



SPECIAL ISSUE

# Humanitarian Work Psychology



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## Special Issue on Humanitarian Work Psychology

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## Editorial

Angela Carter

Never has a special issue been more relevant to the current context. Today, across the world there are people at war, fleeing oppression, suffering from extraordinary natural disasters, living and working in poverty and enduring inequality. This issue of *InPractice* will speak to many of these issues illustrating how psychology is reaching out to these areas, but also has so much more to do to *broaden the lens of research and practice* outside the traditional form of ‘job’ and ‘organization’.

Key to the appreciation of this material is its projection forward to developing more sustainable life and workstyles that are in tune with the environment rather than at odds with it. A strong feature is building and maintaining connections across multiple boundaries. While authors have worked independently you will see there are many connections within their writing that will both inspire you and enable you to develop your own practice and future research. We recommend that you read the issue as a whole to gain the full appreciation of the impact of this work and its place within Humanitarian Work Psychology.

Our issue begins with the first of our two interviews with outstanding scholars and founders of Humanitarian Work Psychology. In a fascinating interview *Virginia Schein* talks about her renown research on gender and leadership (in)equality (*Think Manager -Think Male*) and its international replication. Then she moves on to discuss more recent work exploring women who work in poverty and her activities with the United Nations. Virginia describes the origins of Humanitarian Work Psychology and prompts us to look at the narrow scope of work and organizational psychology that mainly focuses on middle class job roles leaving experiences of the low-waged in precarious work underexplored. The call to broaden the lens and scope of our research in this interview is clear.

Next, we have examples of well-being interventions that are taking place to support workers at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Ingrid Covington in her paper *Protecting the well-being of NATO’s most powerful force: Its people*, describes how a series of interventions were planned, executed and evaluated during Covid-19 lockdown (and after) to support an isolated workforce living many miles from their homes and families.

This is followed by a paper introducing us to aid work; and the impact this work and its organization brings to aid workers. In *Occupational support for aid workers: Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Intervention (AOSPI): A model* Christina Montaiuti offers us a unique insight into aid working and the organizational challenges of supporting aid worker well-being. Christina offers a model detailing the steps aid organizations can take to minimise worker distress before, during and after deployment.

Our second interview is with *Stuart Carr* who describes how his interest in work inequality began studying the dual salary gap between locals and expatriate aid workers (also mentioned in Christina's paper). He describes the expansion of the field of Humanitarian Work Psychology and the need to work across traditional organizational boundaries with multiple stakeholders and experts. He urges us to look more broadly at the informal economy (and precarious working) leaving aside the traditional notion of the 'job'. Building on the notions of sustainability and minimising the environmental impact of work Stu encourages us to look towards a more collaborative future exploring work in its fullest extent from production to product delivery offering examples from around the world. He sharpens our focus to the changes in work and living that are urgently needed, encouraging us to see that our students are already active players in these endeavours.

In our final paper Sakshi Bansal explores *Environment, social & governance (ESG): A new world for Work and Organizational Psychologists*. Sakshi continues the focus on the environmental and sustainability concerns of work and production. She opens up the dialogue of ESG for work and organizational psychologists so that we can appreciate the opportunities of being part of this strategic thinking. She focuses on a practice perspective and further develops Stu's commentary on collaboration, particularly with those people with finance and risk management expertise.

I hope you enjoy this *Special Issue* and the content raises your awareness of Humanitarian Work Psychology, and the exciting future directions work in this area can achieve. Looking ahead, we are assembling the next issue of *InPractice*, to be presented in the autumn. This could be your chance to publish with us. You could offer an empirical paper, a case study, career path discussion, reflections on research or practice, or a presentation of practice-oriented tools used in work and organizational psychology. Please contact us ([InPractice@eawop.org](mailto:InPractice@eawop.org)) with your ideas and a short plan of the paper and we will be delighted to collaborate with you to bring this material into publication.

We look forward to meeting you at the 21<sup>st</sup> EAWOP Congress between 24 and 27 May 2023 in Katowice, Poland (see [EAWOP - 21st European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology Congress 2023, eawop2023.org](https://eawop2023.org)). There is a strong Science + Practice theme throughout the congress. Look out for SCIENCE AND PRACTICE FRIDAY in the Guest Sessions (<https://eawop2023.org/guest-sessions>).



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# Women, work, poverty and the UN: Widening our research lens

Interview with Virginia E. Schein,  
Professor Emerita of Management and Psychology, Gettysburg College, USA

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## Introduction and about the interviewee

Today I have the pleasure of interviewing Virginia Schein a Work and Organizational Psychologist (WOP) who as a scientist–practitioner has been transformational in our field. In our interview we will visit her early work on gender and leadership, see her transition into humanitarian work with women and poverty and move up to date with her current work with the United Nations (UN).

Virginia received her undergraduate degree from Cornell University and PhD in Industrial–Organizational (I–O) Psychology from New York University. Her early career years were spent as an in–house I–O psychologist for the American Management Association and the Life Office Management Association (LOMA) and as Director of Personnel Research for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife), all in New York City. It was at LOMA that she conducted the now well known “*Think Manager–Think Male*” research, one of the first of its kind on gender stereotyping and requisite management characteristics. This research has since been replicated over four decades across five continents. At MetLife she conducted one of the first studies on the relationship between flexible working hours and productivity. Based on her work, MetLife put all its 50,000 employees on flextime, being the first company in New York City to do so.

Virginia then moved into the academic world, holding professorial positions at Case Western Reserve University, Yale University, The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Baruch College of the City University of New York and Gettysburg College. She has lectured worldwide on gender and leadership, including in the United Kingdom (UK), France, Turkey, Poland and South Africa. She is the author of *Working from the Margins: Voices of Mothers in Poverty* and co–author of *Power and Organization Development*.

Virginia is a past President of the Metropolitan New York Association of Applied Psychology (METRO) and of the Work and Organizational Psychology Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP). For over 50 years Virginia has been a member of Division 14 of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP). She served as Workshop Chair, then as an elected member to the Executive Committee of Division 14 and as an elected member to the Council of the APA. Virginia is a Fellow of IAAP and SIOP. Our conversation is described in three sections: a) Gender and leadership equality

(Think Manager -Think Male); b) Women, work and poverty; and c) working with the UN.  
*Keywords:* Gender equality in leadership, gender stereotyping, women in management, women who work in poverty, Social Advocacy Research, development of Humanitarian Work Psychology, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development

## Gender and leadership equality (Think Manager -Think Male)

**Angela:** *Virginia thank you for giving InPractice your time. Can I begin by asking you how the work on gender and leadership equality began?*

**Virginia:** We need to go all the way back to the 1970s when I was a young manager working in the insurance industry. Quite frankly I would look around, and in terms of being a woman manager, there was just me. I started chatting informally with the senior Vice-Presidents (VPs) and asked them, ‘*How come there are no other women general managers?*’ I consistently got one of two answers. Either women did not want these jobs; or women really aren't qualified to be managers. While everybody was very polite in these conversations I'm thinking: *No, there's a lot more going on here; and that's how it started.* There was no research on psychological barriers, such as gender stereotyping. I was working at LOMA with contacts in all the life insurance companies in the US and had the research background that gave me the skills to explore what were the psychological barriers to women's advancement into management. I wanted to prove those senior managers wrong, as I knew there was a lot more to this than what they were saying.

I became interested in gender stereotyping, and I wanted to see if that truly was a barrier to women's advancement. The research hypothesis was that successful middle managers are perceived to possess those characteristics, attitudes and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men in general than to women. As I had extremely good support throughout the insurance industry, I was able to do a field study in thirteen companies across the United States (US), with 300 male managers and 167 female managers.

It was a questionnaire study using three forms of a 92-item descriptive index. All three forms contained the same descriptive terms and instructions, except that one form asked for a description of women in general, one for a description of men in general and one for a description of successful middle managers. Each person got only one of these forms of the questionnaire, and they were not aware of the nature of the study. No one did gender

studies in those days, so it wouldn't occur to them that this was what it was about. Furthermore, in my capacity at LOMA I was involved with selection, research and test development. It was fairly common for me to make requests like this.

The hypothesis was confirmed; for the males there was a strong relationship between how they saw men in general, and how they saw successful middle managers. There was an almost near zero relationship between how they saw women in general, and how they saw successful middle managers. And then, similarly, but not quite, for the females there was also a strong relationship between men and managers. There was a slight relationship between how females saw women and how they saw managers, but it was significantly less than that between men and managers. For both males and females the hypothesis was confirmed; hence *Think manager, Think male*. This relationship continues to be one of the psychological barriers to women's advancement. Based upon the research, all else being equal, if the decision-maker looks at a man and a woman, they're going to see the man as more qualified than the woman for a managerial position.

**Angela:** *What were the implications of this research for practice/organizational change?*

**Virginia:** I was able to bring these outcomes to corporate executives, showing them the possible effects of gender stereotyping on selection and promotion. I did this both inside the insurance industry and in other companies as well. I was in New York City and there was easy access to groups of executives at meetings and seminars.

In these seminars I knew if I stood up to talk to these executives (all men) and delivered an emotional appeal they would have tuned out almost instantly. But I had my research. So when I presented, I would say - "*Here's what executives like you think about woman as managers*". That got their attention; they sat up and listened. We were able to talk about the negative effect of gender stereotyping on women's advancement and how to improve selection and promotion practices to reduce this effect. It was research done to bring about change and get more women into management.

**Angela:** *What did you notice happened after your presentations and discussions, were there any signs of change?*

**Virginia:** It didn't produce immediate reactions. My first study was published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* in 1973, and there was a second publication in 1975; and we were still not quite there yet. But by 1977 and 1978 slowly I could watch it build. People were beginning to understand psychological barriers and read more. I was invited to

give more talks, and so on. I was told that in the insurance industry, where I had the most impact, they did see an effect in terms of women moving into management; so this was an initiating kind of study. Women were moving into regular management levels, although not senior management. Change was just starting, and then it never stopped.

**Angela:** *Did you notice any changes between the US and elsewhere; say the UK?*

**Virginia:** Yes; I think these conversations were further ahead in the US, at that point. Actually, I can remember in the late 1970's when I was doing talks in the UK, they weren't quite as excited about the women in management issue. I gave two different kinds of talks, one on women and equal opportunity, and one on power, totally unrelated to gender. The power and management talk got more people talking! It had higher attendance and was even written up in the *Financial Times*. Not so, for the women's talk.

**Angela:** *What were the international implications of this work?*

**Virginia:** My research has been replicated in the US and twice in the UK, also in Canada, Germany, Japan, China, New Zealand, Turkey, Sweden, South Africa, Egypt and Ireland, and others, definitely across five continents. *Think Manager-Think Male* is a global phenomenon. It's persistent. It's fascinating if you think about it that across all these different cultures *Think Manager -Think Male* tends to hold, especially among males. It's not always true for females in every country. But among the males, who tend to still be the decision-makers, it holds. So the global phenomenon is one international implication.

The second implication is the way this research can help to foster change in individual countries. By using the same questionnaire about women in management and stereotyping, the research can be easily replicated. If you want to generate interest in this topic, collecting data in your own country on gender stereotyping and management is a good way to do it. Then, as I did in the US, you can use the local research outcomes as a basis for conversations about gender bias in management and start to bring about change. This research shows the global nature of gender stereotyping, further encouraging organizational and legal efforts for change.

**Angela:** *This research gives a rational vehicle to promote change. It's not emotive. The range of studies enable comparisons to other countries showing how pervasive the phenomena is.*

**Virginia:** There's an edited book coming out this year (2023) *Organisational Psychology: Revisiting the Classic Studies* edited by Niklas Steffans, Floor Rink and Michelle Ryan. They have included my study as one of the classics. The chapter about my study is written by Madeleine Heilman and Francesca Manzi and it considers the impact and implications of this research. This is really quite exciting!

**Angela:** *When the authors contacted you about the book, how did that make you feel?*

**Virginia:** I was extremely pleased and a little overwhelmed. But it did support my thinking about research. I often will say to graduate students. *What I did at the time was to simply look at the world and say "Hmm, something's not right here."* I had an idea about what needed to change. There was an issue at hand that I could explore via research. It's really a tribute to our profession that I had the skills to be able to answer the question in a meaningful way.

That is why they call the book Classic studies; they are big ideas that challenge current thinking. So then the question becomes, "How do you do that?" I don't think you do it consciously. Just wherever you are, it doesn't matter what the topic. You just consider: what questions need to be asked here? What's important? What do people need to understand? By asking clear, direct questions we can often get profound answers.

**Angela:** *What was happening in your career at this time?*

**Virginia:** Shortly after I did the research, I left LOMA and I went on to MetLife to head up their Personnel Research Department. There I was able to really do something specific to get more women into management. We implemented an early identification of women in management programme. To kick it off, I made a presentation about the status of women in the company and about my research to the Board of Directors. Then two of my staff gave the same talk to all the Department Heads, so the information would trickle down. Each department manager was then responsible for nominating women for future management positions.

I remember giving the talk. I was young, about 30 years of age, and the Board members were all men, older men, older white men. They just stared at me! Probably the only other young women to ever be in the board room were those pouring their coffee. As I remember, I'm presenting all this data on women, and they're doodling, looking at their shoes and probably thinking "*When will this woman stop talking?*" At the time there were Employment Opportunity Commission (EOC) cases with huge settlements. So I put up a

slide showing how many millions were paid in EOC settlements. They all looked up, sort of like puppets on a string, thinking *Oh, yeah, we better pay attention!* It was an effective talk. I had the support of the senior management, and they were taking this seriously. So, then the Department Heads had to take it seriously and nominate women for future management roles. It was exciting to be able to be in one company and really make change.

**Angela:** *It's interesting we are talking about promoting women managers in the 1970s. Do you feel this trend has continued?*

**Virginia:** While I agree we now have more women in management positions, we don't have many women in senior leadership level positions. While the data vary across countries there is not really a change at senior levels. We still have a long way to go. Currently in the US about 52% of all managers, and professionals are women. So that's just where you would want to be. But if you look at senior level positions, only around one-third (32%) of people on our boards of directors are women. You can see a move forward; but we still need to get to the top!

**Angela:** *So we're going to draw a line under our first section of discussion. Having made an impact on women in management in corporate life you shifted your focus to women who work in poverty.*

## Women, work and poverty

**Angela:** *How did your focus shift to women who work in poverty?*

**Virginia:** In the late 1980s I moved from New York City to teach at Gettysburg College, which is in a small town in rural Pennsylvania. Rather than continue corporate work, which involved a lot of travel, I wanted to stay put and do something more local. I became interested in the not-for-profit (or non-profit) sector. I started by interviewing executive directors of various non-profit organizations in the area. These interviews, quite unexpectedly, generated invitations to be on a few local boards of directors. First, I was invited to be on the board of the Private Industry Council (PIC); an organization that distributed government funds for job training for low-income people through local PICs. I was also asked to be on the board of the local Battered Women's Shelter and I went on to be Board President eventually.

At this time in the US the attitude was hugely anti-welfare; particularly about women on welfare. The press was castigating them. *They were lazy. They didn't want to work. They just had babies to get more welfare money.* All very unpleasant. So here I am in Gettysburg meeting with low-income women we were selecting for federally funded job training programmes. I remember one woman. She had an eighth-grade education, was a single mom with three children. She was working all day at a minimum wage job, making very little money. At night she was studying for her high school diploma and juggling this all by herself. I was struck by how difficult her life was. This was no lazy woman trying to beat the system. I was meeting a lot of women like this, and I was very impressed with them. At the same time, I would tour job training centres and see women from the battered women's shelter, and they would often be scurrying out the back doors. I asked the director *"Why are they hiding. Why are they going out the back door?"* She told me they didn't want their abuser to see that they're trying to better themselves. I thought *"There's a lot more to this poverty picture than is being addressed"*, and that's how I got into studying women, work and poverty.

