

Center for Disease Control – Antares Foundation Longitudinal Study on Stress in Humanitarian Aid Workers

The rise in low-intensity conflicts in the 1990's found humanitarian aid workers frequently in the line of fire that affected the functioning and productivity of agency programs. In addition, the recent increased risk of terrorist activities in politically volatile emergencies contributes to the need for security and support of staff. To date, there is a serious lack of studies about the consequences of extreme stress to relief workers, and what agencies can do to appropriately manage and support staff, and worker productivity (Mc Call & Salama, BMJ, 1999). Only a longitudinal approach can establish predictive relationships between personal, organizational and duty-related stressors, and mental health and organizational productivity.

CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, USA) have in collaboration with the Antares Foundation (Amsterdam, The Netherlands), initiated a longitudinal study on stress in humanitarian aid workers. Participating institutions are: the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Fuller Theological Seminary, CA, USA; University of Georgia, GA, USA; Queen Margaret University College, Scotland, Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, LA, USA;

1. Study Goals and Objectives

Study Goal: To provide in depth and scientifically valid information regarding mental health status of humanitarian workers working under stress and in hardship.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify **aspects of work** associated with elevated risk of poor mental health and burnout in aid workers.
- To identify the **risk and resilience factors** moderating the impact of such stressors on or staff functioning.
- To provide **recommendations** for selection, training, and management of aid workers, and effective intervention for stressed individuals.

2. Time-frame of Assessment

The recruitment of NGOs will start from November 2004 and enrolment of respondents will start in January 2005. For the respondents there will be 3 assessment moments; the first before deployment, the second directly after deployment and the third 3 to 6 months after the end of the contract. The final report of the research is planned to be ready in 2008.

3. Participation of Non Governmental Organizations

A minimum of 5 and a maximum of 50 NGO's will be selected to participate in the research. Participating NGOs are required to meet the following criteria:

- In existence for 5 or more years
- Have an established record of international funding
- Operate with a humanitarian imperative, operating in at-risk countries (e.g. including low-income, post-conflict, and chronically stressful environments)
- Deploy 20 or more staff per year
- Willing to adhere to procedures as approved by the CDC Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects

At the conclusion of the study the participating agencies will receive a summary of the findings and recommendations for best practices associated with minimizing stress in humanitarian aid workers. This may lead to improved mental health protocols, training and improved mental health and organizational outcomes.

4. Opportunity for Agency Participation

- A list of agencies that meet the required criteria is currently being compiled.
- If your agency fits the description and is interested, please contact Maaïke Stolte at the Antares Foundation. Email: Maaïke@antaresfoundation.org