningful and trustworthy support network
· Having the need and ability to help others

BOX 2 – Stress management and resilience for national staff
based from an article by Allan and Melville[40]

Considering stress management and resilience for national staff requires to:
· Include cross cultural awareness to expatriate staff and agency ethos during in-country orientation and induction training
· Show greater consideration of the role of faith spirituality and ritual in staff's well-being
· Acknowledge the importance of the family and social support
· Understand potential risks and impact on identity, relationship, status and framework in the course of undertaking humanitarian work
· Educate staff to identify cultural differences in the expression of symptoms of stress
· Look for culturally acceptable response to trauma
· Develop culturally adopted debriefing and post-deployment support for local staff

---

4.2 Resilience factors at environmental level

As discussed previously recovery occurs not only at an individual level but also as a consequence of one's relation with their environment. These factors are presented below with the possible support they may provide but also some shortcomings[41,42].

Social network (friends, family) may provide
- A sense of belonging and connection with the country of origin
- Relationships outside the humanitarian sector
- Objective feedback

Social network may also increase vulnerability if unsupportive or absent

Team colleagues may provide
- A sense of belonging to a team
- An opportunity to make the experience more meaningful
- A social and emotional support

But, poor team dynamic may be a burden

Managers may influence workers' resilience
- In setting the tone in terms of work-life balance
- In encouraging team members to look after one another
- In being sensitive to staff needs

A 'macho' attitude or workaholic leadership style may increase strain on aid workers

Organisations may recognise their responsibility for staff well-being and act accordingly
- In limiting internal causes of distress (bureaucracy, poor administration)
- In reviewing and implementing HR policies and procedures
- In developing more human relationships with aid workers (better knowledge of individuals)

Sector culture is the sum of individual behaviours and may also magnify existing patterns. The culture of humanitarian sector may develop
- a sense of working with values and ethics
- a sense of humanity when dealing with affected population and colleagues

However, a culture of bravado may promote
- Suppression of emotional disclosure
- Increased workload
- Competitiveness

Society in the home country will influence the way the aid workers integrate their humanitarian missions
- by showing interest and recognition of the work achieved

But often society
- has a biased vision of aid work, sometimes idealised, but often of little interest after the first few minutes
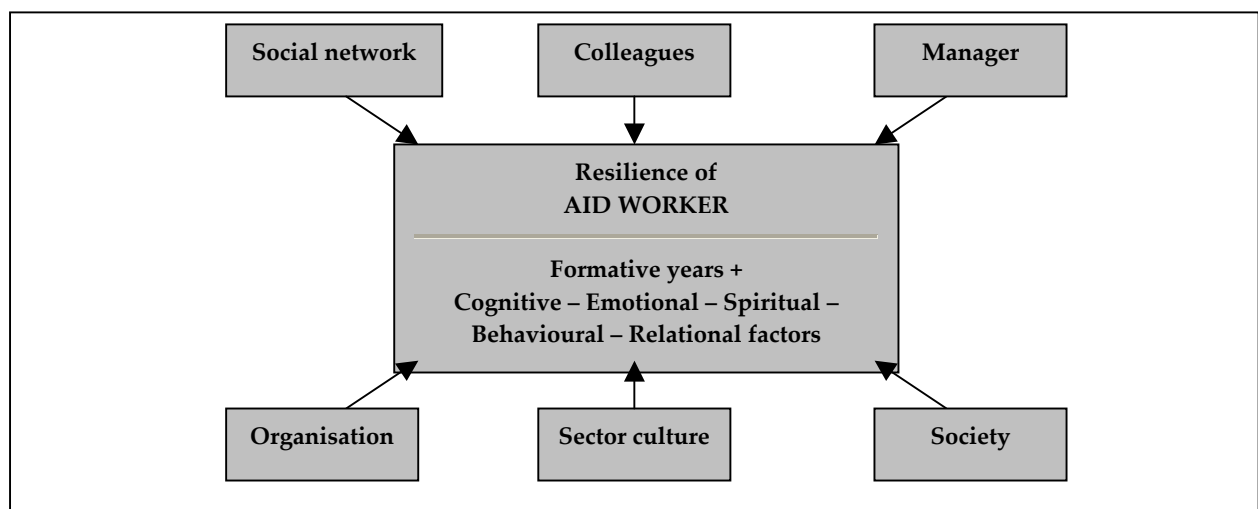- does not provide required social, moral and professional recognition

