



DIVISION OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

The Hong Kong Psychological Society

香港心理學會臨床心理學組

G. P. O. Box 9828, Hong Kong

香港郵政總局郵箱 9828 號

<http://rouge.hkps.org.hk/dcp/>

Psychological Self-Care and Balances For Media and Victim Support Workers

The earthquake in Indonesia on 26.12.2004 has brought massive tsunamis. Many living individuals from these countries and across the world had fallen victim to this disaster, and many people are still reported to be missing. Nations have joined hands in all forms of support and assistances to victims and their relatives at a scale unprecedented in history.

Being a media worker or a personnel involved in victim support, it must have been extremely demanding both physically and psychologically for you in providing relief support in the disaster areas in the past few days. The work must have been extremely difficult. In the hot, unfamiliar, and harsh environment, you have to face numerous dead bodies (including that of children), dying scenes, as well as the despair of helpless family members. These may bring immense stress on your work, body, and mind. Please take good care of yourself while helping others.

Common Responses in a Disaster Site

Although you may be very experienced and well trained in your profession, you may still experience various emotional and physical responses at a disaster site.

They include:

- Feelings about the impermanence and fragility of life
- Awareness of your own limitation and feelings of sadness and depression in face of the tremendous relief task
- Fear, worries, and anxiety caused by the horrible scenes
- Anger and irritability caused by the harsh environment and the work's urgency
- Emotional numbness or social withdrawal after prolonged work at the disaster site
- Flashbacks of the disaster scenes or nightmares affecting sleep quality
- Fatigue, physical exhaustion, and poor appetite
- Bodily symptoms such as headache, bodily aches, or gastrointestinal discomfort
- Poor concentration which may affect your work performance
- Emotional disturbances when handling child victims (May even worry about his or her children's safety)

Are the Responses Abnormal?

All these reactions are actually “Normal Reactions to an Abnormal Situation” and they may affect you and your colleagues in different degrees. Usually, these reactions will subside gradually within weeks with **YOUR PROPER MANAGEMENT**.

Striking a Better Balance

Learning to understand and manage your emotions may build your resilience from the stress of the disaster. Some useful tips are:

- Accept the above-mentioned emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural responses as “Normal”.
- Leave the work behind and relax after duty hours to allow the recovery of your body and mind.
- Remember to eat well and sleep well. Have enough rest, balanced diet, and proper exercise. Avoid excessive alcohol, smoking, coffee, and other forms of self-medication as a means of relief. They will only increase your stress level.
- Pay attention to your own stress responses. If you become increasingly irritable and anxious, you may need a little break from work.
- Colleagues should support and encourage each other. Foster your sense of mission.
- Share your feelings with colleagues. Learn to accept care from others.
- Accept your limitations and understand you have been doing your best. Don't be over-demanding on yourself, nor blame yourselves for being helpless..
- Try to maintain contact with your family or your good friends every day. They may be your important source of support.
- If you are under excessive stress or are having extreme emotional reactions, seeking professional help is necessary.

This informational leaflet brings forth to you the importance of psychological self-care in face of the extremely demanding and often traumatic work at sites of disaster. This, however, will in no way replace professional consultation that may be required. Consult a professional if symptoms become distressful and/or persisting. The Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong Government has set up a hotline (852) 91843775 to assist Hong Kong residents affected by the tsunamis.

Critical Incident Team
Division of Clinical Psychology
Hong Kong Psychological Society
4th January 2005