There were huge differences in what people assumed (in this case lazy, no-good women, seeking welfare) and what I was perceiving as the reality. I had a research background, I wanted to find out the truth. What could I learn that might help us understand what was really going on?

**Angela:** *How did you go about doing this research?*

**Virginia:** This research was very different from my earlier work, when I was a woman manager studying women in management. Here I had very limited experience with poverty issues. I decided I needed to do a study that focused on idea generation, opening up the data gathering process to as much life history and current circumstances of the women as possible. I called it compassion in context. I had to dive in; so I chose the qualitative approach to find out what was going on, sort of learning as you go. I did semi-structured interviews with 30 single women who were on public assistance. They all had some work experience and were raising children alone. I went to the women's homes, sat at their kitchen tables, met their children, immersing myself in who they were as best I could. It was an exciting experience. I remember in the rural areas I would ask for directions and was told *"You go down the lane. You make a right at the dead tree, and then there's the trailer park"* Or in the urban areas, the women would say *"Be careful, it is dangerous around here"*. It was a moving and emotional experience for me. Of course, I had to be calm during the interviewing, as I listened to their stories. But

afterwards I would often go out and sit in my car and just cry.

**Angela:** *It sounds like you had lots of data; how did you do the analyses and what did you find?*

**Virginia:** The interviews were tape recorded so as to have access to the words of the women and be able to present the outcomes through the words of the women. I wanted to bring the realities of the woman's experiences as close to the reader as possible. The analysis drew on the phenomenological approach and borrowed from the thrust of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory perspective. The analyses focused on category development and the words of the women were used to illustrate these categories.

One outcome I called was the *ABCs of Poverty*. All the women would start by saying that they had always worked, and then they would describe the most menial of jobs that didn't pay anything. What was clear was the *Absence* of any essential education and skills that would enable them to get better work (A). Furthermore, there were a lot of instances of abuse, domestic violence, addiction, partners who had disappeared, all reflecting *Betrayal* by the mate (B). The C was *Childhood*, with most women having difficult childhood years. When things got bad for them, they couldn't go home to Mom and Dad because Mom and Dad didn't have any money, either.

I wrote up this research in a book *Working from the Margins: Voices of Mothers in Poverty*, published by Cornell University Press in 1995. I do remember that when I got to the last draft, I didn't want to let it, or the women go. The stories of the women had really touched my heart.

**Angela:** *What were the policy and practice implications of this research?*

**Virginia:** In the book I describe a three-pronged approach to change, based on the themes from the research, in their words. I call it a Framework for the Future. All these women had jobs, but this was not enough, they needed better *income opportunities*. Most of them were terribly isolated, so they also needed *social support and linking systems*. And lastly, because of the abuse they received, they needed *help and healing*. Not only were these women affected by the battering, but their children were also affected.

At the time welfare was still in the press so I wrote about the *ABCs of Poverty* using editorial opinion (Op. Ed.) to explain the issues and causes of poverty. A lot of these Op. Eds were picked up by syndicated newspapers and were carried in newspapers across the country. I also did radio talk shows, speeches and lectures. There was one use I was really proud of. At the time, John Edwards was running a major campaign for U.S. President,

and poverty was one of his key issues. They used my book as evidence in their campaign.

**Angela:** *Wow, so the focus became one of policy change?*

**Virginia:** Yes. Eventually I called this *Social Advocacy Research*: doing research to bring about change. I used the voices of the women to sway the minds of the policymakers. There was an emotional appeal that only these voices could present, instead of dry statistics. I wanted to influence the policymakers to use their power to change the circumstances for these women (known as welfare mothers). The policy makers needed to feel what life was like for those women. There were those who wanted to believe they were lazy and were not working, but this research told them this was not true. For example, I made a presentation for the United Auto Workers Union. In it I never used the word welfare, although most of these women were on public assistance. I called them impoverished, poor or low income. Several people came up to me afterwards and said, “*That was my grandmother*”, or “*Oh, this is how I grew up!*” One person said, “*Oh, thank you for your presentation. These women are so courageous, not like those lousy welfare mothers.*” I think those kinds of presentations were effective in that I could help them understand the full circumstances of these women.

**Angela:** *How did you move your studies onto a more global perspective?*

**Virginia:** Having done this research on women in poverty in the US, I was really motivated to focus on global poverty. Trying to carry out global research is not easy, but I was fortunate that Gettysburg College had a centre in Nicaragua, and it was through that contact I was able to study women in work related groups.

This study was about 57 low-income women in Nicaragua, who were in eight work-related groups. These groups were: a micro-enterprise development group encouraging women to start their own businesses; two union groups; one being a union of sex workers and another of domestic workers; two worker cooperatives (one in agriculture, the other in weaving); a farm group and a community development group. And lastly, I think the most heart wrenching of all of the groups were the women who worked in the sweatshops, also unionised. I met the women at their work sites, except for the sweatshop workers. We had to meet in secret. If the company had found out I was there, and the women were talking to me, they would have been fired. So the women were very brave.

I used semi-structured interviews again, with each group, asking what it was like working and being in a group. I had a translator who was brilliant. We got to be almost in sync. I would ask the question in English; she would ask it in Spanish. The women would answer in Spanish. Then she would translate the answer in English. It sounds convoluted, but it wasn't. I felt like I was looking eyeball to eyeball with these women, and so we were. To meet with the chicken and egg group (the farm group), I had to crawl under barbed wire to get to them. We sat in a circle on the ground, with the pigs and chickens all around. It was not your traditional research!

As before, I did thematic analysis using the women's words and assigning categories. I wanted to look at the role of the groups for these women, to see how group participation helped them. One outcome of the research was fascinating and unexpected. These were women in a very male dominated society. No question about it, but in these small work-related groups the women were able to speak for themselves and take leadership roles. It was a first-time experience for the women. The group work was very empowering. They were marginalised in the male dominated society they lived in where just getting out of the house and being able to be with others was a major triumph. There were a lot of positive outcomes to this. However, this research was less change oriented; it was more about understanding what it was like to be a woman doing low-income work in a developing country.

**Angela:** *What did you take from this research?*

**Virginia:** Mainly that research like this can be done. We are a global community; let's study the global community of workers. Not just the executives, the upper echelons, not just the people in traditional organizations, but the marginalised people who also work. They contribute to the economies of their country, and we so rarely study them; not even in their own countries. So the major contribution was showing that you could study marginalised communities, and learn more about these women, and how they are able to develop self-esteem and other skills through work. I think the problem is that we look at research through such a narrow lens. We need to widen our lens.

**Angela:** *What impact did your research have on the development of humanitarian work psychology?*

**Virginia:** Both my research in the US and in Nicaragua contributed to the development of the *Global Organization for Humanitarian Work Psychology (GOHWP)*. In 2008 Walter Reichman chaired a SIOP symposium entitled *Organizational Psychologists and World*

**Poverty: Our Roles and Obligation.** My talk was on "*Poor Women and Work in Developing Countries: Research Opportunities for I/O Psychologists.*" This symposium led to calls for the establishment of a Global Task Force on Organizational Psychology for Development. In 2011 my research on women, work and poverty in Nicaragua appeared in a special issue of the *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, edited by Stu Carr, on poverty. In 2012, in a book edited by Stu Carr and others, aptly titled *Humanitarian Work Psychology* I used my poverty research in the US and in Nicaragua to illustrate Social Advocacy Research – using research for change. In 2012 GOHWP was officially formed. In 2013 SIOP published *Using Industrial–Organizational Psychology for the Greater Good: Helping Those who Help Others*. My contribution was entitled *Using I–O Psychology to Improve the Plight of Women in Developing Countries: A Research Agenda*. My research on women, work and poverty issues, then, helped to form the early base of research and practice in humanitarian work psychology and demonstrated ways in which WOP psychologists can contribute to poverty alleviation.

**Angela:** Now we move onto our third section looking at your work with the UN.

## Working with the United Nations

**Angela:** Please tell us about your work with the UN.

**Virginia:** I think my most significant involvement at the UN has been through my presentations. I felt truly honoured to be an invited speaker at the twelfth *Annual Psychology Day* at the United Nations in 2019. The theme was: *The Time is Now: Psychological Contributions to Global Gender Equality*. They have a different theme each year and this was the first on gender. The psychology groups have representatives at the UN (APA, SIOP, IAAP) who nominate speakers for Psychology Day. I was one of four invited speakers, and the title of my talk was *Women at the Top: From Gender Bias to Gender Balance*. In addition I have presented at two SIOP sponsored panels at the UN. In 2016 my talk was: *Work Psychology and the Women at the TOP International Conferences* and in 2018 my talk was: *When Women Lead: Competency, Connectivity and Courage*. These two panels were held in conjunction with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which has been held every year since 1947. CSW is the UN's largest gathering on gender equality and women's rights. Over 4,000 women come to the UN headquarters in New York City for two weeks with multiple sessions running from 8 am to 8 pm each day. It's a lot of people and an extraordinary experience to link with women around the world on a whole host of topics.

Another panel presentation was in 2017 at the UN's Commission for Social Development. The presentation was: *Decent Work, Not Just a Job as a Pathway Out of Poverty: Voices of Low-Income Women in Nicaragua*.

Over the years I have also been a Non-Governmental Organization /UN representative for IAAP and the Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND). I attend sessions focused on the 17 UN Sustainable Goals, such: 1) Poverty alleviation; 5) Gender equality; 8) Decent work; and 13) Climate change. For the past several years I have represented CSEND at CSW, mainly in information gathering and networking roles. Networking is a critical thing; to be able to sit next to someone from Nigeria, for example, who's interested in the same topic and compare what you know, is an incredible opportunity! The information you get from global networking is quite amazing.

## Conclusions

**Angela:** *What have you noticed changing for women in the world of work and what things are not changing?*

**Virginia:** Women are making significant progress in advancement into positions of power and influence, although there is still work to be done. As I mentioned before in the US, we now have women holding 52% of the professional and management positions, but we still need to make progress at the senior levels. Looking at the data, there are only about 10% women CEOs in Fortune 500 companies. So in terms of progress in management, I would say we're levelling off; and the push is not as strong in the way it used to be.

I would like to see more of a focus on marginalised workers, women in low paying positions who are still having difficulties. There is much less change happening here. For example, it was the low-paid service workers (e.g., cashiers in grocery stores; workers in health care and food processing; child care workers), who were hardest hit in Covid-19. They were labelled the *Essential Workers* at that time; and now to me they've gone back to being invisible. We need to pay more attention to the issues of low-paid workers, especially women who are struggling with jobs with unpredictable hours, costly child care, along with low wages. When I look back at the women in poverty research that I did in the 90s I say now, *there is no timestamp on poverty*. What I found out then is just as relevant today.

I have an example of how to minimise, in a small way, the middle-class influence in education. When I was teaching at Gettysburg, I designed a course called Women at the Top and Women at the Bottom of Organizations. At the beginning of the course, I would send the students out to interview women executives in the workplace. They would be excited to go to New York and come back and talk about the interviews; as this was familiar to them. In the second half of the course I would have them go out and interview women in low-income jobs (I had access to various groups to connect them). Every semester they would be surprised at what they learned about the women's lives. These were mainly middle-class students, and they would say, "I didn't know..." and "I didn't understand..." The day-to-day details of the women's struggles with the basics, such as food, clothing and housing were new to them, and they were truly learning. I was always delighted when they then choose to explore the issues of low-income workers for their term papers. If we want more research and practice about marginalised workers, we need to include it in our teaching.

**Angela:** *How do you think WOPs can influence these inequality outcomes?*

**Virginia:** Volunteer at your local food bank, homeless shelter or clothing distribution center. Try to get on the board or governing body. Consider pro bono consulting for poverty related non-profits. Then you will have your own network. When you're ready to do your project, they will help you get in touch with people. Maybe that's the subject of a conference symposium: How do you contact low-income workers, such as cashiers, hairdressers or cleaners? They have their own associations and unions. We don't go to these groups very often but that's where we should put a lot more of our attention.

I would like to end with a quote from one of the women I interviewed for my poverty book, let's call her LaVerne. She was thirty-four years of age, a single mother with one child. She held a variety of jobs, mainly in factories, and when I interviewed her, she was a part-time barber. She said:

*"I don't know why life should be so hard... Seems like I get on a boat, and I get going, and something happens, and then I fall back again. Then I have to start all over. Then I get back in the boat and work hard, and then something happens, and I have to start all over again. It seems like I never get anywhere, but I work really hard. The big question for me would be to figure out how I could get somewhere and stay there and keep going. But I don't know how to do that."*

She's asking a very good question: *How can I move forward?* When you are tottering on the poverty line, any small thing that goes wrong can send you back to the bottom, as you have no security. When the car breaks down it's a big, big problem; it affects everything, like a domino effect. As a field, we could use our arsenal of expertise and research methodologies to improve the lives of people like LaVerne. By considering all those who work, whether inside or outside of organizations, WOP research and its applications can more readily address humanitarian and social issues.

So—I will end on a humanitarian work psychology note!

**Angela:** *Many thanks Virginia for giving us your time to explore the fascinating work you do.*

**Virginia:** *It's been delightful. Thank you so much for inviting me to this. It's been a pleasure.*

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# Protecting the well-being of NATO's most powerful force: Its people

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## About the author

**Ingrid** is a Chartered Psychologist (Health and Care Professions Council registered), public speaker, researcher, Qualified Executive Coach, a member of the European Association for Aviation Psychology, the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), EAWOP and Project Security Assessment for Everyone (S.A.F.E.) She has over two decades of experience in industries and sectors from finance to international organizations (e.g., the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO). She received the Practitioner of the Year Award (2010) from the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Division of Occupational Psychology (DOP). She served as the DOP Strategy Convenor and Conference Chair for a decade and was a Research Fellow at Birkbeck for two years. Ingrid is a reviewer for the BPS Professional Development Centre and is pursuing a PhD at KU Leuven University.

Ingrid is a member of the EAWOP Congress Katowice 2023 Organising Committee and is responsible for the invited speaker programme. She will be involved in a symposium chaired by keynote Professor Martin Euwema on what Work and Organizational Psychology can learn from military psychology research and practice, and is involved in the networking, relationship building and practitioner aspects of the congress.

Reflecting the context of this paper Ingrid has a chapter in a forthcoming international book to be published by Routledge – Taylor & Francis, on the topic of *Elite High Performing Military Leaders & Resilience*, edited by Professor Fotinatos–Ventouratos, Professor Sir. Cary L. Cooper and Professor Alexander, S. Antoniou.

*Keywords:* occupational psychology, work and organizational psychology, international communities, military culture, work and well-being, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, mental health, mental health awareness, stigma, covid and social isolation, social support, social capital, community building, humanitarian work psychology, global security, human security psychology

## Introduction

Covid-19 was life altering, indiscriminate and unprecedented. We were paralysed by fear and the unknown, and the world ground to a halt. Acts such as handshakes, hugging and kissing became unwanted demonstrations of affection. The fear of infection overrode our need for affection and acceptance. Those living far away from

home experienced homesickness as though for the first time. Yearning for days gone by when they were surrounded by tradition, family gatherings, national celebrations and the simple hospitality people would offer one another. Our innate need to connect with others was hampered by the pandemic, leaving many of us to experience periods of prolonged isolation and loneliness. Facing the unknown led to heightened fears, leaving many of us to feel increasingly anxious and hopeless about the future.

This paper tells the story of the creation of the *Staying Well Together Programme* an informal, volunteer, grass root, networked effort to strengthen individual and collective resilience in the multi-national community of NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium.

### **Locked down, knocked down, but not out!**

I will forever remember Friday 13 March 2020. It was the first day of lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. I was at home with my two teenage daughters and husband at SHAPE. This is the military headquarters of NATO's Allied Command Operations (ACO) that commands all NATO operations worldwide. Located in French speaking Mons, Belgium, it is home to 16,000 people from 30 member nations and two dozen partner nations. It is a culturally rich and dynamic community, with military personnel and their families passing through every two to three years. Fostering a sense of community and connection at SHAPE is part of supporting the mission for the Alliance.