Figure 5 Resilience factors at individual and environmental level

Part 5 Addressing resilience from different perspectives

Having examined the different components of resilience that will influence the aid workers' capacity to react positively to adverse events during and after their missions, this last chapter will look at how to enhance these resilience factors. Two perspectives are considered below, firstly looking from the aid worker's point of view and secondly taking the stand of the organisation. These recommendations will be presented based on three stages: before, during and after the humanitarian mission.

5.1 Addressing resilience from the aid workers' perspective

Before the mission, aid workers should
- Think about their *motivations and expectations*, be realistic, coherent and honest about their goals and drivers[43]
- Gain understanding of the *geopolitical context* of the mission, consider ethical frameworks, anticipate moral dilemmas
- Increase awareness of *specific stressors,* more positive or harmful coping mechanisms, both for first time mission as well as linked with cumulative stress
- Think how disaster may *challenge routine operation's procedures* and psychological assumptions[44]
- *Identify emotions* in themselves, in their colleagues and in those they will be helping; learn how to build up appropriate response to their own emotions[45]
- *Reconcile with organisation's goals and value system*

Also, they may consider the interactions with their environment, and

- Be aware of the *value of social support with home*, possible gaps that will occur with friends and family, get information regarding means of communication
- Consider the *importance of collegial support* and gather information on the mission context (isolation, team size, gender, culture)

- Learn and develop basic *conflict resolution strategies*
- Ask for *clear job description*, objectives and regular appraisal
- Make an effort to *feel emotionally attached to the organisation*, its values in order to enhance sense of belonging[46]
- Be conscious of the *influence of the individual on the culture* of the team, organisation, and sector.

During the mission, aid workers should
- *Pay attention to their minds* (concentration problem, feelings of being overwhelmed)[47]
- *Articulate their thoughts* and write them down or discuss
- *Be sensitive to their emotions*, learn coping skills to protect emotionally, distancing techniques (positive images, relaxation, exercise)
- *Find people to share spiritual matters* with or write them down[48]
- *Monitor their sleeping, eating habits,* promote physical exercise and hygiene, and avoid temptation to use alcohol or drugs as dissociation mechanisms
- *Talk to others* about their needs and look for appropriate support

After their return from mission, aid workers should

- *De-role with the organisation*, and from their role through debriefing sessions, hand-over, take part in farewell party[49]
- *Be psychologically prepared to return home*, remove element of surprise and disappointment
- Ensure *emotional disclosure* within socially supportive environment
- *Reflect on spiritual matters*, possible loss of meaning having moved out of disaster context, new motivations
- *Give time to physically recover*, and also feel free to enjoy
- *Establish a network* of people to create a 'holding environment' from aid sector and outside[50]

- *Seek professional support* for counselling if need arises

5.2. Addressing resilience from the organisation's perspective

The organisation has also a role to play to limit causes and impact of stress and trauma, and support the recovery process. Based on the theoretical framework explored earlier, this section will propose some recommendations for an organisation to enhance aid workers' resilience.

Before assignment – Selection
During the selection, recruiters must assess the capacity of the individual to perform to levels expected by the organisation. However, recruiters must not assume that everyone who applies is resilient[51]. Criteria based on the framework developed earlier may be assessed:
- People with secure professional and personal life
- Ability to handle previous life events and transition
- Capacity to relax and take care of themselves
- Ability to secure and retain a good social network
- Positive experience in working and living with a team

Moreover, existing individual vulnerability or resilience factors need to be weighed up with the situational characteristics (mission, country)[52].

