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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.

The vast majority of Caribbean and Latin American countries does not have a comprehensive stress management program in place to preserve the psychological well-being of their emergency response and disaster workers. In 1998, the Program on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief of the Pan American Health Organization took the initiative of bringing resource persons from throughout the Region together 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. It was designed to prevent and to mitigate the psychological dysfunction which exposure to traumatic situations like disasters may cause in emergency response personnel. 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 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.

This publication can be consulted on the internet at:
www.paho.org/disasters



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