Historically, SHAPE ran a varied and active social programme to celebrate the many traditions and cultures of its member nations. It offered a Language Centre to equip members with the language skills necessary to navigate an international community. There were a variety of clubs and activities in and around the base, in addition to sports facilities (e.g., tennis courts, running track, swimming pool, fitness centre and basketball courts). But all this came to a grinding halt on that fateful day!

### **Finding connections in a disconnected pandemic world**

As a chartered psychologist I was acutely aware of the need to cultivate meaningful connections and a sense of community in the face of this pandemic to insulate the mental and physical health of individuals from factors such as loneliness. Loneliness and isolation can be experienced acutely by members of the military. According to Diener and Seligman (2004) the well-being of a population or workforce impacts on

health and social care expenditure as well as overall economic productivity of a nation or organization. This was especially salient given that individuals were away from home and far away from their trusted and familiar social support networks. Members of a military community have unique risk factors, especially for depression and anxiety, alcohol problems and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Inoue et al. 2022, for more information see [mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)). This is further compounded by lower-than-average support seeking behaviours. Indeed, Sharp et al., (2015), suggest that up to 60% of military personnel don't seek help, mainly explained by the high levels of stigma that exist around accessing mental health support. The importance of having human contact and meaningful activities as well as access to appropriate services and support was never more evident.

The Covid-19 lockdown was a period of deep uncertainty, causing doubts and worries that were deeply distressing for many. Under these circumstances, time was of the essence, and we immediately got to work and launched the *Staying Well Together at SHAPE* programme. The mission of the programme was to build social capital throughout the community by building awareness of, and opportunities for, how to remain and sustain an individual and collective sense of well-being. Social capital is a concept in social science that looks at the phenomenon of social networks and how individuals can benefit from membership in them. Social capital revolves around three dimensions: a) interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties or social participation); b) levels of trust that characterises these ties; and c) resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation ([Britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com)). An underpinning belief is that measurable and tangible psychological and protective benefits to individuals exist from being connected through strong and supportive social ties, which formed the foundation of the programme.

## **Well-being at the center of all we do**

The literature on well-being has been rapidly growing for the last two decades and has accelerated even further in response to the pandemic. It is important to note that there are many different types of well-being to include physical, mental and social aspects. Interest from psychologists, sociologists, economists, business and policy makers in this area are becoming increasingly focused on the role and impact of well-being on overall life satisfaction and its relationship with key outcome measures. Indeed, several studies have associated higher well-being with better health and longevity (Boehm & Kubzansky, 2012; Huppert, 2009; Park et al. ,2016; Shrestha et al., 2019; Seligman, 2008), better

ability to cope with adversity, greater productivity and stronger social relationships (Diener, 2000; Graham, 2009). Protecting the well-being of military personnel and their families is especially important in the context of higher-than-average risk of PTSD, depression and anxiety, sleep disruptions and suicidal ideation. In response to this, a variety of programmes have been developed focused on counteracting stigma by building strong peer support relationships designed to increase social support to encourage help seeking behaviours (Greden et al., 2010).

The primary focus of our culturally sensitive programme (*Staying Well Together*) was on helping people to build and strengthen their psychological well-being by developing prompts and activities that encouraged an abundance of positive feelings and a reduction of negative feelings. We used the well-researched Diener (2009) definition of Subjective Well-Being (SWB), as it allows the individual to determine their own sense of well-being in terms of happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect, and is influenced by health, social contact, activity and personality. It was built as a system with distinct elements that were inter-connected, self-reinforcing and adaptable to individual and group preferences and circumstances. It was evidence-based programme underpinned by the holistic *Five Ways to Well-being* (Connect, Give, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Be Active, Centre for Wellbeing at the New Economics Foundation, 2008) as a set of simple daily practices for individuals to improve their well-being. The idea that individuals can achieve a sense of well-being by developing specific building blocks is well documented and supported by Seligman (2018) who hypothesised that PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) are the essential elements of well-being. Evidence exists to support the association between individual practices and well-being (Aked et al., 2008). Engaging in multiple practices is associated with higher levels of well-being, with well-being increasing with each additional practice regardless of the combination. The most important predictors of well-being are *Keep Learning and Take Notice*, according to an extensive study undertaken with 10,012 adults throughout Aotearoa, New Zealand (Mackay, 2019).

Importantly, the *Five Ways to Well-being* approach is outcome focused based on the five key actions of social relationships, physical activity, awareness, learning, and giving, that research indicates are important influencers of well-being. Evidence exists to show that both well-being and ill-being are influenced by having secure social relationships, being involved in learning and being physically active (Aked et al., 2008). Specifically, well-being is shown to be influenced in a positive way through the processes of giving and becoming more aware. The universality and simplicity of this approach was appealing

given the complex and diverse needs of the international military context. The positive and empowering focus on encouraging a healthy combination of these behaviours to enhance individual well-being with the goal of reducing the number of people in the community who develop mental health disorders in the longer term, was relevant and appropriate given the context of stigma around seeking mental health support that existed and the scarcity of resources available to deal with behavioural health challenges.

Thus, equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and resources to achieve a sense of well-being by offering concrete activity-based ideas on how to improve personal well-being was highly desirable. By communicating these five simple ways to well-being, individuals were being prompted into thinking about what is important to their well-being and encouraging them to prioritise these simple activities into their everyday routines. Individuals would likely already be involved in many of these activities, and it was our goal to increase the time spent on the specific activities that were known to enhance well-being. As many of the ways for people to enjoy these activities were shut down due to the restrictions, the programme focused on redesigning these activities in Covid-19 friendly and accessible ways.

### **Staying Well Together**

The programme had a clear mission and was volunteer-led, so it was able to be responsive, agile and adaptable to the ever-changing conditions and environment. It grew and evolved in response to demands and feedback from the wider community. Vulnerable groups were identified and prioritised. Those in danger of falling through the cracks were offered a sense of belonging. The systemic nature of the programme helped to simplify an over complex organization by making explicit the inter-connections and relationships that needed to exist throughout the community to achieve the mission.

Due to the increased risks of isolation during the winter months and lockdown during Christmas, we developed a targeted campaign, informing every member of SHAPE of the *Five Ways to Well-being*, employing leaflets, a huge banner and content displayed on large LED screens all around the compound (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Banner display of Staying Well Together



We needed to identify the resources available in the community that could be mobilised to help meet the needs of the community. To do this we developed a team made up of international psychologists and psychiatrists. This was accomplished rapidly through word of mouth and social media announcements. Team members were keen to have an opportunity to use their skills in a timely and impactful way. Collectively we developed a series of principles and activities that engaged all nations throughout the community, and which responded sensitively to the unique circumstances that each nation faced.

Activities mapped onto the *Five Ways to Well-being* such as language buddies, photo competitions, book clubs, cooking clubs, golf, Cross Fit, virtual Zumba and yoga and hiking clubs were launched to create opportunities for Covid-19 safe shared interests to be discovered and nurtured. They were designed to lessen isolation and increase motivation and a sense of hope. By joining special interest activity groups individuals were encouraged to develop social relationships and stay connected (*Connect*); as 'Doing good does you good' (McCulloch, 2012). We organised community activities such as healthcare appreciation lunches, that required volunteering and giving to others (*Give*); yoga and meditation classes encouraged individuals to become aware of what is happening in the moment by being more reflective and photo competitions helped individuals to notice and appreciate the beauty that surrounded them (*Take Notice*).

The Language Buddy Programme helped to increase skills and improve self-esteem by offering peer language support (*Keep Learning*); and the Walk and Talk programmes (designed for specific communities) encouraged people to keep active throughout the year, especially during winter, through a social walking programme designed to strengthen the link between exercise and reduced depression and anxiety (*Be Active*).

Figure 2  
Walk and Talk programme



## Evaluation and outcomes of *Staying Well Together*

We conducted formative and summative evaluation through monitoring uptake numbers (motivation), seeking feedback and reviewing the effectiveness of the activity. We also used Facebook polling to monitor and track the mood (affect) of individuals by using the mood questionnaire each week. For example “*How have you felt in the past week?*” *Please rate your mood by ticking the appropriate box*” Rating: 1 = never, 6 = all the time in the categories of Happy, At ease, Annoyed, Anxious, Calm, Motivated, Bored, Tired, Active, Gloomy. We observed that moods were adversely impacted by poor weather and quarantine (we introduced care packs and zoom counselling to counteract this)

and positively impacted by factors such as fair weather and community campaigns, for example, the photo competitions inviting people to take pictures of their favourite quarantine activities.

Based on feedback and uptake numbers, the two most impactful activities were Walk and Talk and Language Buddies. They each offered an opportunity for meaningful and mutually trusting connections to be built around a common interest, activity or goal. Friendships were made and confidence to connect amidst uncertainty offered a much-needed cocoon of safety and comfort. We successfully encouraged social connections throughout the pandemic by replacing the commonly used and severely limiting term 'social distancing' with 'keep socially connected and physically distanced'. We worked closely with the SHAPE Base Support Commander to ensure that we were operating safely within the Belgium Covid regulations and sought formal approval for each activity.

Visibility of our activities impacted the community positively and spurred many additional activities, including a Walk and Talk for the Italian spousal community, a book club for the Polish community and a Virtual London Marathon hosted by the British Military Community. Our programme principles inspired existing groups to understand their purpose more holistically, positively impacting the community. For example, the former president of the SHAPE International Toastmasters Club, thanked our programme for motivating her to take her club on-line and to use the platform to connect former members around the world with existing members, creating meaningful connections throughout the community and a renewed sense of purpose.

We created an education and awareness campaign through a Facebook group (currently with 874 members) and a monthly column in the SHAPE Community Life Magazine (for an example see Figure 3), featuring mental health-focused articles and studies, events and activities engaging all international members of the community. The many featured topics are selected in response to feedback from the community, and have included how to reduce and manage stress, how to build and sustain lasting friendships, how to build a balanced and happy life and understanding the benefits of health psychology for well-being. An article on 'Sustaining a Happy Work: Life Balance' resulted in our programme being asked to deliver staff training to the American Armed Services personnel based in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and 'Finding Your Sense of Belonging When Away from Home' was turned into a workshop and delivered at an Americans Working Across the Globe (AWAG) conference in Germany.

Over time, connections across the community were made and members of the community grew in strength and developed confidence in sharing articles and stories about resilience and mental health, demonstrating a level of trust and compassion that continues to grow. The primary goal of the campaign was to facilitate and create opportunities for individuals to make meaningful connections with other members of SHAPE. By strengthening the psychological safety and security of the community, we believed that the resilience of the SHAPE community was being strengthened.

Figure 3  
Example of a monthly column in the SHAPE Community Life Magazine

Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Friends help you live a long and happy life!

StayingWellTogetherAtSHAPE

By Ingrid Covington

**W**ith the uncertainty that we are experiencing at present, it is reassuring to know that there are some things that we can be certain about! One of those things is the power of friendships!

### 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

#### EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT

DEPOSIT	WITHDRAWAL
• Keeping promises	• Breaking promises
• Using kind words	• Using unkind words
• Remembering things about them like their interests	• Forgetting things about them
• Apologizing, including the person in your activity and helping a person out	• Refusing to say sorry, by excluding and ignoring the person

#### Investing in Friendships

When was the last time that you made a new friend or connected with an old one? Think of friendships as relationships that need to be nurtured and invested in – think of them like a bank account. We will all make withdrawals at some point, but the effects are limited by the credits that we have built up. You can make deposits by keeping promises, using kind words and giving compliments, by remembering things about them like their interests, sending an article that made you think of them, by apologizing, including the person in your activity and helping a person out. Withdrawals include breaking promises, saying unkind words, refusing to say sorry, by excluding and ignoring the person.

**Did you know** - People with strong social ties are 50% less likely to die early.

**Did you know** - A British study found that regular contact with 10 or more friends significantly increases happiness and lengthens life. The same study found that people with fewer friends reported lower levels of happiness all around.

**Did you know** - A Harvard Business School study showed that an everyday occurrence like a conversation can often hold more meaning for us later than a momentous event.

#### When you are feeling down – call a friend

Call your positive friend for a quick chat and we guarantee you'll feel better. It is a good idea to get into a healthy habit of calling friends regularly – perhaps choose a day of the week for 'friends'! To foster a friendship, skip the small talk and get to important topics. Research shows we feel closer to friends when we have meaningful conversations.

The *Staying Well Together* programme acted as a bridge between the community, the SHAPE Healthcare Centre and SHAPE. By way of example, the 'Walk and Talk for Parents with Newborns' programme, identified vulnerable parents of newborns across all nations, connected them with the various community healthcare services and designed an activity to bring together these otherwise dispersed and isolated individuals into a purposeful and active group. The Walk and Talk for Parents group met weekly come rain or shine and friendships were formed and continued throughout and beyond the pandemic. It offered a lifeline for many new mothers who found themselves struggling alone with a newborn and away from their family and friends. Focus groups and interviews of participants and professionals involved in the programme highlighted many powerful personal and community benefits, some of which were anticipated and others that were not:

*“As a midwife, the programme reminded me of the importance of social connections and support for new mothers and taught me how to foster a sense of community and unity amongst service users.”* UK Midwife, SHAPE Healthcare Facility.

*“As a new mom and someone new to the military, I was overwhelmed by having a newborn in a foreign country during the pandemic. I have a history of mental ill health and was fearful that I would slip into a deep depression. The Staying Well Together programme gave me a reason to get dressed and out of the house. It helped me to make friends and to keep active and most importantly offered me a sense of security that someone would notice if I didn't turn up and reach out to check in on me.”* US spouse of US Armed Services Officer.

Themes from our evaluation were shared with the healthcare professionals at SHAPE to further their understanding of the unique and universal needs of the community and the evidenced based ways of meeting them.

## **Reflections on what it means to help another's well-being**

As I reflect on the past two and a half years of *Staying Well Together at SHAPE*, I am convinced that well-being of the individual or individual nations is at the heart of NATO. The Covid-19 experience made more explicit our understanding that well-being is underpinned by security in its many facets (health, economic, physical, psychological, national, regional and global).

The Washington Treaty was signed by 12 founding nations of NATO in Washington DC on 4 April 1949. While NATO's common defense purpose and its famous Article 5 is generally understood, the authors of the Washington Treaty also foresaw a critical mission for the Alliance in the post-World War 2 period of reconstruction and challenge:

*"The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."*

Notably, the Treaty (p1.) reads: "They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area." Yes, well-being is a mission for the Alliance, and one of its original missions. It was this historical Treaty that sparked the start of a journey that would result in the formation of the world's longest and most successful alliance. For over seven decades, NATO has largely silently and subtly protected the well-being and security of over one billion citizens.

Over the decades of travel by the Alliance, well-being has been and continues to be challenged in numerous ways, to include communism, military invasion, Cold War, fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11, Afghanistan and most recently the Ukraine crisis. These incidents bring into sharp focus our understanding of common defense and freedom, and the preservation of our well-being.

As a psychologist, and not a specialist on international relations or treaties, it is the authors of this Treaty over 70 years ago who used these words and highlighted them. These are words of the profession of psychology. These are the words we as psychologists use in consultation. We have seldom heard these words before concerning NATO; that is until the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the Covid-19 has changed how we see security, how we see interactions and how we see well-being. Note the phrase 'You Are Not Alone'!

We built a programme at SHAPE that would support individuals to feel physically safe and socially connected. Yes - *socially* connected rather than socially distanced. The one thing connecting us on this planet is the one thing that protects us - our humanity. As humans we are instinctively connected and thrive through our being connected. I understood that we needed to nurture and foster these connections as a community at SHAPE and this is where the idea of the Staying Well Together programme was born. Social Capital is best understood as an organizational asset that benefits all its members.