Before assignment – Training
An organisation may conduct training for aid workers; this should include awareness session on resilience factors at individual and environmental level. Using simulation that models the demands, the competencies and the context[53], experiential learning could include the 4 phases as explained in Figure 6 in order to achieve psychological, emotional and physical conditioning. Training would provide frames of reference in terms of threat perception, adaptation to different cognitive schema and familiarisation with one's emotions. Training may also provide awareness regarding team management and conflict resolution[54], detailed information on task to be performed, organisation's procedures - security, logistics, administration; this knowledge should increase one's sense of self-control[55]. Training may also include awareness on possible difficulties at the return and discuss openly psychological support.
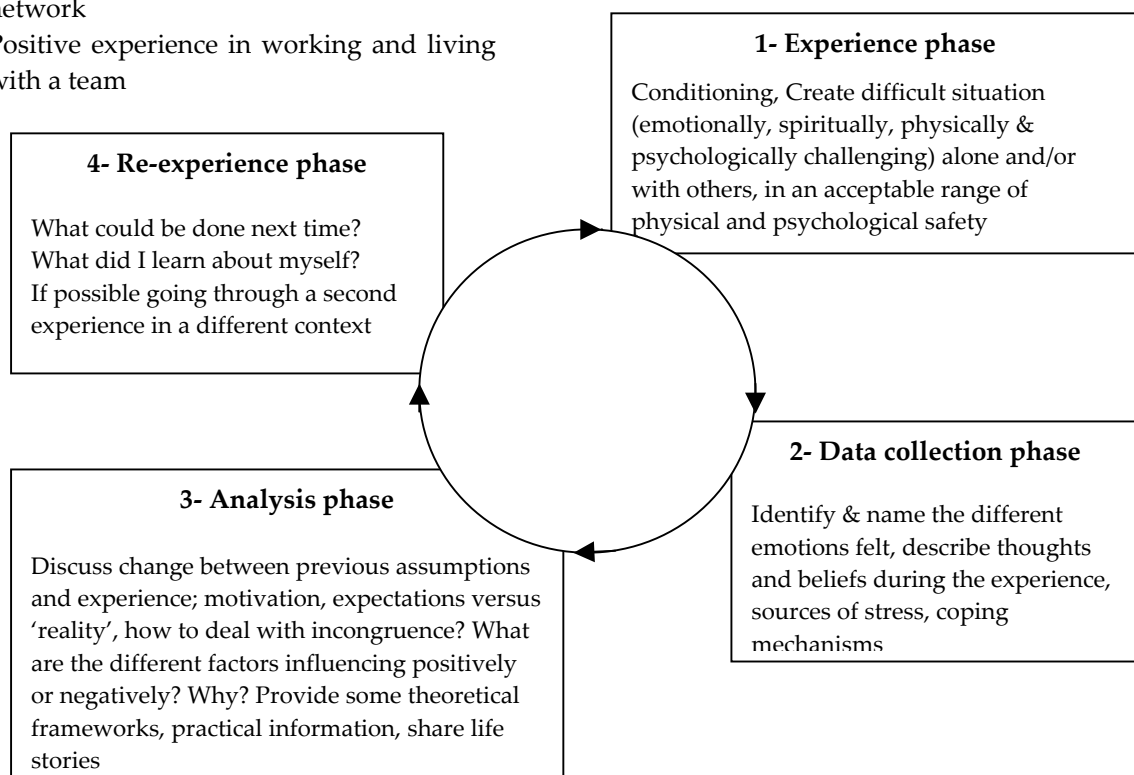
1- Experience phase

Conditioning, Create difficult situation (emotionally, spiritually, physically & psychologically challenging) alone and/or with others, in an acceptable range of physical and psychological safety

4- Re-experience phase

What could be done next time?
What did I learn about myself?
If possible going through a second experience in a different context

2- Data collection phase

Identify & name the different emotions felt, describe thoughts and beliefs during the experience, sources of stress, coping mechanisms

3- Analysis phase

Discuss change between previous assumptions and experience; motivation, expectations versus 'reality', how to deal with incongruence? What are the different factors influencing positively or negatively? Why? Provide some theoretical frameworks, practical information, share life stories

