

STRESS MANAGEMENT

in Disasters

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This workbook was developed by Dr. Cyralene P. Bryce for the Stress Management in Disasters in the Caribbean (SMID) course. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the *Insights into the Concept of Stress* workbook. It is not intended to be a complete text on the subject of stress.

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"When things go wrong and they sometimes will, just pick up the pieces and keep moving, never stand still." –CPB

M O T T O :

Take control and move on.

" You need to be at peace with yourself before you can be at peace with others." –CPB

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C O U R S E O B J E C T I V E S

1. Define a disaster.
2. Understand the characteristics of disasters.
3. Appreciate the possible impact of a disaster.
4. Describe the psychological profile of the emergency response worker.
5. List the possible occupational stressors encountered by emergency response personnel.
6. Outline the psychological syndromes associated with traumatic stressors.
7. Recognize the common signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndromes.
8. Understand the principles of preventing and managing critical incident stress.
9. Outline the components of the SMID program.
10. Demonstrate crisis intervention and counseling skills in simulated exercises.
11. Demonstrate defusing and debriefing skills in simulated exercises.
12. Be able to plan and implement a SMID program in an organization or in the wider community.

P R E F A C E

It is universally accepted that optimum levels of stress can act as a creative, motivational force that can drive people to achieve incredible feats (eustress). Chronic or traumatic stress (distress) on the other hand, is potentially very destructive and can deprive people of physical and mental health, and at times even of life itself.

Emergency response personnel are unique in that they dedicate their time and energy in assisting persons during stressful times of their lives, for example, after disasters such as hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, etc. By doing this however, they are themselves repeatedly exposed to very stressful situations. Even though their training prepares them to deal with such situations, the reality is that they have a higher than normal risk for developing post-traumatic stress syndromes, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Hence, it must be deduced that the repeated exposure of emergency response personnel to critical incident stress does have a potentially deleterious effect on their well-being. It has also been found that the psychological well-being of emergency response personnel dealing with emergency situations can greatly affect the overall outcome of such situations, including the prognosis of the primary victims of the event.

Despite all of this having been well documented and the repeated exposure of the Caribbean and Latin America to natural disasters, the vast majority of countries do not have a comprehensive stress management program in place to preserve the psychological well-being of their emergency response and disaster workers. The Program on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief of the Pan American Health Organization, Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization, took the initiative of bringing resource persons from throughout the region together in late 1998 to develop the Stress Management in Disasters in the Caribbean (SMID) Program.

The SMID Program is a comprehensive, peer-driven, multi-component stress management program which is administered on a volunteer basis and was designed to prevent and to mitigate the psychological dysfunction which exposure to traumatic situations like disasters may cause in emergency response personnel. The program is based on the principles of crisis intervention and critical incident stress management and it is not intended to take the place of professional therapy. Instead, it seeks to provide persons with the knowledge and skills to better understand, recognize and manage their emotional responses to traumatic situations. While the SMID Program was developed with emergency response personnel and disaster workers as its primary target group, the principles of the program, with appropriate modification, can be readily extended for use in the broader community, including with children and adolescents, to prevent and mitigate traumatic stress.

This workbook, *Stress Management in Disasters* and the companion workbook *Insights into the Concept of Stress* were designed to provide the basic training material for persons who will be providing such a service.