

Coping with crisis

Reference Centre for Psychological Support

News from the Reference Centre for Psychological Support

By Janet Rodenburg, Head of the Reference Centre

Since our last *Coping with Crisis*, there have been some significant developments. In October 2002 a workshop was held with the roster members - a group of experts most of them attached to National Red Cross Societies, conducting assessments and training on behalf of the Reference Centre. The purpose of the meeting was to consolidate the roster after a long period without deployment, to discuss the future direction of the Reference Centre, as well as possible assignments.

A draft policy paper on psychological support within the IFRC has just been developed, which has been sent out to 30 National Societies, health advisers, and Health Commission members for their comments. A strategy paper, paving the way for the Reference Centre for the coming three years, is soon to follow.

During the last couple of months considerable time has been spent on fund raising. Thanks to the generous contributions from the Icelandic, Norwegian and Finnish Red Cross our assistant, Ewa Maryl, could be offered a fulltime position in the Reference Centre from January 1, 2003, and we succeeded to cover most of the planned core activities.

Following a regional PS meeting in Beirut in September, a project proposal has been developed to strengthen PS in the RC/RC societies of the Middle East and North Africa region. There is an urgent need to support training activities, both in Iraq and in the adjoining countries. Last November, training on psychological support was provided during a Disaster Preparedness exercise attended by 120 volunteers from all 18 branches of the Iraqi Red Crescent. This

was followed by a workshop, in cooperation with the ICRC, for 25 participants on Safety and Stress, covering, among others, psychological support to caregivers. It is expected that the war threat and concomitant tensions will have a considerable impact on all countries of the region and that is why we opt for a regional strengthening approach. In the meantime, a Psychological First Aid seminar with Red Cross personnel from Latvia and Lithuania took place in November 2002. The Icelandic Red Cross facilitated the seminar as part of the Nordic-Baltic work plan.

And this is only the top of the iceberg, as much more seems to be going on.... *Please share your experiences with the Reference Centre, so that we can learn from each other!*

For more details on any of the above-mentioned activities, please contact the Reference Centre.

ICRC Conference on The Missing

By Janet Rodenburg

Ten of thousands of people are missing as a result of conflicts, leaving families and friends to wait for years – often in vain – for news of their fate. At a conference organised

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last month by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, participants called for greater consideration for relatives, better ways of identification and stronger laws to prevent disappearances. The conference brought together experts from governments and NGOs as well as representatives of families of the missing to discuss ways to make a difference for people who have no news of their missing relatives. Moreover, representatives of 44 National RC/RC Societies participated, as well as the Federation Reference Centre for Psychological Support. Apart from the need for information and socio-economic needs, the panel *Families and their need to know the fate of their relatives* addressed the need for psychological support. Not having confirmation of a relative's fate leaves a permanent open emotional wound. As the president of Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action, in Sri Lanka, put it: "Anxiety has a tendency of increasing even after decades" and is a damaging aspect of the healing process. It is clear that the families of missing persons constitute an important target group for many National Societies in the aftermath of armed conflicts. For them it will be a challenge to strengthen family and community development by providing psychological support and therapeutic social activities. More information on the conference, as well as the full texts of the speeches, can be found on <http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/5HMDYE>

Community-based Psychological Support: a Training Manual

The new community-based manual has now been launched! The manual has been piloted in three different cultural contexts - Hungary, South Korea and Lebanon - utilising evaluation and feedback to refine the contents. The manual consists of a modular training package that aims to cover the key areas of a psychological support program:

- *Module 1: Psychological Support* – the evolution, definition, aims and purpose of the Psychological Support Programme in the context of the Red Cross/Red Crescent
- *Module 2: Stress and Coping* – the identification and management of stress reactions in volunteers, relief personnel and people in need
- *Module 3: Supportive Communication* – addressing communication in a variety of *challenging situations*
- *Module 4: Promoting community self help* – how to engage communities in their own recovery process

- *Module 5: Populations with special needs* – addressing the needs of vulnerable populations e.g. children, the elderly, HIV/AIDS
- *Module 6: Helping the helper* – ways in which volunteers and other workers can deal with the impact of their work on themselves and their colleagues

The modules provide some initial tools of how to incorporate psychological support in disaster preparedness, disaster response, first aid, emergency health and development programmes like community health, HIV/AIDS and social welfare programmes. The manual will soon be available on www.ifrc.org



Below, you will find a snapshot of the delivery of the new manual in South Korea.