Figure 6 Experiential learning for aid workers, based on Kolb's learning cycle[56]

Before assignment – Briefing

Different types of briefing may be conducted both in the headquarters and in the field. Based on the study of resilience factors developed earlier, following key recommendations may enhance aid workers' resilience:

- More time during recruitment and briefing to know the person
- More time between the recruitment and the starting date to ensure commitment
- Importance to 'en-role' the aid workers with the organisation's values and systems
- Need to provide sufficient information to allow the aid workers to develop a motivating but clear and realistic picture of the mission (geopolitical and security context, existing tensions, possible frustrations)
- Open discussion on mental health with existing sources of support

Finally, briefing should be carried out systematically even if time is limited due to emergency.

During assignment

The major stressors occur in the field. It also there that support is less available. Defusing stress during the assignment is essential and should be done as a complement to final debriefing. In order to support this process, the organisation may intervene at different levels, by reducing the causes of stress: internal bureaucracy, ineffective administration, conflicts diffusion and also by enhancing resilience factors[57]. Different actions may be taken such as:

- Ensuring access to external support (phone calls, peer support)
- Maintaining stable and long term team to enhance cohesion
- Providing effective supervision, and being sensitive to staff's need
- Contributing to give meaning to the humanitarian action
- Developing clear management structures, and adjusting them in changing environment
- Providing media and society with a positive and fair view of aid workers' role.

After assignment – Debriefing

Three types of debriefing may be organised: operational debriefing, personal debriefing and less commonly Critical Incident Debriefing (CID)[58]. In parallel with the need to 'en-role' prior to an assignment, is the importance to 'de-role' at the end of it, the organisation must recognise the work done and outcome achieved, provide feedback to aid workers and learn from their recommendations. Organisations may also support the aid worker's reflection on positive and negative aspect of the experience in a way helpful in adjusting to other environment[59].

Efficiency of systematic psychological debriefing is currently discussed[60]. However organisations should ensure that relief workers are aware of the availability and confidentiality of such services.

After assignment – Return home, next mission

Currently, support for aid workers after their assignment period is almost nonexistent, some organisations offer free counselling sessions up to six months after the end of the contract. Ideally, organisations together with aid workers should define reintegration strategies that would sustain resilience and any benefits accruing from working in disaster contexts[61]. But in the absence of a legal obligation, organisations may not be willing to ensure this post-assignment support.

Organisations must also accept one needs time before going back to the next mission, and therefore leave some space for the aid worker to say 'no' to the next assignment without being penalised.

5.3 Conclusion

This research has explored the resilience of aid workers. Integrating the humanitarian experience into one's identity is challenged by the complexity of providing coherent meaning to one's action during and after an assignment, and also by the incongruence of one's emotions or their protective suppression. Additionally, physical and moral disconnection with others in the host or home country reinforces the feeling of not belonging, putting a strain on one's social identity. Considering the specific pressures and potentials of the humanitarian environment, a resilience framework is developed here and aims to support this integration into one's identity. A combination of various factors are presented in the study, referring at both individual and environmental level, but also having their drawbacks, as vulnerability can be considered as the other side of the coin.

Though there is no magic formula to create resilient aid workers, a number of actions would contribute to strengthen an employee's capacity to deal positively with their experience and gain advantages from it.

These recommendations include:
- Enhanced self-awareness for the relief workers
- Improved communication and a more human relationship among workers and with managers
- Better implementation of organisation's policies and guidelines
- And a shift in the aid sector culture towards psychological support

To conclude, resilience must not be assumed as a given quality to all aid workers in any situation. Moreover, there is room for improvement in enhancing resilience factors and containing causes of vulnerability. Finally, it must be recognised that responsibility for aid workers' well-being is shared between the individual and the organisation.

