



Superheroes need not apply

On first responders and other humanitarian workers in the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Åsta Ytre, Torino, Italy, 10-12 November 2008

The
International
Federation

**Reference Centre for
Psychosocial Support**



**To improve the lives of
vulnerable people by mobilizing
the power of humanity**



About the Federation

- **186** National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- **97** million members and volunteers, of whom 20 million are active volunteers
- Assisting millions of beneficiaries each year

International Federation Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support

- Established in 1993
- In Copenhagen, Denmark
- ***Promotes and enables psychosocial well-being of beneficiaries, humanitarian staff and volunteers***



The PS Centre mission:



“Assist the Federation Secretariat and National Societies to develop the capacity to provide psychosocial services at the community level in areas affected by catastrophic events, long-term crises and/or armed conflict”

What does psychosocial mean to us?

Targets the sphere between
psycho – individual emotional reactions and
social – the relations between people

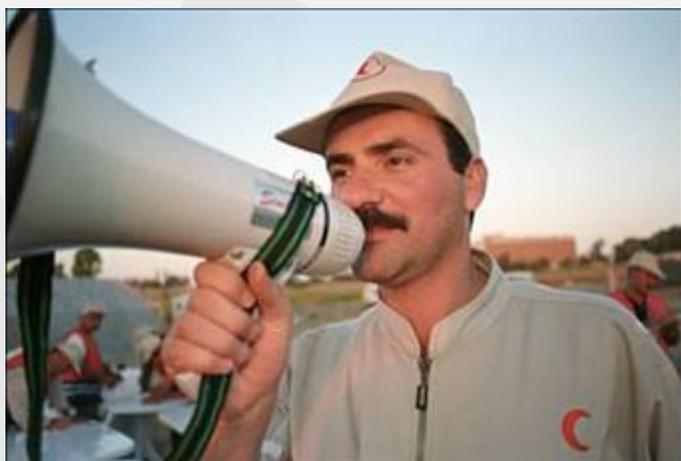
Assist affected people to attain a stable life, to restore hope, dignity, mental and social well-being.



Red Cross and Red Crescent psychosocial objectives

- Create awareness regarding psychosocial reactions
- Improve disaster preparedness & response
- Facilitate psychosocial support
- Promote individuals & communities resilience
and
- **Improve assistance to staff & volunteers**

”The RC Superman”



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The endless business of helping



”Many of us that are caught up in the business of helping others feel that we need to keep going, no matter what. This is dangerous, because we will burn out. If you burn out, you will be of no use to yourself, your family or to those you try to help.”

(Angela Gordon-Stair, Jamaica Red Cross)

IFRC Psychosocial support Policy 3.8:

The International Federation and individual National Society shall:

”Provide psychological support as a long-term and reliable commitment to ensure that the psychological aspects of relief work are professionally implemented and make a crucial difference to the population, ***volunteers and staff*** affected by disaster.”



What happens if we don't help?

**If we do not
take care of
our people,
we will lose
them.**



Helping the helpers

- Self-care techniques
- Supportive environment, peers and supervisors



NB! None of these replace professional help but might be the only support available and can have preventive effects.

Self-care



Self-care is essential for helping others.

It means maintaining one's fitness.

Volunteers and staff need techniques.



Role of management

- Role model on how to cope
- Create opportunities to speak about tension and communication problems
- Create the possibility of social activities
- Provide opportunity of giving a long weekend off or other R&R (rest and recreation) possibilities