Training with the Korean Red Cross

By Stephen Regel, Director, Centre for Trauma Studies Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Nottingham, UK

Ms. Aida Paez Beltejar, Head of Welfare in the Philippine Red Cross and myself, facilitated the piloting of the Community-based Psychological Support Manual in South Korea. As members of the PSP Roster, we had both met on previous occasions, but had not worked together on PSP training. After our arrival, there was a day of preparatory meetings at the NS's headquarters in Seoul to discuss the format of the training and deal with logistics and other matters. We also arrived during one of the worst floods to hit parts of South Korea in almost a century. The PSP Training workshop was held at the Korean Red Cross Training Institute, Suwon, South Korea from 2-6th September 2002. There were 14 participants, including two delegates from the Hong Kong Red Cross. The majority of the participants had a health or social work background with only a few having little knowledge of the concepts of PSP. Some had experience of teaching similar material and were thus familiar with many of the ideas. A decision was made therefore, to 'walk' the participants through each of the modules, checking cultural

appropriateness, language, terminology etc., but also to conduct the modules as they might be taught to different target groups. Some of the activities were also thus modified.

Language was a challenge, whilst many, if not all participants could understand and read English well, it was soon clear that speaking openly in the group was inhibiting for a few. Therefore participants were encouraged to speak in their own language whenever they felt they needed to and to use their colleagues to clarify any of the more subtle differences and nuances. This was successful and was also encouraged during activities and role-plays. The delivery of the modules took longer than anticipated in each case, because of the need to ensure participants a) understood the facilitators, b) had opportunities to ask questions and c) seek clarification of key points, consider cultural, contextual, subtleties, nuances and differences.



Photo: Stephen Regel

In some respects the training was timely, not only in light of the floods, but also in the context of the recent disaster which befell South Korea's third largest city of Daegu, that of the subway fire which killed hundreds and injured scores of people. It is precisely such critical events that the PSP is designed to address

In conclusion

The experience of delivering the material in an Asian context was invaluable on a number of fronts, but also highlighted the challenges of making such material cultu-

rally appropriate. In addition, the comments and observations from participants were extremely helpful for the facilitators. The manual is an invaluable reference point for the PSP. There is obvious potential and scope for further development and the inclusion of supplementary materials and modules, thus allowing for maximum flexibility. The cultural context of training is extremely important and cannot be emphasized enough as this PSP workshop illustrated and highlighted so vividly.

Sadly, it is also impossible in this brief article to convey the spirit of place we experienced, from the peace of a Buddhist temple to the booming and bustling metropolis of Seoul. For most westerners, until Korea co-hosted the recent World Cup, it was a relatively neglected area of the Far East – hopefully this will now change.

The mission was extremely enjoyable though challenging – and sadly as always too brief to give a true picture of a fascinating and beautiful country, with a polite, gracious and charming people. Nevertheless, our hosts, Ms. In-Jae Cho, Head, Health and Welfare Division, Korean Red Cross and Ms. Ji-Hyun Park, Programme Officer, Health and Welfare Division, made sure that despite the intensive training experience, we had an opportunity to experience a taste of Korean life. Taste in this case, being the operative word! The gastronomic delights of Korean food will linger long in the memory and the taste buds! The facilitators would like to take this opportunity to extend their sincere and heartfelt thanks to all staff in the Korean Red Cross National Society for their generosity, hospitality and kindness during their stay in Korea. Hopefully, one day we will get the opportunity to return and learn of developments and initiatives within the Korean National Societies implementation of the PSP.



Upcoming events:

- **Sub-regional workshop on Disaster & Psychological Support in Slovakia from 10 to 12 April 2003**
- **Sub-regional workshop on Disaster & Psychological Support in Romania from 5 to 7 June 2003**
- **2-day Conference and 5-day Training of Trainers in Tokyo and Yamanashi, Japan, from 21 to 27 June 2003**
- **FHS-Forum Katastrophenmanagement in Götting, Germany, from 23 to 24 June 2003**

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