About the research

This article is a condensed version of a Master's dissertation written during the summer 2006 as part of a MSc. in the Management and Implementation of Development Projects at the Institute for Development Policy and Management at The University of Manchester, UK. http://www.manchester.ac.uk/idpm

The research includes the analysis of relevant academic sources, literature specialised in humanitarian sector and primary data. Through semi-structured interviews, information was collected among 14 persons involved in aid work: 6 relief workers, 4 head office managers with extensive field experience and 4 head office representatives with no or little field experience from three UK-based organisations (Mines Advisory Group, Merlin and Save the Children). Psychology professionals have supported technical input as key informants. A full version of the dissertation with detailed methodology process and findings is available upon request.

About the Author

Pascale Blanchetière has worked for four years in post-conflict and disaster-aftermath contexts as logistician and project manager with UK-based organisations such as Merlin and Save the Children.

Her email address is pascaleblanche@hotmail.com

Copyright

[1] Oxford Dictionary Concise (2004) Ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Manchester University. 3 September 2006 http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e47692

[2] Vanistaendael, S. (2006) *Presentation about resilience* at the Prisons' Chaplaincy meeting, Mars 2006 south of Paris, Member of the International Catholic Office for Children (Bureau International Catholique de l'enfance, à Genève, www.bice.org)

[3] Save the Children (2002) *Personal Guide Well-being*, internal guidelines Health and Safety, London

[4] ICRC (2003) *Humanitarian Action and Armed Conflict: Coping with stress*, ICRC publication, http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList74/714142754D6899A2C1256C5B00319162

[5] Barron, R.A. (1999:165) Psychological Trauma and Relief Workers in Leaning, J. *et al*. (eds.) *Humanitarian Crises: The Medical and Public Health Responses* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, pp. 143-175.

[6] Loquercio, D., Hammersley, M., Hemmens, B. (2006) Understanding and Addressing Staff Turnover in Humanitarian Agencies, *Humanitarian Practice Network*, Number 55, June 2006

[7] Van Brabant, K. (2000:280) *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments,* Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI, London

[8] Barron (1999:165)

[9] Barron (1999:163)

[10] CHP Centre for Humanitarian Psychology (2006) available at http://www.humanitarian-psy.org/pages/default_en.asp

[11] Van Brabant (2000:283)

[12] Headington Institute (2006) accessible at http://www.headington-institute.org/

[13] McFarlane, C.A. (2004) Risks Associated with the Psychological Adjustment of Humanitarian Aid Workers, *The Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies,* Vol 2004-1, accessible at http://www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/issues/2004-1/mcfarlane.htm

[14] McCall**,** M., Salama, P. (1999) Selection, Training, and Support of Relief Workers: an occupational health issue**.** *British Medical Journal*, *318* pp.113-116.

[15] Barron (1999:160)

[16] Aid worker's interview (2006)

[17] Save the Children (2002)

[18] Lovell-Hawker, D. (2006:59) *Working Through Trauma, Supporting Staff Responding to Disasters*, People in Aid publication

[19] Tedeschi, R.G., Calhoun, L. G. (1996) The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the Positive Legacy of Trauma, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol.9, 3 pp.455-471

[20] Sarrade, C. (2005) Rétablissons de l'humanité dans l'humanitaire, DESS dissertation, accessible at http://www.stress-humanitaire.org/

[21] Horowitz, M.J. (1976) *Stress Response Syndromes*, Jason Aronson, USA

[22] Howell, E. F. (2005) *The Dissociative Mind*, the Analytical Press, London

[23] Herman, J.D. (1992:43) *Trauma and Recovery, the aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*, Basic books, New York

[24] Herman (1992:55)

[25] Paton, D., Smith, L.M., Violanti, J. (2000) Disaster Response: risk, vulnerability and resilience, *Disaster Prevention and Management*, Vol 9, 3 pp.173-179

[26] Almedon, A.M (2005) Resilience, Hardiness, Sense of Coherence, and Posttraumatic Growth: All paths leading to "Light at the end of the tunnel"? *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, Vol. 10, pp.253-265

[27] Almedon (2005)

[28] Bracken, P.J., Petty, C. (1998:50) *Rethinking the Trauma of War*, Save the Children/Free association books, London, England