Covid-19 has highlighted the value in moving beyond an individual model of well-being towards a collective one. Individuals thrive in environments where psychological safety and collective trust exist. A strong community in which individuals are able to leverage collective knowledge and resources, strengthens the entire membership. This is where the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Our motto '*You Are Not Alone*' could not have been simpler. We will always be stronger together. Essentially, the principles of being an Ally that bound together the alliance back in 1949, were the same ones that bind together the community at SHAPE. Stay connected - take notice - keep learning - keep active - give to others. These were the pathways guiding us back to our roots; back to a more fundamental understanding of security, away from the complexity of policies or strategies or weapon capabilities - back to well-being, our well-being, our collective well-being as a prerequisite for any other form of security. And the well-being journey at SHAPE was designed to rebuild well-being and to respond to these crises with new pathways, as we simultaneously redrew the emotional maps of our lives to help us cope with the fear, unknown and isolation. We all redefined what well-being is and what it means to each and every one of us, individually and together.

The well-being journey at SHAPE led us to a place where we were reminded of the power of the human touch - the power of being touched and the power of touching others. Together we protect the well-being of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This is a mission the Treaty authors envisioned over seven decades ago and it is a mission that remains central to each of us as individuals, as a community and as a community of nations. This priority will never go away. It is here to stay, with or without a pandemic. It is driven by need. And it is in the recognition of this universal need that we will all find our path to security, our path to success and our path to making others feel secure and safe.

As Work and Organization Psychologists, we can protect these cherished institutions. We can impart our extensive knowledge and understanding to ensure that humanitarian missions remain sustainable and achievable, through resilient and adaptable policies and practices, through education and awareness and through guiding principles that inspire future leaders to lead passionate and engaged followers in search of a safe, fair and humane existence. The pandemic created a moment in history for billions of people around the planet to contemplate the kind of world that they want. Thus, a global 'unfreezing' (Kurt Lewin, 1951) has occurred. So now, let us come together as

a profession and collectively create a future that is defined by a sense of psychological security, agency and a commitment to a higher purpose. American Anthropologist Margaret Mead summed this up well by stating:

“Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.” (Stover, 2005).

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# Occupational support for aid workers: Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Intervention (AOSPI): A model

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## About the author

Christina's career started in the United States where she earned a Masters' degree in community counselling. She has since received a PhD in Industrial-Organizational psychology researching aid workers' resilience. Christina worked in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East as a counsellor to aid workers and now lives in England.

## Introduction

It is because of the survivors of natural disaster, war, homelessness, internal displacement and/or famine that aid work exists, and it is implicitly worthwhile. In comparison to the general population aid workers (AW) experience high levels of burnout and traumatic stress (Connorton et al., 2012). Traditionally, AW have been held responsible for their own well-being, as self-care is believed to be the primary mode of protection against the stress of humanitarian work (Quimby, 2021). More recently (Stringer, 2023), the psychological safety climate (Hall et al., 2013) of aid organizations has been recognised as being fundamental for the welfare of AW (Jachens et al., 2019). Therefore, aid organizations, whatever the capacity or role, have a pivotal role in mediating the stress of AW (Strohmeier et al., 2019). But the psychosocial support for AW can be a challenge for AO (Aldamman et al., 2019), as the work stress that affects AW can be compounded by inefficient organizational structures and leadership inadequacies (Strohmeier et al., 2019). To increase the psychological safety climate of AW it is therefore important to scrutinise what aid organizations can do to improve upon existing AW support. This paper is written in the hope of creating cues for formal or informal dialogues and exchanges about information, policies, resources and programmes related to the protection of AW. This paper is shared to encourage psychologists to research and embrace careers in the aid sector, as despite its challenges the work can be rewarding. While not intending to be exhaustive of all facets of AW, the discussion below illustrates some of the triumphs and struggles AW face. Here I propose the *Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Intervention (AOSPI) model*, which was forged by gathering empirical evidence and existing best practice. The model provides a template for understanding the complexity of supporting AW at all levels. The AOSPI model is meant to be adapted, developed, changed and moved along the spectrum of needs across diverse aid organizations.

## The work of aid workers

Since 2013 there has been a 40% increase in the number of AW, with more than 630,000 professionals estimated to be working in countries with humanitarian crises in 2020 (ANALP, 2022) as “*The world faces worst humanitarian crisis since 1945, and 20 million people will starve if the wealthier population does not help*” (BBC, 11 March 2017). Overall, there are over 13 million humanitarian volunteers or non-professional AW who respond to the call to support people across the globe before, during or after crises (Hazeldine & Baille Smith, 2015) helping 93 million beneficiaries. Humanitarian aid can be extended by governments and by religious or secular non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC), or by inter-governmental organizations such as the United Nations (UN), or the International Federation of Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Aid workers can be locally or internationally recruited, seconded, volunteered or unpaid. Aid is usually funded by donors but can also be profitable (Casey, 2012). Aid work can be linked to permanent health care, to temporary provision in the aftermath of a disaster or political unrest, or to protracted refugee, development, human rights, political or peacekeeping support.

Aid workers can be engaged in supporting beneficiaries during emergencies, extended conflict, or economic development, and can specialise in anything from sanitation to political and economic protection. Contractual agreements for AW span from sub-contractor or volunteer to long-term employee. While the increase in professionalism of AW has been welcome in the sector, the level of competence required for AW posts can make aid work employment an exclusive choice for elite students who have access to stable internet and education (Gloss et al., 2012), making aid work an elite profession in many nations. Nationally recruited AW make up more than 90% of the official 632,000 emergency workforce. Yet, irrespective of expertise there is usually a power imbalance between nationally and internationally recruited aid workers, as the most senior professional positions are held by international aid workers (NALP, 2022).

Aid workers customarily have assigned duty stations, which can be from a *field* office with limited infrastructure and financial resources such as disaster sites or refugee camps to headquarters (HQ). The International Civil Service Commission (2022) categorises duty stations according to the level of danger and/or privation which increases from H (HQ) to E (E being the most remote or dangerous, or both). Emergencies make aid work impermanent, and most IAW spend the better part of their professional life in the

field, moving from one posting to the next, some spending their working lives in D and E duty stations. Upon re-entry from missions or life-long careers, AW often face social (McCormack et al., 2009) and spiritual isolation (Wartenweiler & Eiroa-Orosa, 2016). To my knowledge, the long-term effects of lives spent working in challenging and or isolated geopolitical areas are under-studied.

## **The insecurity of aid work**

Regardless of disposition, gender, posting, national origin, or contractual status AW will experience challenges as the safety and security of AW has severely deteriorated. Crime and danger have become inherent to aid work as exposure to critical incidents is now routine, increasing the mandate to protect the well-being of AW (Stoddard et al., 2022). From 2009 to 2016 the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSD, 2022) listed 2,139 security incidents involving 4,112 AW. In 2020, 484 AW were victims of violent attacks, 117 of whom died, making 2020 the worst year for humanitarian work losses after 2019. From 1997 to 2018, 1830 AW died, 1365 were kidnapped and 1700 were wounded. While being less reported, sexual violence against AW has increased (Mazurana & Donnelly, 2017; Nobert, 2017). With overall violent attacks totalling 459 in 2021; attacks against AW were more deadly. Among those attacked, 141 AW were killed, 117 were kidnapped and 117 seriously injured (AWSD, 2022). In countries where violence and sexual assaults or threats are common, and where AW are exposed to secondary security risks, AW live in a constant state of alert (Houldey, 2021; Quimby, 2021).

The aid sector is unpredictable because it often requires immediate responses to disasters and conflicts which by nature are overwhelming. Immediate emergency responses require emergency funding, lifesaving rescues and supplies and readily available AW (UNICEF, 2023). Therefore, while employed professional national and international aid workers have the potential to earn good money, and many AW called upon to answer humanitarian emergencies have weak or short contractual agreements based on need. This lack of job security can add to existing family burdens for AW (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014). I have spoken to many AW providing shelter in emergency refugee camps who sleep little for weeks if not months, as the urgency of need of desperate people trump personal needs. While it is understood that the nature of emergency interventions requires sacrifices, working under such conditions for long periods will affect resilience reserves (Brooks et al., 2015). Add to the situational urgency organizational structures that are unprepared for supporting AW; the burden on AW can easily lead to long-term stress consequences. The recovery phase of emergency operations may find AW who have already reached

burnout (Jachens et al., 2019). Regardless of contractual status, the exigences of service for many AW often include exposure to extreme human suffering, lack of social support, and dissatisfying work (Quimby, 2021). Given common organizational stressors can extend everyday work stress, some stressors particularly related to aid organizations are illustrated below.

## **Working with aid workers**

Specific stressors articulated by AW are internal (agency or team) conflict, lowered productivity (Dahlgren et al., 2009), high staff rotation, cliques, indiscriminate blaming or scapegoating, apathy, and excessive sick leave (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, 2001). Aid workers occupational stressors can also involve chaotic programmes, local settings, and conflict over available resources (Wenar, 2009). Failing leadership and poor team support negatively affect AW teams (Young et al., 2022). While 40% of the 600,000 humanitarian workers who provide forefront aid are women, most IAW with families at home are men. Women international aid workers who are professionally compelled to serve beneficiaries across continents are more likely to be unmarried / uncoupled, and less likely to be in leadership positions (Black et al., 2017). Women, and especially non-White AW are more vulnerable to discrimination (WeciE, 2023), sexual harassment and assault (EISF, 2018). Pervasive sexist attitudes are aggravating stress factors for women AW who often ignore sexual harassment to survive in aid work (Mazurana & Donnelly, 2017; Wagener, 2017).

While AO are often criticised for resource and financial waste (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014), the scarcity of internal resources (Strohmeier et al., 2019) can itself create additional stress. Conservation of Resource theory (Holmgren et al., 2017) helps explain how the scarcity or loss of resources can bring significant distress for AW in field offices where even primary assets such as food and other essentials are severely restricted (Comoretto et al., 2015). When comforts are few and far between, the psychological stress can be intensified by AW competing for assets. For an example, of a seemingly minor issue, if the mission has a total of four cars for more than 20 AW, and three of the cars are taken by senior AW to meet with officials to obtain permission to establish emergency supply chains (think for example the Covid19 vaccine), the car rotation schedule (to get supplies for personal use or to beneficiaries) is challenged. The hierarchical use of limited resources and conflicting needs creates competition and distress. Other resource struggles or distress can stem from ease of access to basic needs such as running water, sanitation, internet, reasonably comfortable accommodation or means of comfort. Senior

AW with greater access to resources and increased freedom of movement will most likely experience less distress or conflict because of easier access to necessities and/or freedom of movement.

While acceptable levels of stress can facilitate cognitive function, exposure to intense stress can impair performance on complex tasks (Sandi, 2013); particularly those concerned with teamworking where *transactive memory*, a form of shared cognition across the team is needed to code, store and retrieve information (Blanchet & Michinov, 2014). To safeguard energy under stress, the brain's focus narrows to short-term goals and needs. Such focus affects complex thinking behaviour, hampering planning and decision-making abilities and weakening restraint and prosocial behaviour (Forbes et al., 2022). Thus, because of the need to preserve cognitive energy (Bogdanov et al., 2021) AW facing high or prolonged stress may default to a position of *least cognitive effort*. For example, I have witnessed AW preserving their cognitive energy avoiding speaking in a second or third language and gathering with colleagues from the same national background, producing what appeared as 'us vs them' splits across teams.

Many are the demands for flexibility and for adapting to new environments for AW, and accepting dispositional and perceived cultural encumbrances can also be experienced as hurdles (Putnam et al., 2009). Cultural stressors include nationally recruited aid workers who must adjust to incoming IAW recruited managers on rotation who may or may not acknowledge existing local expertise. National aid workers may also be forced to work with ethnic or minority groups that may be culturally different, or if the country is experiencing a civil war, may work under members of opposing factions (McFarlane, 2004). For international aid workers, after moving home and countries, adapting to a new office environment means learning local customs and new offices *rules*. For example, a conservative IAW assigned to a liberal country may find it demanding to be confronted with more liberal values regarding dress and social behaviour or may not have a choice of diet. Similarly, AW may be required to acclimate to local culture by adopting behaviours or clothing they may perceive as constrictive. Regardless of internal variances, in general AW identify strongly with the fundamental participatory humanitarian principles of: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence. As such the politicisation of aid is generally incongruous with AW beliefs (Jachens et al., 2019), and can undermine AW motivation (Dany et al., 2013), therefore a brief mention of the politicisation of aid work is central in understanding its effect on AW.

## The politics of aid work

The power and financial disparities created by history and by the costs of aid across the globe remain influential in aid policies and actions (Belloni, 2007). Much has been written about the influence of aid, as politicians at all levels use aid for their own gain whether to grab or keep power, to legitimise financial interests, or to enforce political strategies (Escalante Block, 2021). For example, in 2022, 35 countries abstained, five voted against, and 12 did not vote in supporting a UN resolution against Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Mills, 4 March 2022). Russia, as a permanent member of the UN security council has veto rights. Faced with moral distress related to challenges to the core humanitarian principles (Nilsson et al., 2011) the frustration for well-meaning AW can also mount because of oppressive bureaucracies and political tugs (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2012). Strains can stem from value systems dictated by aid donors via, for example, corruption clauses that limit resources reaching beneficiaries (IASC, 2016). For example, the food insecurity in Afghanistan has protracted for decades (Atmar, 2001) because of reluctance in helping existing regimes, or the Taliban government that has now banned women from working in the humanitarian sector (Naqui, 2022). Or supplies have had a difficult time reaching the victims of the latest earthquake in February 2023 in Syria because of political tensions and interests. To that effect, AW voice how efforts to implement programmes are frustrated by donors' political demands, or how priority is given to donor political reports over recommended changes in resource allocation by field staff *in the know* (Quimby, 2022). The tendency to evaluate aid's effectiveness via reductionist approaches (based on statistics and numbers, the predisposition to translate behaviours and needs into numbers that can be counted/monetised) and to present the needs of entire nations based on figures alone frustrates aid workers and diminishes the meaning found in aid work (Quimby, 2022). According to the AW themselves, effectiveness of aid interventions may be better served by inductive participatory studies that considers the nuances in persons and behaviours through human experiences informed by beneficiaries and AW in the field (Houldey, 2021).

Because sense of coherence and meaningfulness are strong predictors of better health outcomes for AW (De Jong et al., 2022), the personal effect of the politicisation of humanitarian aid can challenge the resilience of AW. Aid organizations may create hostile environments by their mere presence, raising the security profile of AW (Fee et al., 2019). Consequently, AW can be confronted by challenges when exposure to the host country's and/or to colleagues' hostility toward aid takes away from the sense that the *sacrifices* they are making are worthwhile or recognised (Putnam et al., 2009). Working

under raised physical protection strategies, for example high security barb-wired gated compounds, convoy travel, helmets and flat jackets that create divisions between AW and beneficiaries can demoralise AW who tend to be idealistic (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014) and favour softer security approaches (Fee et al., 2019). For security reasons AW may have to work side-by-side with security or armed forces, knowing the work will not appear neutral, nor impartial, but instead is perceived as top-down and from a position of power, as it is often that. Perhaps the issue is best illustrated by the recent experience of an international AW who had just returned *home* after working for an international non-governmental organization in the Horn of Africa. The AW expressed frustration at not being able to help the hungry because the local government and rebels were stopping the supply chain so that the *opposition* would starve. The AW was living without running water or internet for several months at a time without breaks, and felt their sacrifice no longer had purpose. The AW's inability to help on *the ground* was wearing on their sense of coherence (Thomas, 2016) gathered from providing life sustaining supplies for desperate beneficiaries.