Peer support – Austrian Red Cross example

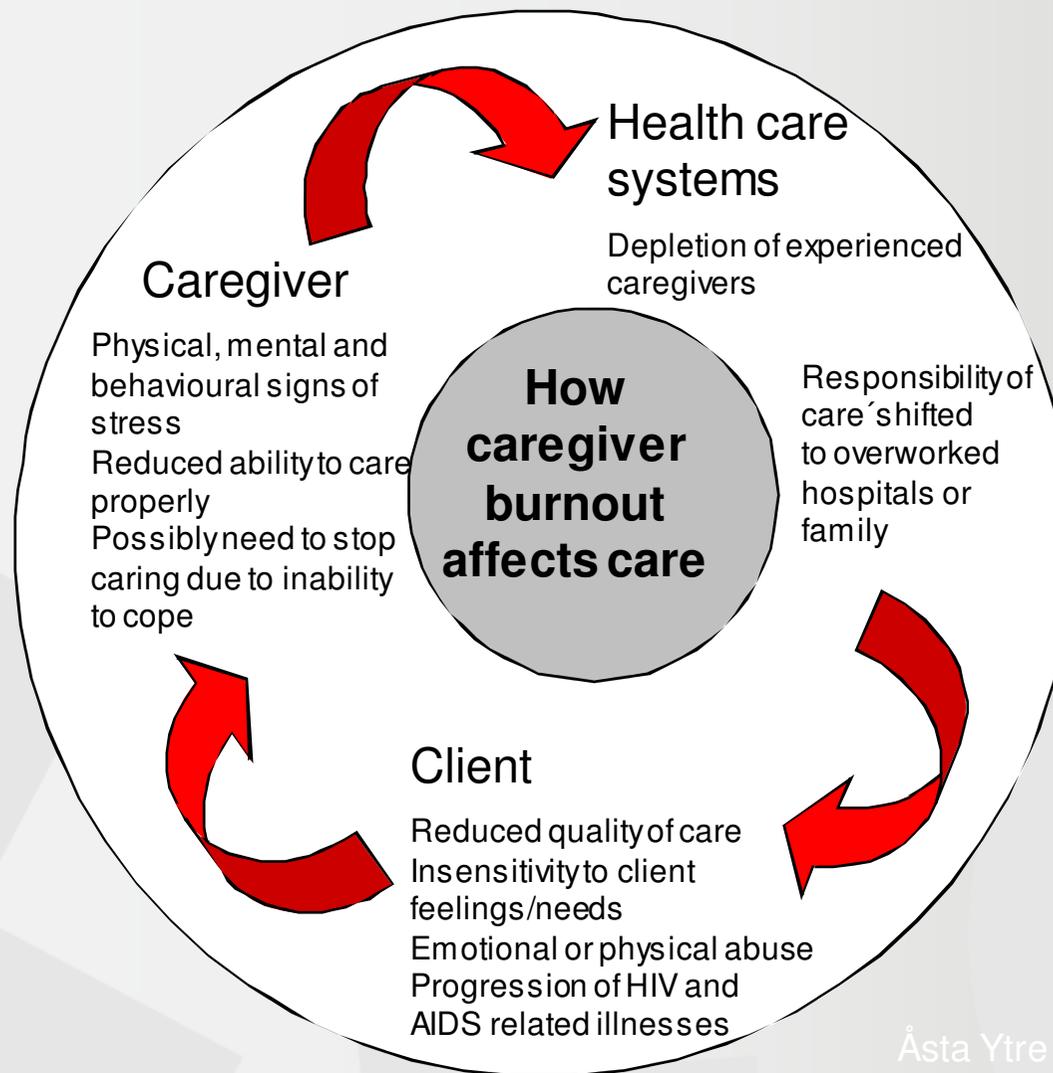


South Africa: Reducing the human cost of caring



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How burnout affects care



Impact of caring for carers



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Stress and growth

While recognizing the stress developed by some it is important to realize that others feel strengthened by the same work, experience post-traumatic growth



So... at the end of the day:

- Psychosocial support is needed during and after catastrophic events, long-term crises and armed conflict
- Staff and volunteers have similar needs to beneficiaries when it comes to psychosocial support
- National Societies should ensure appropriate support systems and referral to professionals when needed

The fundamental principle of *HUMANITY* applies for helpers and those helped alike!

Tools and techniques

PS Centre tools:

- *Community-based psychological support: A training (under revision)*
- PS tool kit (CD-rom)
- <http://psp.drk.dk> – documents – support of staff and volunteers and other material
- Regional and national trainings/practices

Contact us: psp-referencecentre@drk.dk

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Thank you for your attention

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