[29] Allan, A. (2004) citing Baumeister Expatriate Team Dynamics and Support in the Field: Psychosocial Implications, presented at the Conference *Psychosocial Support of International Humanitarian Aid Workers*, Nov. 2003 International Conflict Resolution Centre, University of Melbourne, Australia, available at http://www.psychology.org.au/units/interest_groups/cultures/crosscultural/ngostaffissuesforum.pdf#search=%22%20site%3Awww.psychology.org.au%20australian%20NGO%20psychosocial%20forum%22

[30] Vaux, T. (2001:59) *The Selfish Altruist*, Earthscan Publications London

[31] Ehrenreich, J. H. (2002). *A Guide for Humanitarian Aid, Health Care, and Human Rights Workers: Caring for Others, Caring for Yourself,* Old Westbury, NY:

Center for Psychology and Society, available at http://www.mhwwb.org/disasters.htm

[32] Barron (1999:161)

[33] Barron (1999:160)

[34] Paton *et al* (2000)

[35] McCreesh, M. (2003) Re-Entry Syndrome, article posted on *Aid Workers Network* accessible at http://www.aidworkers.net/?q=node/263

[36] Headington Institute (2006)

[37] Berk, J.H. (1998) Trauma and resilience during war: a look at children and humanitarian aid workers of Bosnia, *Psychoanalytic Review* Aug 1998 Vol 85 (4) pp.639-65

[38] Paton *et al* (2000)

[39] Apfel, R.J., Simon, B. (1996) Psychosocial Interventions for Children of War: The Value of a Model of Resiliency, *Medicine and Global survival*, available on http://www.ippnw.org/MGS/V3Apfel.html

[40] Allan, A., Melville, F. (2004) Mitigating Stress of National Staff, Suggestions for Proactive Management, *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Psychological Issues of Humanitarian Staff Care Conference* 16-17 November 2004, Melbourne

[41] NOHA (1999:29) Network on Humanitarian Action *Psychology in Humanitarian Assistance*, http://membres.lycos.fr/dloquercio/know-how/Ressources/psychology/Psychology.pdf

[42] Van Brabant (2000:285)

[43] Ehrenreich (2002)

[44] Paton *et al (*2000)

[45] Danieli, Y. (Ed.) (2002:379) Sharing the Front line and the Back Hills: International protectors and providers: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers and the media in the midst of crisis. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Co.

[46] Gordon, R. (2004) The Stress of Humanitarian Work, discussion paper presented at the Conference *Psychosocial support of International Humanitarian Aid Worker*, Nov. 2003 International Conflict Resolution Centre, University of Melbourne, April 2004 http://www.psychology.org.au/units/interest_groups/cultures/crosscultural/ngostaffissuesforum.pdf#search=%22%20site%3Awww.psychology.org.au%20australian%20NGO%20psychosocial%20forum%22

[47] Ehrenreich (2002)

[48] Headington Institute (2006)

[49] Gordon (2004)

[50] Danieli (2002:379)

[51] Lovell-Hawker (2005:2)

[52] McFarlane (2004)

[53] Paton *et al* (2000)

[54] Salama, P. (1999) *The Psychological Health of Relief Workers: Some Practical Suggestions*, accessible at http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/psycho.htm

[55] Creamer, M. (2004) Mechanisms of Recovery Following Psychological Trauma presented at the Conference *Psychosocial Support of International Humanitarian Aid Workers*, Nov. 2003 International Conflict Resolution Centre, University of Melbourne, Australia

[56] Mann, P. (2006) Learning cycle presentation, and triangle Why, What, How during sessions *Practice of Change and Learning*, IDPM, University of Manchester

[57] Ehrenreich (2002)

[58] Lovell-Hawker (2005:40)

[59] Platt, S.M., Bacareza, Margallo, S. (2002:208) Sustaining the Humanitarian Work Force: Increasing Violence, Increasing Vulnerability in Danieli, Y. (Ed.) (2002) *Sharing the Front Line and the Back Hills: International protectors and providers: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers and the media in the midst of crisis.* Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Co.

[60] Barron (1999:165)

[61] Paton *et al* (2000)