Sense of coherence is a determinant for well-being, and a key component for sense of coherence is meaningfulness (De Jong et al., 2022). For *support* AW lacking contact with beneficiaries, the absence of recognition and direct contact with aid recipients undermines sense of coherence (Thomas, 2016), individual motivation (Friesen, 2022), and meaning of work (Montaiuti, 2013); all factors that psychologically can aggravate existing strain. In political or peacekeeping UN missions assisting governments or peace and security operations (United Nations, 2023), the direct contact with aid recipients by AW may be limited by security or by narrow mandates agreed with governments and/or international entities as the African Union, the Arab League according to the UN Charter. Such *substantive* operations are usually in active conflict and/or remote areas (for example Somalia or Libya), and aid efforts are often political or directly related to paradoxical peacekeeping military engagements, which seem intangible to AW (Montaiuti, 2013). In such operations, work sense of coherence may be found for *substantive* AW who may be leave the compound to meet political actors; *support* AW (HR, logistics, security, finance, and others) however may never need to leave isolated compounds and working *behind the scenes* can create additional psychological pressure. While essential to keeping *substantive* aid work going on the *front lines*, generally donors (and politicians) are not keen on the costs of administration (IASC, 2016). Aid organization culture may derive from similar attitudes where *support* AW can be resented for *taking* resources that could otherwise help more *substantive* aims, which in turn devalue *support* AW moving them to feel diminished (Montaiuti, 2013).

## The role of aid organizations before, during and after deployment

Whatever the service aid agencies offer, the responsibility for the well-being of AW rests solidly on the shoulders of aid organizations to research and implement effective solutions to best assist AW in delivering services to beneficiaries (Dunkley, 2018; Stringer, 2023). Some aid organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021) have plans in place for the welfare of AW which inform best practice. However, despite of the importance of the role of aid organizations in the prevention of AW stress, the level of commitment to prevention and intervention policies varies (Connorton et al., 2012). To avoid the tendency of aid organizations to bolster mental health care *only* after critical incidents (Quimby, 2021), I propose a *Model for Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Interventions (AOSPI)* in Figure 1. The AOSPI model illustrates a multi-modal approach to enhance the psychological safety climate. The aim is to forge robust prevention and intervention policies as protective factors for AW. As illustrated in detail below, the greatest burden rests on aid organizations to establish stress prevention measures and psychological safety climate.

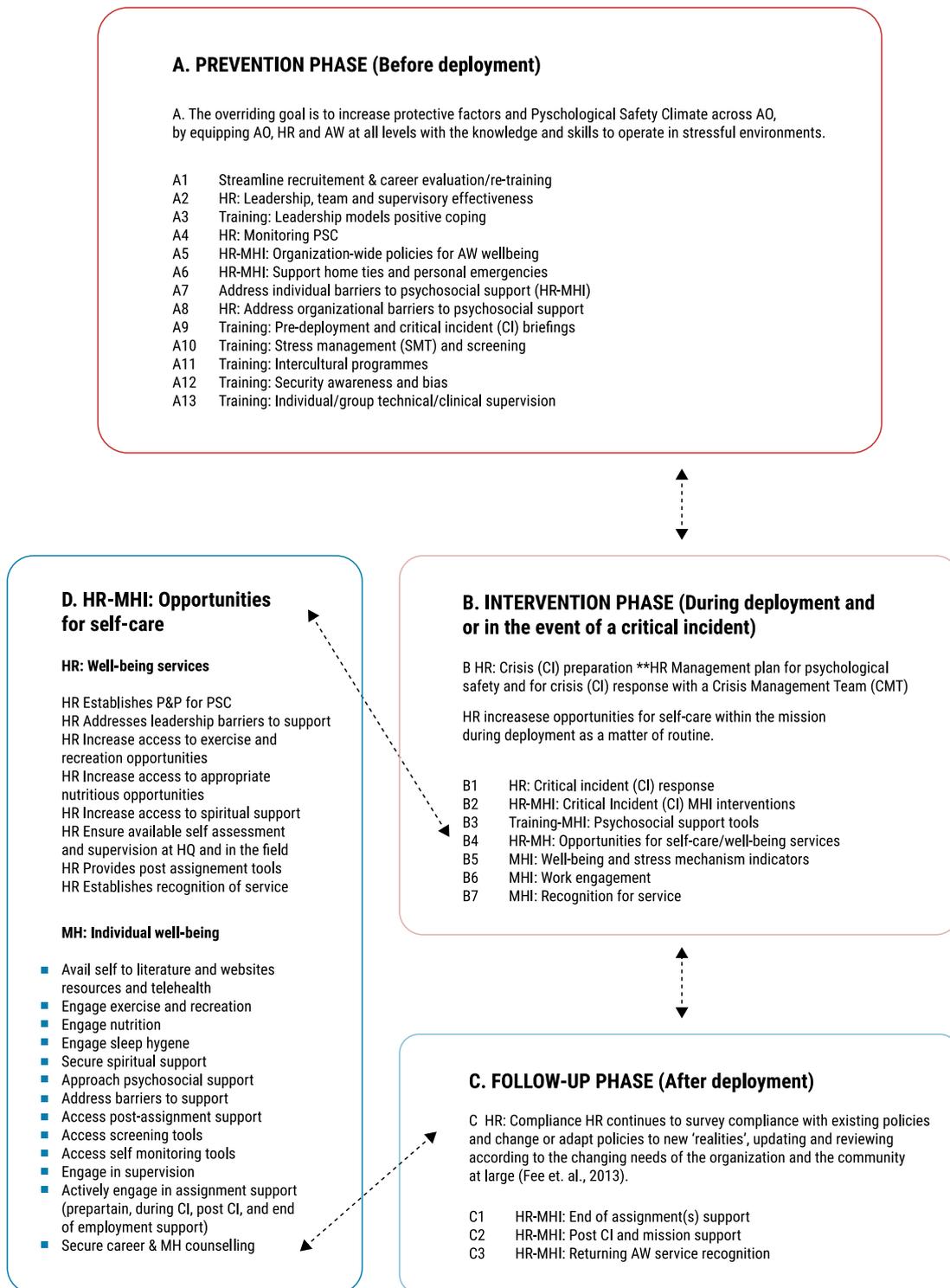
### Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Intervention (AOSPI): A model

The main premise for the AOSPI model, is the establishment of an organizational plan for psychological safety climate which includes the role of the aid organizations and of individual AW in prevention, intervention, crisis service-delivery and follow up. The model was assembled by combining Fee et al.'s (2013) *HR model for expatriates* with an *intervention model for critical incident response* (Miczaica & Montaiuti, 2019) and by integrating existing evidence and best practice. Within the context of aid organizations' policies and procedures, the AOSPI model contains three interchangeable phases of (A) before, (B), during and (C) after deployment and/or critical incident. Within each phase are four broad categories of Human Resources (HR), Training, Mental Health Interventions (MHI) and HR-MHI (HR policies and procedures addressing burnout and MI). Suggestions refer to national aid workers and international aid workers regardless of employment status unless otherwise specified. Section D further details opportunities for self-care and well-being services offering recommendations for HR and individual AW interventions to increase ipersonal well-being regardless of existing psychological safety

climate or disposition. *For each overall theme recommended policies and procedures are written in italics.*

Figure 1

Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Intervention (AOSPI): A model



## A. Prevention phases (before deployment)

### A. HR: Overriding policies and procedures

Aid worker stress can be minimised by better organizational practices acting as protective barriers against the inherent stress of aid work (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020), and the overriding goal of AOSPI is to help equip aid organizations at all levels with the knowledge and skills to operate in stressful environments. Because preparedness and training (Connorton et al., 2012) are more effective than assessment and pre-screening (Opie et al. 2022), before aid operations or critical incident interventions can take place, an overview of existing policies and procedures is necessary. Tailoring the aid agency's management plan for psychological safety climate follows.

Regardless of the aid organization's mandate, the management plan for psychological safety climate includes a review of the organization's role in prevention and intervention and crisis service-delivery (Fee et al., 2013), and critical incident follow-up policies and procedures (Miczaica & Montaiuti, 2022) designed to support AW mental and physical health and professional goals. In addition to existing evidence, policies based on participatory approaches help AW feel valued and benefit HR decisions at HQ (Curling & Simmons, 2010). *Organizational wide policies and procedures that implicate AW's well-being are reviewed, established and implemented according to empirical and grass-root evidence obtained from AW (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014).*

#### A.1 HR: Streamline recruitment and career evaluations

Stable work environments with clear roles and matched competency positively impact transactive memory increasing team efficiency and reducing stress (Blanchet & Michinov, 2014; Josam et al., 2022). In aid organization team changes are frequent, and it is important that HR practices match levels of expertise with previous incumbents to increase team cohesion, communication and knowledge sharing (Blanchet & Michinov, 2014). Instead, inadequate HR services in the aid sector can lead to promoting a disproportionate number of technical AW with seniority to occupy management position without proper management or leadership training or expertise outside their own technical proficiency (Houldey, 2021). Moreover, for legal reasons letters of recommendations are not required by some aid organizations. Therefore, AW who may have been fired (something that happens rarely for again, legal reasons) can be hired by another organization without being vetted (Quimby, 2021); instead, rumours can

serve as recommendations. Creating recruiting practices, evaluation and compensation strategies that are efficient and transparent by way of bias-free feedback mechanisms and accountable procedures unburden AW from toxic leadership or colleagues (Houldey, 2021). *HR helps harmonise skills and personal preferences with assignments (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014) by lowering procedural burdens and bureaucratic requirements (Ghodsi et al., 2022) and enhancing transparency in training before promotions.* Providing new skills and knowledge and fair employee evaluation processes to AW regardless of contractual status improves peoples' sense of worth; especially if such skills help improve continuity and team stability. These improved HR practices in turn help aid organizations respond to increasing aid needs (Hoffman & Weiss, 2007). *AW need training and support in transition to leadership and should be supported. HR provides confidential and systematic career counselling and or training and re-training to all AW regardless of contractual status to improve services across aid needs. Objective performance/key performance indicators (KPI) are monitored.*

### **A.2 HR: Leadership, team and supervisory effectiveness**

Aid worker stress is mediated by improving supervisory and team relationships and perceived organisational support (Young et al., 2022). Team cohesiveness can improve with insights into cultural nuances of newly assigned offices. Therefore, addressing cohesiveness through leadership effectiveness and creating cultural insight is crucial for improving AW resilience (Bartram et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2015). *Because of the transient nature of many aid office roles, the role of HR is critical in helping forge dynamic new teams through good leadership training and cultural integration. Accountability via leadership, team and supervisory Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).*

### **A.3 HR: Training: Leadership models positive coping**

The knowledge and ability of leaders to manage AW enabling them to feel valued is a protective factor (Ghodsi et al., 2020). Conversely, poor leadership is a strong barrier; with supervisors able to influence the capacity for mental health support and judgement attitude surround psychosocial issues. When seeking self or psychosocial care is seen by supervisors as being 'weak' or 'unfit', stigma increases. Senior AW can also model negative copying by espousing a culture of overwork, or the appearance of overworking (e.g., long hours in the office). Macho/martyr organizational cultures which encourage the suppression of emotions can be addressed by improving erroneous perceptions that only people with severe issues are to seek support (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020). *Aid organizations invest in training leadership on the benefits of accessing support. AW leaders are*

*role models for psychosocial well-being and engage in executive coaching (Korotov, 2016). Senior AW are responsible for engaging with the resilience and development of junior AW. HR and leaders improve access to well-being services by communicating availability of support devoid of stigma and by modelling self-care. Leaders model accessing to well-being services (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020).*

#### **A.4 HR: Monitoring psychological safety climate**

Some existing harassment policies leave managers to address harassment (UN, 2019) and the repercussions of outing abusers can be difficult for AW (Lee, 2018), especially in isolated or field offices. The PSC-12 (Hall et al., 2010), a short instrument measuring psychological safety climate, is relevant for monitoring management values and attitudes toward staff care. *Accountability systems include robust policies and reporting procedures that protect AW from the repercussions of whistleblowing and or reporting harassment. Instruments like the PSC-12 are engaged regularly to keep management at all levels accountable for psychological safety climate.*

#### **A.5 HR-MHI: Organization-wide policies for AW well-being**

Although interventions such as effective leadership (Bartram, et al., 2017) can alleviate stress burdens (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014), the conflicts and stress of emergency teams can remain unmanaged. Since emergencies are often sudden and/or ongoing, there may neither be the time nor the resources to address the stress management of AW, as priority must be given during emergency operations the delivery of essential supplies or safety. However, ungoverned stress affects self-efficacy and safety (Comoretto et al., 2105). *Teamwork guidelines and well-being policies and procedures are established before operations begin.*

#### **A.6 HR-MHI: Support home ties and personal emergencies**

Social support is a robust component of the resilience of AW (Stevens et al., 2022), but the altruism that shows as a dominant value for AW (Fechter, 2012) can create internal struggles between the AW's internal values and existing organizational macho/martyr culture (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020), particularly when things are amiss at home. For example, the needs of a loved one may be perceived to be in conflict with the needs of beneficiaries on the ground, an emotional divergence which can exhaust the psychological resilience capital of AW involved in emergencies (Houldey, 2021). Social strains can also overwhelm the stress coping mechanisms of AW because of the logistics of aid work. For example when a child is severely ill or in trouble; the AW may not be

able to travel home for various reasons; flights once every 7 days, nobody to cover, or supervisor may have empathy fatigue and will not allow the AW to leave. Or if a spouse threatens divorce the AW does may not have internet or stable phone access to make private calls. During my years as an AW, I witnessed extreme emotional responses, and while some were normal reactions to extreme situations others, such as suicide were the result of a combination of stress and personal crises often caused by a crack in existing social support systems (King et al., 2006). Leaving beneficiaries to take care of self or loved ones is not selfish, it is basic self-care, and an essential element for efficient aid work (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014). Moreover, it is important for international aid workers to maintain a home and social network in a country of choice (Snelling, 2018). *Policies and procedures allow reprieve from witnessing misfortune and disaster and support social bonds outside the mission (Hearns & Deeny, 2007). HR facilitate home ties by allowing for frequent breaks away from the stress of AW, and by establishing effective communication and/or IT systems. Safeguards are in place for emergency support without repercussions on careers or reputation. Leadership actively manages rumours and HR holds colleagues accountable on gossip via employment KPIs and supervision.*

### **A.7 Address individual barriers to psychosocial support**

Whether sometimes acute, continuous, or intermittent, emotional and/or physical, AW will most likely be exposed to stress, testing resilience of individuals and teams. AW exposure to stress and critical incidents increases the incidence of longstanding traumatic stress including long-term psycho-biological and behavioural changes (Macpherson & Burke, 2021). Even when psychosocial support is available, AW can experience psychological barriers to support that may be personal, professional, and/or environmental. Personally, AW can be reluctant in seeking psychological help because of a personal lack of self-awareness (e.g., 'I don't know what I need when I am stressed') or a tendency toward avoidance (e.g., 'I don't want to deal with it now'). Coping mechanisms such as forced normalisation ('this is normal') and *wait & see* ('I'll see how I manage') attitudes downplay or belittle one's own issues. Aid workers also avoid seeking support by using compartmentalising and detaching as coping mechanisms (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020) ("I don't need to think about that" or subconsciously deciding not to feel anything).

AW with secure attachment styles seem to better manage stress, as do AW with dismissive attachment style who distance themselves from the emotional impact of overwhelming experiences by suppressing emotions (Declercq & Willemsen, 2006). Compassion fatigue

expressed as lack of empathy itself a consequence of over-exposure to stress, and can present as avoidant attachment (Guilaran, 2012). While temporarily compartmentalising or detaching may be helpful in dealing with stress for short periods, it may also encourage a habit of shutting down (Guilaran, 2012). Frequent emotional blackouts used to survive stress can undermine well-being, because once AW can no longer willfully engaged such mechanism, shutting down can transform into burnout and empathy fatigue (Quimby, 2021).

