



# Self-care for GBV in Emergencies Professionals; Rhetoric vs Reality

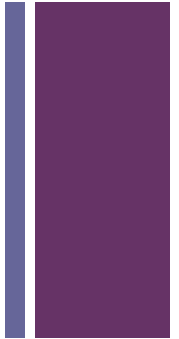
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# CHALLENGES

- GBV in emergency (GBViE) specialists work in challenging circumstances in conflict and natural disaster settings.
- To ensure a safe environment, agencies turn to security regulations and self-care rhetoric.
- However, the reality for GBViE specialists— particularly national staff – is different.
- Those who try to implement self-care by requesting support or time off are often met with obstruction, stigma, delays, and in some cases –negative evaluations.
- The security needs of women are ignored and overlooked.
- This culture of denial negatively impacts GBViE specialists and may be leading to lowered capacity to respond as staff leave the sector to seek other opportunities.





# Working on GBV

- GBViE work creates a real risk of vicarious/secondary trauma.
- Changes in physical, emotional, or behavioral states because of constant exposure to traumatic stories are, in fact, normal.
- They are also cumulative - built over time with exposure to other's suffering and daily confrontation of the reality that there are few resources to adequately respond.
- Practitioners need a supportive environment in which to acknowledge the limitations of humanitarian response.





# Working in Humanitarian Setting



- Numerous studies of the toll this work takes on researchers and those in the “helping professions”.
- A culture of denial permeates the humanitarian field and staff are left to find alternative coping mechanisms which often leads to burnout.
- Collectively, the humanitarian sector must examine the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, and behavioral toll on its staff.

# + SELF-CARE



- **Rhetoric: Self-care includes taking care of our physical and mental health, and seeking support when we need it.**
- **Reality: Self-care is not sufficient. What about the culture within the humanitarian system? What about toxic organizations?**



# Case Study 1: Office Politics and HR as a factor



- GBViE expert working Asia. Working in multiple countries specializing in disasters and neglected areas. Deployed with agency that promotes gender equality and women's rights. Very little notice about whether contract would be renewed. Going month to month.
- Wins major award and is told to give it to male head of agency
- Raises issues about the fact it is difficult to prepare for child's schooling and is told "we are aware that this is an issue for women so we are looking into hiring more men."
- **Rhetoric: We care about GBV and Gender Equality**
- **Reality: HR stress creates a hostile workplace that does not support women.**



# Case Study 2: Stigma around mental health



- GBV expert working for major international NGO that provides psychological care globally.
- Working on Sexual violence, lack of support from majority male managers, “Why do you work on this feminist stuff? It has no place in our organization”, experienced death of father, security incident, Haiti earthquake, suicide of two friends, and sexual harassment at organization within 1 year.
- Referred by company’s psychologist to private psychologist, given six months leave with pay and free care. Upon return to work, told by boss “you were partying for six months – you weren’t really sick.”
- **Rhetoric: We care about the psychological health of our staff**
- **Reality: Culture of “toughness” and stigma for mental health**



# Case Study 3: Security for Women



- Upon briefings in Middle Eastern country, asked about what issues women should be aware of. Security professionals said “Dress respectfully. If you don’t do that, you will be treated as a prostitute.” Sexual assault never mentioned despite Megan Norbert and Kayla Mueller.
- Awareness raising session with female staff at UN agency and at INGO – national staff and internationals. Sexual harassment, sexual assault, and discrimination were raised as number one security concerns. No “referral pathway” in place if aid worker is raped. No enforcement of sexual harassment rules. Security officers placed guest house on road in red light district. Female workers harassed.
- **Rhetoric: Security is important.**
- **Reality: The real life security needs of women are not addressed or treated with importance.**



## + A modest proposal

- We propose using the SVRI Forum as a platform to build a shared agenda to create an enabling environment for GBViE specialists.





# Recommendations



Organizations and donors must support an enabling culture through:

- Institutionalizing – and respecting - a culture of care across institutions;
- Supporting and encouraging staff to access care opportunities while creating space for staff reflection/discussion;
- Ensuring that all staff – regardless of contract status – are entitled to support as a right, not a privilege;
- Encouraging staff to access care – without risk of stigma, shame, or discrimination in present or future.



# RESOURCES:



GBV Capacity building strategy calls for: **Promoting staff professional development and care**

Address contract modalities and TORs and create incentives for more senior people to stay in positions longer, particularly focusing on policies that address possible barriers to retaining women, such as balancing work with child-rearing responsibilities.

- Conduct a study to determine barriers to GBV specialist retention.
- Review organizational cultures and environments and promote a more conducive environment for gender equality to support GBV work.
- Work with senior management teams to ensure gender and power issues are included in senior management capacity building to promote more understanding of GBV work.
- Develop staff care guidance for agencies/organizations deploying GBV specialists to humanitarian contexts.
  - Identify the health and mental health risks for GBV in emergency specialists.
  - Highlight the importance of developing and implementing specific staff wellness and care policies and processes related to self-care and resiliency.
  - Identify and promote internal policies such as supportive supervision, time off, access to technical support and mentoring, access to counselling and/or support groups, etc.
  - Ensure mentoring and supervision includes time for debriefing and well-being check-ins along with technical support.



# More Resources



- Mindfulnext blog: <http://mindfulnext.org/>
- Fifty Shades of Aid: Facebook group:  
[https://www.facebook.com/groups/1594464844163690/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1594464844163690/?ref=br_rs)
- Online Petition to raise issue at World Humanitarian Summit:  
[https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/UN SecretaryGeneral and the Emergency Relief Coordinator We call on you to include staff welfare as a key issue at the W/?nqEgtbb](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/UN_SecretaryGeneral_and_the_Emergency_Relief_Coordinator_We_call_on_you_to_include_staff_welfare_as_a_key_issue_at_the_W/?nqEgtbb)
- Security resources for women:  
<http://screamsfromthepinkcollarghetto.blogspot.co.za/2012/12/tips-on-preventing-and-responding-to.html>