Professional barriers to support for AW include feeling guilty about taking time off to focus on self-care when beneficiaries/national colleagues are suffering. AW perception of the relevance of psychological support (e.g., personal/cultural beliefs and the cost) can also hamper accessing support (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020). *Aid organizations help establish a culture of well-being: include well-being plans within budgetary guidelines, train AW on the sources and consequences of stress, and scaffold AW leadership well-being. Enhance psychosocial support to include reasonably-accessible, confidential psychological support.*

### **A.8 HR: Address organizational barriers to psychosocial support**

Aid organizations can boost psychological safety climate by dismantling organizational barriers via transparent leadership (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014), clear accountability practices (Quimby, 2021) and by financing and normalising psychosocial support (Houldey, 2021). Organizational protective factors include ease in providing services to beneficiaries (Jachens et al., 2019). Obstructions to psychological support for AW can stem from inside the aid organizations (Quimby, 2021). For example, when rumours about the lack of confidentiality of staff services undermine access to support, objective evaluations of existing psychosocial services can help address such barriers (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020). *Aid organization makes face-to-face and/or telehealth/cyber assisted psychosocial support routinely accessible. Aid organization safeguards AW against the lack of perceived confidentiality or trust in psychosocial provision and establishes accountable ethical KPI across department, and by planning for regular professional supervision for psychosocial service providers.*

### **A.9 Training: Pre-deployment and critical incident briefings**

Suitable training and knowledge help AW gain the confidence to operate under challenging conditions, particularly when AW are required to take control, make decisions, and take up positions of responsibility (Yang et al., 2022). However, existing ongoing critical incident preparedness is limited in some aid organizations (Connorton et al., 2012). Because the resilience of AW to stress is enhanced by specialised training (Turner

et al., 2021), aid organizations are responsible for setting up evidence-based pre- and post-deployment CI training and support (Connorton et al., 2012). Pre-departure sense of coherence trainings tailored by gender preferences help avert mental health incidences and cannot be underestimated (De Jong et al., 2022), therefore, *prior to active employment and for each deployment, AW are made aware of potential psycho-biological risks of aid work and particularly of critical incident stress. Gender preferences, individual psychological, behavioural and cultural barriers to accessing psychosocial support are incorporated in all training (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa). Websites, telehealth, and supportive literature are clearly marked and unambiguous. Aid organizations' policies and procedures include psychological training (sense of coherence), time management strategies, regular (confidential and professional) screenings for psychological distress (Borho et al., 2019), and heavy-drinking awareness and treatment (Jachens et al., 2019).*

### **A.10 Training: Stress management and screening**

Although distress is pervasive in aid work (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2012), AW may not always be aware of protective factors and risks associated with stress (Dahlgren et al., 2009). Training AW in crisis teamwork response before deployment can help facilitate collaboration (Yang et al., 2021), and without insight into stress, individual self-efficacy can diminish, as can the quality of service to beneficiaries (Hears & Deeny, 2007; Turner et al., 2021). Therefore, positive impact stress management training includes explanations of boundaries, *Psychological First Aid (WHO, 2021), active listening skills (Guskovict & Potocky, 2018) and are integrated into stress well-being prevention programmes.*

Because of the pivotal role of leadership in the prevention and support of AW serving under challenging conditions, *policies and procedures are established about training of leaders to recognise and manage stress reactions. Because training on local culture and counter-culture shock also helps alleviate stress burdens (Strohmeier et al., 2019), HR plans for psychological safety climate include policies and procedures about mental health within each team's cultural context (Comoretto et al., 2020). Psychological First Aid/PFA (WHO, 2022) is taught across seniority levels for the prevention of long-term effects of traumatic stress by enabling safety and calmness, and by supporting self-efficacy and hope within affected communities. The Total Worker Health® (a computer-based training, Hammer et al., 2021) for mental health helps guide leaders to target interventions is adopted widely.*

### **A.11 Training: Access and equitability**

Shielding elements against stress are: team building (Comoretto et al., 2015), effective learning programmes and healthy communal living (Josam et al., 2022). Protective factors also include perfected team communication and understanding across the aid organizations (Walsh, 2009). Additional safeguarding elements feature equitable, inclusive, gender and racially un-biased work environments (Houldey, 2021). AW often work far apart from colleagues and may experience additional challenges in teamwork because of logistics imperatives. For example, HQ AW may never have worked in field offices, newly assigned international aid workers may lack local knowledge needed to help beneficiaries in situ (Johnson et al., 2016), national aid workers may attend to unfamiliar or unfriendly communities (Hess, 2017; Strohmeier et al., 2019). It is the responsibility of the aid organization to address the realities of aid work by improving teamworking. *Based on IASC guidelines when devising policies and procedures, local communities and knowledge inform the development of cultural awareness training, and systems are put in place to regularly gather updated grassroots information (Kang, 2016). All AW, regardless of position or assignment, benefit from intercultural and training programmes addressing possible partialities, conflict and specific field offices qualities (Dass-Brailsford, 2008; McFarlane, 2004). Gender balanced teams promote the overall health of AW (De Jong et al., 2022), efforts are made to gender-balance teams. Leadership demonstrates commitment to inclusivity and diversity by acknowledging bias and the risks of racism and by attending training (Arthur & Moutard, 2016).*

### **A.12 Training: Security awareness and bias**

Security is an essential element of the stress of AW (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2013), and to protect AW, safety and security are relevant to AW well-being. Aid staff are heterogenous, and have diverse security needs (Hensch, 2016; Jones et al., 2017). *All AW, regardless of contractual status receive adequate security awareness, communication and critical incident training (Fee et al., 2019). AW diversity entails cultural sensitivity, as the nature of crises informs its reaction and levels of communication at the appropriate cultural level (Woodrick, 2009). Aid organizations integrate race considerations into aid organization security processes and adapt security training to include diversity and inclusivity components on power, privilege, and biases (EISF, 2018). Aid organizations diversify security hiring and leadership to improve on understanding of on-the ground security threats (Arthur & Moutard, 2016).*

### **A.13 Training: Individual/group technical/clinical supervision**

Effective supervision (Callifronas et al., 2018) is related to lower stress (Ellis et al., 2017). Just as AW supervision can be a vital source of support (Guskovict & Potocky, 2018) supervision of peer support volunteers bolsters self-confidence and efficacy (Curling & Simmons, 2010). *Regular clinical supervision is scheduled for professional mental health AW and peer support volunteers. Ongoing supervision and professional support are organized for AW at all levels involved in the aftermath of crises or disaster relief (Guskovict & Potocky, 2018).*

## **B. Intervention phase critical incident interventions and interventions during deployment**

### **B. HR: Crisis incident preparation**

Aid Organizations' role in the CI reactive phase is to be prepared and to maintain ongoing situational assessment. Critical incident P&P include standard operating procedures for crisis management and establishing a Crisis Management Teams (CMT). *Policies and procedures are free of diversity, gender and racial bias (Dass-Brailsford, 2008). Crisis management team maintains active drills and activates drill response adequate to crisis. Community preparations before crises includes psychologists, religious leaders, colleagues and peers trained in critical incident response (Eriksson et al., 2009). Management at all levels prepares and coordinates ongoing situational assessment and service delivery of coordination with crisis management team (Fee et al., 2013). Critical management team ensures channels are ready and stakeholders are updated about interventions and evacuation maintaining compliance with existing P&P (Fee et al., 2013). Support service delivery preparedness via critical management team and HQ coordination includes safety and security, medical and administration, media, intervention teams, evacuation, care, referrals and post care in coordination with HQ (Fee et al., 2013; Miczaica & Montaiuti, 2013). Policies and procedures secure insurance coverage for mental health establishing resident professional counselling services and/or tele-health.*

#### **B.1 HR: Critical incident response**

*In event of a critical incidents the crisis management team activates drill response according to established standard operating procedures. Communication between stakeholders and the crisis management team includes crisis management team critical incident-specific services. Short-term and immediate psychosocial responses and long-term emergency recovery and mitigation*

efforts must incorporate mental health interventions (IASC, 2017). Planned crisis service delivery is implemented through local and culturally appropriate community-based entities when needed via culturally-appropriate Psychological First Aid (WHO, 2022) and CALMER protocols (Consider-your own needs, and those closest to you; Acknowledge-the source of stress, and how it impacts upon you; Listen-how you are feeling mentally and physically; Manage-ways to deal with stress and regain control; Enable-what has enabled you to cope with stress in the past; Resource-what do you need to put steps in place, Davidson, 2010). Ongoing situational and individual assessment by mental health professionals on the scene is coordinated via crisis management team and HQ (according to existing HR policy and procedure). Professionals make specific mental health intervention assessment and recommendations (Miczaika & Montaiuti, 2019). Crisis management team coordinates administrative and mental health support during evacuations of AW that are culturally appropriate (Miczaika & Montaiuti, 2019). Critical management team equips local AW to carry on services when evacuation of just international aid workers are required (Fee et al., 2013). Critical management team executes established critical incident protocol for individual/group technical/clinical supervision of all AW involved. At least one person at HQ is on a 24/7 rotation during crisis to support ground staff at all levels. Personal and organizational barriers to support are modelled by trained leadership. Critical management team manages press/social media and rumours via established policies and procedures. Critical management team hands over to HR crisis teams who deliver post critical incident care (Miczaika & Montaiuti, 2019).

## **B.2 HR-MH: Critical incident mental health interventions**

The common thread when confronted with unexpected or extraordinary events are feelings of helplessness, and critical incidents have the power to tax the resilience of any AW. Many AW are repeatedly exposed to potentially traumatic critical incidents, and some struggle to find their way through sometimes-crippling mental health diagnoses (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2012). Because critical incident stress may also have a negative impact on the availability and quality of social support (King et al., 2006), critical incident stress must be met with the consideration of the aid community of mission colleagues, where HR policies and procedur sustains community (IASC, 2017) as a means for psychological safety climate and healing (Taylor et al., 2019). All psychological support service actions undertaken in emergency responses meet the IASC guide six core principles (2017). Mental health support interventions are community based and person focused. Mental health policies and procedures and drills have been routinely managed and ensure spiritual and religious practices that help foster meaning, interconnections and purpose are available as alternatives to Western

psychosocial interventions (Houldey, 2022). Regardless of contractual status, HR immediate psychosocial response and long-term emergency recovery and mitigation efforts are engaged as appropriate and incorporate no-stigma mental health assessment, intervention, evacuation, care and post-care (Macpherson & Burkle, 2021). HR Macho/martyr culture is addressed via leadership activities and modelling (Cockcroft-McKay & Eiroa-Orosa, 2020). Policies and procedures include continued evaluation, supervision (Guskovict & Potocky, 2018) and monitoring of mental health interventions with a gendered approach (Jachens et al., 2019).

### **B.3 Training-mental health interventions: Psychosocial support tools**

Stress exerts a negative impact on the availability and quality of social support (King et al., 2006), and in many isolated field offices, the organization is *the* community, therefore the community of colleagues must learn ways to support fellow AW. As an alternative to post-critical incident debriefing which is not widely recommended (Donnelly, 2017), and in a low resource setting with limited mental health service, the British Red Cross recommends guiding interventions according to the CALMER (Davidson, 2010). Psychological First Aid (WHO, 2022) is a simple resource-rich psychosocial tool for critical incident interventions (Corey et al., 2021). It is delivered through support system by competently trained AW rooted in the critical incident contexts; who have access to supervised support. Peer support volunteer training intended as the informal colleague support and referrals system provided by especially trained non-professionals, can be activated in a crisis (Carvello et al., 2019). Psychological first aid and CALMER, and the peer support volunteer network are implemented as part of a wider critical incident protocol. Peer support volunteer training and supervision is funded and organised across aid organizations.

### **B.4 HR-mental health: Opportunities for self-care/well-being services**

Competing demands on AW can challenge the best intentions about self-care. Aid organizations can increase AW prospects for self-care by collecting evidence about what works best in what aid operation from the AW themselves, and by allowing for easy access to self-care (Ghodsi et al., 2022). Beyond this, broadening the range of measures to upturn resilience includes elements of RESPECT: Relaxation, education, social, physical, exercise, creativity and thinking (Dunkley, 2022). Opportunities for socialising outside the work team (Guskovict & Potocky, 2018) and rest and recuperation (R&R) help mitigate the balance between professional and personal life (Josam, 2022), and alleviate the physical and emotional burden of isolation often experienced in field offices (Asgary & Lawrence, 2014). Allowing for quality physical health also improves stress outcomes (De Jong et al.,

2022) with sleep hygiene, diet and exercise (Soteriades et al., 2022). Contact with nature also helps elevate mood (Klots et al., 2021) and improves stress outcomes and cognition, as do cold water immersion or showers (Kelly & Bird, 2021). *HR help alleviate stress burdens by making room for individual input and needs in decision-making and by exploring ways to express joy in work (Josam et al., 2022). HR directs resources and actively support officed-tailored prospects for social, reflection, rest, exercise, sleep, creative education, and a diet. Input is sought from junior AW as a matter of practice. Leaders help preserve or restore health by modelling and encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, allowing for recreational prospects and rest between assignments (Ghodsi et al., 2020). Because NAW at times experience greater stress than their expatriate colleagues (Ager et al., 2012; Musa & Hamid, 2008), despite the predetermined differences in benefits and needs, access to psychological support is provided to all AW aid organizations regardless of contractual status (Strohmeier et al., 2019; Asgary & Lawrence 2014). Counselling support integrates culturally appropriate interventions through established connection to local community systems and leaders (Houldey, 2021).*

### **B.5 Mental health interventions: Ill-being and stress mechanism indicators**

Well-being preservation involves regular self-screening (Borho et al., 2019) as targeted regular psychosocial health interventions help avoid the long-term effects of aid work stress (Sifaki-Pistolla et al., 2016). The following tools can be engaged contingent upon need: *The Headington Institute Resilience Inventory* is a multidimensional assessment tool used to support the resilience of AW (Nolty et al., 2018). Likewise, *The Self Care and Lifestyle Balance Inventory* (the Headington Institute, 2023) is for educational purposes and aims at improving insight into resilience. Chari et al. (2022) developed *The Worker Well-Being Questionnaire (WELLBQ)* which measures multiple dimensions of well-being. The instrument was developed through literature reviews and expert panel recommendations and has acceptable reliability and validity. Additional tools that help identify stress reactions include *Sense of Coherence* which evaluates three components: Comprehensibility, Manageability, and Meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987); *The Hopkins Symptom Checklist* (Derogatis et al., 1974) is a self-inventory, it helps identify symptoms of anxiety and depression during the last seven days. *The Post-Traumatic Check List DSM-5* (Blevins et al., 2015) measures the DSM-5 symptoms of PTSD. *The PostAID/Q* (Post mission altruistic identity disruption questionnaire) by McCormack et al., (2016) is a self-inventory developed for the post-deployment screening of psychological trauma, and burnout of AW. This tool highlights behaviours and feelings that can hinder personal reintegration into teams or social settings. *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit* (the International Society for Traumatic Stress, ISTS, 2022) can raise awareness of vicarious trauma.

It is freely and regularly used to support self-monitor against secondary trauma or stress experienced by witnessing or listening to suffering of others (Lusk et al., 2015; Shah et al., 2007). *Listed measuring tools are employed to assess general well-being and help forge immediate and long-term well-being interventions. COPPS ethical professional guidelines for occupationally mandated psychological evaluations are followed (APA, 2017).*

## **B.6 Mental health interventions: Work engagement**

Criteria for burnout are met when a person at work experiences emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a reduced sense of accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). While burnout in AW is not directly related to the number of field assignments (Cardozo et al., 2012) senior AW will more likely experience it (Eriksson et al., 2013) as post CI stress strongly correlates with burnout (Chatzea et al., 2017) and empathy fatigue (Guilaran, 2012). The quality and insight of leadership can greatly affect team cohesion and effectiveness (Ghodsi et al., 2020), and levels of burnout in leadership impact teams (McCormack & Joseph, 2017) therefore aid organizations have a duty of care in equipping leaders with measures to address burnout (Cripe & Nyssens, 2017). Mitigating factors protecting AW from the consequences of stress and *vicarious* trauma (ISTS, 2022) and vicarious burnout (the burnout of office colleagues) include qualities associated with suitable leadership such effective boundaries, insights into own burnout and successful delegation (Osicki, 2016). *Work engagement outcome indicators include the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1981) measuring burnout-related experiences of emotional exhaustion; and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006), measuring work engagement that is understood as engaging, positive occupational mindset. Burnout solutions are assessed routinely by senior AW and HR and leadership and general AW support policies are modified according to the agency's needs.*

## **B.7 Mental health interventions: Recognition of service**

Aid work is rarely done half-heartedly (Fechter, 2012), and considerations need to be made about well-meaning and altruistic AW who may also be misguided by a disproportionate need to help (Houldey, 2021). Aggravating factors of AW stress are the lack of recognition for the *personal* cost of work. Recognition through bottom up feedback to more senior AW and a deliberate focusing on the purpose of aid work helps obviate challenges to individual sense of coherence during and post-assignments (De Jong et al., 2022). By acknowledging the impact that sense of coherence and the meaning of work

have on resilience (Young et al., 2022) and on self-efficacy (Turner et al., 2021) leaders increase protection against stress. *Public recognition of service is routinely organised in the field and HQ. Include AW who have low or no contact with beneficiaries in vision meetings and when not harmful, improved direct contact with beneficiaries (Friesen, 2022).*

## **C. Follow up phase (After deployment)**

### **C. HR: Compliance**

*Human Resources continues to survey compliance with existing policies and change or adapt policies to new ‘realities’, updating and reviewing according to the changing needs of the organization and the community at large (Fee et. al., 2013).*

#### **C.1 HR-mental health interventions: End of assignment(s)**

Check out briefings and post mission assessment to minimise stress responses, and included repatriation procedures for AW (Comoretto et al., 2015). *HR’s role in the follow up phase of a critical incident or re-deployment is complex, and includes evacuation, repatriation, personal property recovery, updates on personnel skill. If international aid workers are evacuated, policies are implemented that equip national aid workers to carry on essential work (Fee et al., 2013). HR is prepared for national aid workers’ families’ safety, the continuation of work post critical incident, post mission briefings. Critical incident repatriation for national aid workers and families (if evacuated) is established clearly with the support of established internal policies and budgetary support. Plans are in place and executed for post-mission/employment follow-up and aftercare mental health interventions in person or via telehealth as required.*

#### **C.2 HR-mental health interventions: Post critical incident and mission**

The responses of the crisis management team, HR provide valuable lessons learnt, and a post CI or mission review is necessary to learn and improve on the experience (Fee et al, 2013). *Therefore, a close evaluation of service-delivery and survey compliance with existing policies and procedures needs carrying out. Policies and procedures can be updated according to the emerging needs of the aid organizations and their AW and lessons learnt is implemented. Meanwhile, HR continues to assist with changing roles and assignments of AW, and to oversee care for their psycho-bio-social health (Comoretto et al., 2015). HR provision upon end of mission/operations/employment comprises of written policies supporting staff adversely impacted by exposure to critical incident stress upon assignment (Wersig & Wilson-Smith, 2021). Policies and procedures are established or modified and implemented*

*for the psychological culturally appropriate assistance at the end of assignments according to AW wishes. Post critical incident or mission provisions include adaptable protective policies and procedures for adversely impacted AW (Wersig & Wilson-Smith, 2021). Practical and psychosocial care is delivered post mission or post critical incident, in person or via telehealth, and include follow-up and professional supervision (Guskovict & Potocky, 2018).*

### **C.3 HR-MHI: Returning AW service recognition**

Beyond practical challenges of moving countries, post-mission(s) adjustment can be significantly taxing, as AW routinely experience difficulties in sharing their identities altered by aid work with families and friends (Comoretto et al., 2015). The perceived lack of support of returning AW from the employing agencies can aggravate post-employment stress (Thormar et al., 2013) therefore, AW can benefit from assistance with re-integrating. HR interventions comprise repatriation of people and things (Fee et al., 2013), career counselling, CI after-care, education and self-care support, prior to separation. Aid organizations commitments include end of service recognition, practical and social assistance, and follow-up post-assignment (Albuquerque et al., 2018). Ceremonies involving loved ones acknowledging returning AW are routine (Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2014). Contingent upon individual AW needs, aid organizations scaffold the long-term resilience of AW by helping merge existing and post-deployment identities (McCormack & Joseph, 2013) with the help of the peer support volunteer network. The PostAID/Q (McCormack et al., 2016) contributes to the reintegration back into the home community of AW by validating past work, by evaluating feedback and insight from work, and by monitoring the stages of post-mission integration.

## **Concluding remarks**

Occupational hazards for aid workers who have first-hand contact with hardship, danger and some the most challenging human conditions (UNICEF, 2023) can weaken well-being. Environmental dangers add to existing organizational complexities and challenges such as stifling bureaucracies, high turnover, lack of contact with beneficiaries, excessive politicisation and paucity of resources. Minimising the psychological burden of aid work is an ethical responsibility of all aid organizations, as psychological safety climate affects the quality of life of aid workers and in turn, that of beneficiaries. Aid organizations can increase aid workers well-being by addressing aid workers' physical and psychosocial needs, and by providing a psychological safety climate that is free of internal stressors.

Protective organizational measures against the stress of aid work involve solid commitments to shield aid workers against negative psychological outcomes while holding leadership at every level accountable before, during and after deployment or critical incidents. Without wanting to underestimate the complexity of the task, The *Model for Aid Organizations' Stress Prevention and Interventions (AOSPI)* is designed to help aid organizations and aid workers mitigate stress responses alike by dismantling barriers to psychosocial support, and by establishing programmes suitable for sustaining psychological safety climate in aid work. My viewpoint is influenced by my own cultural affiliation with the 'Global North' and by my professional experience as an aid worker, therefore different outlooks are likely to improve upon my interpretation of how to preserve psychological safety climate in aid work. The model is a work in progress and can be improved by expanding upon emergent practices or empirical scrutiny on the experience aid workers, and by broadening perspectives across the world of aid.

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INTERVIEW

# Reflections on the field of Humanitarian Work Psychology

Interview with Stuart C. Carr

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## Introduction and about the interviewee

Today I have the pleasure of interviewing **Stuart Carr (Stu)**, who holds a UNESCO Chair on *Sustainable Livelihoods*, in partnership with Massey University in New Zealand. His specialism is Humanitarian Work Psychology (HWP) and its relevance to the United Nation's primary goal of 'eradicating poverty in all its forms, everywhere. As a co-founding member of the End Poverty and Inequality Cluster (EPIC), Stu conducts applied research as part of a 30-country, 50-year Project GLOW (for Global Living Organisational Wage). GLOW focuses on the links between decent, living wages and well-being, including their role in promoting and supporting wider sustainable livelihoods. A former editor of the *South Pacific Journal of Psychology*, the *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, and more recently *International Perspectives in Psychology*, Stu is a long-term staunch supporter of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which focus on eradicating poverty for example through decent work, towards *Sustainable Livelihoods*. In our interview we will explore how he became involved in humanitarian work research, and how this influenced his orientation towards the study of decent work – and beyond, towards sustainable livelihoods. **Over to you Stu:**

With connecting people in mind, in partnership with Massey University, UNESCO recently created this Chair focusing on sustainable livelihoods, and has entrusted me to occupy it. It sounds individualised but the role is really about facilitating connections. Walking the talk. *Livelihoods* is a far wider, more inclusive concept than a singular, formal, secure, regulated, and secure job, which a vast majority of working people no longer have (if they ever did). Livelihoods become *sustainable* when they do not degrade people's well-being, or the ecosystem that supports it; but instead, when they contribute to the livelihoods of others, both today and into the future, i.e., across generations. The adjective *sustainable* also resonates with the 2016–30 SDGs. These are focused primarily as we saw above on eradicating poverty, in all its forms, everywhere. This includes through *decent work*, which is a key stepping-stone towards making livelihoods more sustainable. That link to the SDGs is central to the research, teaching and service we are doing at the moment – and to the UNESCO Chair. So, it all comes back to tackling poverty, together.

**Angela:** *How and when did your interest in HWP begin?*

**Stu:** It began with my first academic position post-PhD, at the National University of Malawi (UNIMA), in Southern Africa. Malawi was a rich country socially, culturally,

historically, while also being economically – materially – poor. Economic poverty was widespread. Not surprisingly perhaps, there was also a deal of humanitarian aid, and aid work, going on. Surprisingly too however, much of it was – ironically – backfiring.

UNIMA itself was not exempt from the same dynamic. As a Professor of Education pointed out to us when discussing where Psychology research might contribute:

*‘Open your eyes and look around you: Why not research **this corridor**? Look around you; and then look out to the rest of the country, and you’ll see it replicated all over the nation. How can you have teamwork and ‘development cooperation’ when some people are paid 10 or 20 times more than their colleagues for doing the same job? Why don’t you research, and address, that?’*

In our own workplace corridor, all the doors looked virtually the same, except for having different names on them. Some had Malawian (local) names, and others expatriate (expat) names. Behind them there were also different contracts of employment for these very same local and the expat colleagues. Notably, the expats generally earned far more than their local counterparts, despite staff often being no different in their training or experience; and doing largely the same job as each other. Popularly dubbed *dual salaries*, this double *standard* can be found all over the world. In Papua New Guinea, for example, it has even been termed ‘Economic Apartheid’ and, reflecting local wage shortfalls, ‘Zero [Bank] Balance’ (see Marai, 2014).

Our own department like others was a mix of host country nationals and expats, but we had the rarity of all being waged locally, with none being aid-funded. So clearly (for us at least), dual salaries did not *need* to be structured in the way that they were. As it turned out however, the aid wage system was antithetical to teamwork; to aid-workers working themselves out of a job; and ultimately, to eradicating poverty (see ESRC Impact case study). As policy-focused HWP would later document, across a range of sectors, the dual salaries reward system was/is still conducive to a brain drain; to creating yet more jobs for over-rewarded expats, encouraging them to leave, and to creating ever more entry-points for outside ‘assistance’ (for a summary, McWha-Hermann, Marai, MacLachlan & Carr, 2021). More palpably, the wage system itself was denying local people their own sustainable livelihoods.

This is just one of many examples of why, perhaps, some years later a prominent scholar from another African country would say to me: ‘*My country could have been far better off without all these aid organizations ever being here.*’

So, my interest in HWP began with collectively experiencing and helping to expose the human factor contradictions in, and of, aid work. But it went deeper than just critiquing aid work, much of which was no doubt well-meaning. Malawi also led me/us to start thinking about psychology helping to tackle poverty in more sustainable ways, through Sustainable Livelihoods.

**Angela:** *What was the catalyst that brought you and others work together in the field of HWP?*

**Stu:** As detailed by Emeriti Professor Virginia Schein (in your previous interview), there were some particularly catalytic years between 2008 and 2010. During that time, there were a slew of galvanising speeches at conferences and other meetings, radical (for the time) seminar sessions, new courses and workshops backed and run by leading scholars and practitioners in our field (as mentioned by Virginia), and all of them on HWP concerns. Most of them linked back, in some way or another, to tackling poverty, inequality, and hardship. But the real story of HWP in the 2000s, for me, was the electric buzz that was being generated by and among so many earlier career scholars and grad students. They filled the rooms to overflowing; they came with ideas and energy; they brought and breathed a renewed sense of urgency into the old touchstones, to making a difference, not to economic power but to tackling poverty, inequality, and hardship. Many of them as Virginia has noted have become leading lights in HWP, and a source of inspiration to (and for) us all.

At first much of the interest was around work that is humanitarian. But in the 2020s, that key momentum has been turbo-charged by all the wider humanitarian changes, crises, changes (threats and opportunities) around the world-of-work in *general*. Poverty and hardship, unfortunately, knows no border(s). If the late Kurt Lewin were still with us, he might be describing these times, both within HWP work and across the world of work, as a time of great unfreezing(s). Our whole world of work has changed, we in work psychology have changed, have to, change with it. The pandemic and a range of other crises, from racial injustice and gender inequality/'Me too', to cost-of-living and the overarching threat of destruction of the environment, much of it - let's face it - by organizations and by dirty jobs - have all made HWP even more relevant now than ever before. Students are up for the challenge, hungry to engage, and change the whole world (of work). Why? Perhaps, in part at least, because many of them are working in precarious 'jobs' and because they can see themselves and their own collective futures, and their future of work, reflected in *Humanitarian WP*. In that vein, there is no more pressing a motivator perhaps than goaling sustainable livelihoods?

One obvious way for any society to try and end poverty and inequality is through increased access to decent work; and decent, inclusive, dignified working conditions. Humanitarian work psychology is thereby, at root, about helping to make work, and access to work in *general* more humanitarian. Since then, I think the world has changed in so many ways that the Humanitarian emphasis on work in general has become even more relevant. I mean the students in the classroom have already changed, and we're just playing 'catch up,' in a sense to an increased demand for us to do more for people not just in 'aid' work, but more generally, across all forms of work, across human society globally. Again, it's in the corridor at work: Many of our own students are holding down precarious jobs. They're working at night, in jobs in hospitality for lousy wages; and on zero hours contracts. These are flimsy working conditions that mean they are already stressed just trying to get by. Plus, they've been made to pay for their education, and they are often living in lousy accommodation (or sleeping rough). In New Zealand today we have a housing crisis. People with property have been able to acquire more and more wealth, through speculation and literal rent seeking, from people not on the 'property ladder.' Minimum wages rise, but rents rise higher. Inequality escalates. Poor work and wage conditions are implicated in child poverty. So too is land-lording. We cannot pretend that they are not connected.

**Angela:** *Yes, we are seeing this in the UK with many working people having to use food banks to feed their families.*

**Stu:** Things will have to break unless there is radical reform that redresses these inequities and broken promises. Yes, people are very 'resilient,' but you cannot keep pushing them to cope with more and in the process keep shifting the spotlight away from upstream work systems and structures, including so-called 'free' labour markets that a prominent work psychologist once described (to me) as '*economic slavery*.' For a long time, Economics has been the loudest voice in the room. Psychology has shied away from economics; and even when we have engaged it's arguably often been through nudging and using crude, simplistic models that don't really deal with the complex forces that are involved. But economists' perspectives are diverse, like psychologists', and there are raging battles going on within economics now as well. For example, there is a long-standing argument about minimum wages which is still not resolved. One side is saying, if you promote minimum wages, you will lose jobs overall, and the other side, less and less of a minority voice perhaps, is saying the reverse. The bit that's likely missing is the quality of work that is required for peoples' well-being. Because there's a huge difference between a job that makes you ill, and a job that provides you with a decent, actually more

than that, a sustainable living. It is that kind of differentiation that work psychology can contribute more toward. So, you need economists and psychologists to come together and re-theorise research and re-think the policy implications of the psycho-economic nexus; because who wants to retain jobs when most of them are poor quality, and actually threaten, or least fail to adequately protect, people's well-being?

But how do you create jobs that enable people to have a truly sustainable livelihood? These are germane questions, and there are two sides to every story; and the adult way of dealing with this is probably to try and learn each other's languages; and find a place where you can meet. And it's not just with economics. Public Health has been doing much more than we have to link well-being with raised minimum wages, and we need to talk to them too, much more, I feel, about what psychology can do, and constructively offer, from its small corner of the much bigger (societal) room.

So, there are differences and diversities within disciplines, and also intersections between them that need to be found rather quickly. Especially post pandemic for instance, why are we not involved more in burning Artificial Intelligence (AI) issues? In New Zealand there are robotics engineers being asked to do things like design robots that can pick fruit. Technically they can – and have. But socio-technically, they will have a big impact in small country towns because automating this work may longer-term ruin local businesses. The workers won't be required so the little shops that their wages help to support will go, and the towns may atrophy.

We need to be working with these socially responsible robotics engineers to help them – they are asking us to help them with making the arguments for and against their own technology. Generally, we can do more to help self-managing communities and responsible employers to find better ways of making the automation work 'for' people, and not 'against' them; for instance, by developing complementary and/or replacement livelihood opportunities from and with the technology itself (see Carr, Hodgetts, Potgieter & Meyer, 2020).

**Angela:** *Do you feel we need to be reaching out making connections with other disciplines and domains, like policy studies, with some urgency?*

**Stu:** I've already mentioned Economics and Public Health. But also, when you and I pick up the average work psychology textbook there's still not a lot/enough on intersections with politics and policy, at all levels from organizational to societal and global. Years ago, I was told that 'the real force in most organizations, in most workplaces is political.'

I wasn't convinced, but the advice was right, not only within organizations but also between them, along global supply chains and across whole countries and societies. We have to stop feigning that work is not inherently socio-political, alongside the social and the economic. It's very much political, and about the dynamics of economic power and policymaking at all levels, from micro and macro, through the 'meso' (mid-level), in organizations and communities (Carr et al., 2020).

That dual salaries example we spoke about earlier is a lot about economic power, for instance. The people with the economic power have more; they enjoy the privileges from it; and it's the power structure that needs to be challenged. The same arguably goes for the current world of work, which is characterised by working poverty for the many and an extreme affluence for the elite – including the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) upper wage class. Whenever and wherever the power structure is unjust, the people who have it right are the ones who are calling out that power structure for being unjust. Those voices can come from within any discipline; and there have been many voices speaking; but they have too often been in a/the social minority. Now they're growing in number, because the injustices and the abuses of economic power are becoming more and more flagrant. They stand out in times like this when we've all been going through a pandemic; and the public health crisis has exposed the inequities; raising awareness that the people who have economic power to begin with have ridden out the crisis relatively well. But people like key workers were having to go out, put themselves in the front line for lousy money, then go home and risk infecting their families; that's if they have a home to go to, and are not living in a car or something. I feel we are getting to a critical period now when power bases must change, as a lot of people are very angry with the current system for different reasons. It is about challenging power structures and coming up with constructive alternatives that are more inclusive and fairer. A lot comes back to justice (A. Furnham, in Carr, 2023).

Extant wage models are exploitative, yet there are different ways from to get from A to B; and equality-related and systems theories can give you different routes; but in the longer-term no one wins when profitability for a few puts most others into economic slavery. There are better, more sustainable *win-win* paths. If there is justice, people feel the system is just that's a good foundation for moving forward as a united social entity rather than divided individuals. I know this sounds a bit general, but fairness is a basis for a lot in our society, and our work theories and research going back a long way do show that, and how, fairness is vital for sustainability. I feel we've neglected the material side of what work can fairly deliver, having over-focused on work's middle classes. We haven't

shone our spotlight enough at the lower end of the table, where the majority of workers work. A wafer slim minority enjoys a huge amount of relative benefit and privilege. I think people by and large, including our students, are feeling more and more unhappy with this state. and want to see it changed. So, I'm optimistic because the students are really engaged in realising this future through connecting our discipline with political and policy issues.

**Angela:** *I remember when I was researching a precarious working fifteen years ago (Calvard et al., 2008) where people were working dressed up in costumes to advertise products on the High Street. These were early forms of precarious working, which sadly now are much more common forms of work. It was very hard to get this work noticed or even published, at that time. However, these forms of work are now attracting attention and EAWOP has a Small Group Meeting (SGM) on Precarious employment and work: Understanding the underlying psychological and social processes, in September 2023 to bring together researchers in the field of precarious work. I am really pleased this research is being developed.*

**Stu:** When you/we were presenting on precarious work, the room would be empty, but now the room is full. There's more recognition now, with people seeing themselves and their future, our collective future, in the research.

**Angela:** *Yes, there's been a rather polarised view and minimal view about who's being researched in psychology. Virginia's interview in this issue makes that point too. When you are teaching your students and giving them a good education in psychology, are there ways in which you can increase their understanding of other ways of working that decrease social inequities?*

**Stu:** That's a good question. I don't think it's impossible to do because social inequity in work is all around us. We have to increase our contact with government organizations and union organizations who are there for workers in precarious forms of work. We talk to the *Productivity Commission* here in New Zealand about the links between living wages and well-being as well as productivity per se. Also, we are talking to one another across international boundaries along global supply chains; and we need to get this more into organizational psychology. Instead, we've still got this isolated individualised version; OK, not all the time, but we've been quite insular talking about 'an' organization, 'a' job within that, and 'an' individual who does that job. And I do know we've got teams and work life balance and things like that; but fundamentally we haven't really expanded our own work relations consciousness to take this further in our communities. We need to look at work in our local shop, the café across the road, the cleaners in our buildings;

but also, in the supply chains that deliver T-shirts into the supermarket for 5 bucks, from Bangladesh, and its beautifully sown and quality cotton. It can't just be \$5 - unless somebody's been treated unjustly to deliver that product; some waterway is polluted. Another example is everyday commodities like coffee, which may be ethically certified as fair traded.

All that goes readily into our teaching around the SDGs and sustainable livelihood. You know, I think we need to bring in the consumer, the producing work forces and the small-scale farmers to have a bigger notion of work. To do this we have to expand, and question, some of our sacred *cows*, like *the job* (for instance). There are different ways of making a livelihood, from field to fork, and crop to cup. If you've got a good one-stop 'job,' then great, but many don't make a livelihood from just one job. Sadly, a lot of them are precarious, but it doesn't have to be. You know, if you've got multiple income streams, you can be more robust when a time of crisis/es come(s). We know that from ancient farming practices like cereal *mixing*. So, there are things we can be doing to reinvent some of our core work psychology constructs, to reflect more on making livelihoods more sustainable, and sustainability work more inclusive of how livelihoods are actually braided, interconnected individually and socially. For example, there is a huge amount of unpaid work that contributes centrally to society and the livelihoods of others. If you are a cleaner or a bus driver in the middle of a pandemic - you're contributing centrally to local society, and to livelihoods of others. That's what the street applause was about in the lockdowns, wasn't it? Now, though, it needs to be actioned, e.g., through fixing our broken wage system, e.g., perhaps by re-evaluating job evaluation.

Pick up the average work psychology textbook. To me, it no longer feels relevant enough. So, although we provide undergraduate students with a background textbook, we foreground the SDGs. We zero-in on SDG 8 (decent work) and pan out to wider implications for sustainability across all 17 (such as food, health, homes, energy, climate, security). Meanwhile, our graduate course *Sustainable Livelihood* starts with the SDGs and sustainable livelihoods among them, and, importantly, what are the *new diplomacies* needed for achieving them. It is important to know for example the political structures one must be able to navigate, like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) multinational guidelines on SDGs, and the laws around decent work, fair pay, and so on. The Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND) in Geneva have been arguing this for years. Expand how we think about the political side of our discipline; we can't just publish journal articles and expect the world to change. Use at least more policy briefs from major organizational related commissions as set readings;

they're in the real world of work and have topics like living wages. This puts wages back into the curriculum. After all, they matter for well-being when you don't have enough to eat whilst others arguably a small minority have way too much.

We also use a work-well-being lens to look at issues like *global mobility*, climate refugeehood, integration in society through new livelihoods, digital mobility, and so on. A lot of the classes here are very diverse, because this is a country of people who have had to move and integrate. Why call them 'migrants,' I hate that word and challenge it as derogatory. One group gets called the nice name (expats), and another group gets called the not the not so nice name because there is an economic hierarchy there. To change this necessitates speaking truth to power. On the *future of work*, we invite robotics engineers to come in and talk about how they're designing for someone to pick through a field of kiwi fruits in New Zealand from their living room in Fiji, using a gaming console. Then they can get paid a half decent wage without having to uproot from their family as a so-called migrant worker. They talk about the upsides and the downsides of AI and how we need to work together. All of this relies however on having a climate that does not flood the orchards so that the fruit is no longer there in the first place. It's also vital to include informal work; it's the biggest sector in the world; making up almost two-thirds of the world's work. It's not all about the formal sector, with the so-called one-stop shop of 'the job.' The informal sector is often stereotyped as being poorly skilled. Yet as leading work by Mahima Saxena and Charles Tchagneno (2023, in process) has pointed out, many of these people are in fact highly skilled, and they have to be. They may as part of that resourcefulness be engaged in *radical commerce* (Groot & Hodgetts, 2015): How do people make a livelihood out of a street intersection? How do they structure their workplace? What skills do they need? What do councils need to do to make their workplaces and livelihoods safer and sustainable?

So, we've got all these things that we've overlooked, and if you start bringing them into the classroom students see/recognise a wider, more inclusive field.

**Angela:** *Tell us about the research you are doing at the moment?*

**Stu:** I am working with a global network in project GLOW; with hubs from at least 30 countries in it. Set up in 2015 with colleagues in South Africa, GLOW is focused on one core question, 'Is there a global living wage that enables people, organisations and communities to prosper and thrive?' Spanning 50 years, and involving research, teaching, and service hubs in over 30 countries, GLOW has been theorising, researching, and advocating for

living wages across global supply chains, for example in the production and consumption of (fair-trade) coffee.

We have teaching and research hubs in each country, and they kind of do their own things. We got together at the EAWOP SGM at the University of Glasgow in 2019 as a connectivity event and have recently co-produced a short video for The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (see UNESCO). That 2019 SGM was hugely productive and has had ripple effects on policy. Why? When you go to policymakers in our respective countries saying we're part of a 30-country network, and these are some of the things we've been finding, it gives everything much more gravitas and leverage; and it enables us to apply for, and secure, funding, in part because we are advised by 29 other countries and feed back into that network. People are anchored in their own locality but they're also doing interorganizational work that connects workers along global supply chains. That naturally includes Human Resource professionals in those chains.

All these connections work together in research and in teaching. Students will write policy briefs on sustainable livelihoods, and we share these with other students who are writing a policy brief the same space. The student's work is exchanged once its marked anonymously, and they get to see that other students like them, are working on similar issues in different places in their ways. Everything's connected; seamless because everybody respects and learns from everyone else's point of view.

We have applied the same kind of sustainable livelihoods lens to research, theorise, practicalise fair-traded/living-waged coffee, for instance (see, Carr, Meyer, Saxena, Seubert, Hopfgartner, Arora, Jyoti & Marai, 2022). Coffee is first grown and picked, perhaps competes as a cooperative with a multinational, and then goes out through a supply chain into retail and hospitality outlets in countries like New Zealand, where consumers often want to support and taste fairtrade coffee. We predicted that fair traded coffee will taste better, especially when the living wage runs the entire length of the chain (as some chains are now doing). After all, we have decades of research and theory on justice at work, and fair trade connects with that extant literature, and tells us that people will be more motivated at work when they feel that they are being treated fairly. Quality of product, in this case coffee, will go up. And if you have the wage to pay for plastic covers for your beans against the rain, that will keep the quality up too. If the factory worker processing the product is remunerated fairly, and treated in general, they will take more care with quality control; the service in your local café will be better, and your cuppa will taste and feel better – organoleptically and morally. You/we thus become willing to pay more – and so the circle continues.

Projects like this one, and many others, are featured centrally in a forthcoming SIOP Frontiers edited collection *'Tackling work precarity: Toward sustainable livelihoods'* (Carr, Hopner, Hodgetts & Young, in process). Watch this space for more, soon!

**Angela:** *Are today's technologies helping these connections and networks?*

**Stu:** Yes, like the digital platforms we're on now. You can talk to one another across all these different areas; have webinars and all kinds of stuff. That's made a huge difference, of course. The communication consolidates and helps our work; we know each other even better now, even though we are great distances apart. But what also puzzles me is why are we still stuck in that single job-in-an-organization mode, when on some digital platforms are run completely remotely, by just a few people, with perhaps no one in the host country to whom workers can actually talk?

**Angela:** *Looking back on the past few decades, what are your reflections on the field of HWP – is it coming of age?*

**Stu:** Yes, it is. The foundations for this change have been laid by our pioneering predecessors, who as we saw in your previous interview have worked behind the scenes, often at macro-policy levels, to represent our profession at multilateral, national and civil society levels, to help shape human development goals.

Today, I think we are in a new era of HWP, when it reaches more directly into everyday working lives, and work policies. For example, GLOW researchers, teachers and practitioners are having real impact on living wage city council ordinances, and policy shifts at organizational and inter-organizational supply-chain levels. Part of that shift is moving away from formal jobs, which even the World Bank and other UN chapters have said people, even before the pandemic, needed protecting from (see World Bank Group, 2019). Great Resignations and the Quiet Quitting are death knells for this arguably broken institution.

Progress entails focusing more, too, on *social* change. Inside work organizations, that can include tackling inequality at work, between gender groups, class groups, and ethnic groups. Outside of organizations, people who make their living from renting property will have to have their rent-seeking reined in (what use is raising a minimum wage if the gains are rapidly eaten by raised rents?). In an even wider, related vein, we need to start courageous conversations about the role of some occupations in destroying the very ecosystem on which all human life depends – and should respect if the word

*sustainable* is taken seriously. We can start this questioning for example by focusing on the psychology of maximum wages; as well as minimum and living wages. For example, the ratio between CEO and shop floor – hopefully living wage – levels, and how this links to well-being at work, for one and all, as well as the sustainability of the organization itself. Outside of organizations, we are working already in projects which link job satisfaction to housing satisfaction, work policies with social policies, private sector with government departments. In Clean SLATE (Sustainable Livelihoods And The Environment) we are co-designing a new system of occupation evaluation, which ranks diverse forms of livelihood generation for their sustainability (watch this space!). Coal mining for example is antithetical to environmental sustainability, whereas working in green hydrogen generation is the opposite. Such rankings have the potential to resonate with young people as they seek their own livelihoods and may end up informing and helping choices in the right direction for the goals.

**Angela:** *Are there fundamental questions that need to be researched at doctoral level to move this forward?*

**Stu:** Oh, there's no shortage of them! The concept of sustainable livelihoods could be opened out so much more. As automation advances and the number of so-called jobs decreases, we're going to have to think about all the ways (plural) that people can make a livelihood. Things like: Where is our work? What is the psychology of universal income? But psychologists are good at saying "*It might be a good idea, or it might not be?*" So, you need to be more specific about what you want to achieve. Where do you set the actual wage level? How does this interface with other wage structures? What well-being practice can come out of it? There is no use in having an income structure if it just allows (the unscrupulous) employer(s) to say "*Oh, we're going to pay even less now because you've already got those basics covered.*"

What is good employment practice on digital platforms? How are people protected both on the worker side and on the customer side? These are crucial interfaces for human rights; or, ways that living wages are calculated. We need to get much more into the policy debate. We have evidence on the real well-being consequences of decent wages over time; but how does that relate to global mobility? Integration? We need to be humble in front of the issues that are in the world of work now for people; but also, not backward in coming forwards, either. The amount of change needed means that a lot of the things we took for granted, we can't take for granted anymore (like the *steady state job*, the single organizational employer). I'm not being negative – we can rise to these challenges

because that is what we've done in the past. There is a lot going on already. If you look at the young scholars coming through in HWP, they are gravitating to topics like fair trade, and work(ing) in the informal sector. They have experience of helping people through the pandemic; like keeping street stalls going; and they are tackling combating trafficking and slavery. They are the future.

**Angela:** *Can I ask you for some concluding remarks.*

**Stu:** The big challenge for the whole of humanity is Climate Change. We need to get serious now and look forward. We've come of age and can see what is pending. It's already here. It's not pending. It's already here when we look out of the window! Work of various kinds, from organizations through to platforms, in many ways are responsible for a lot of the pollution; the warming, the degradation of the environment, the chopping down of forests and plundering of the seas. We have to get much more real about the interface between work and the biosphere. The ecosystem we all depend on for our well-being, and all the other creatures in the world, as we're not the only species here. The SDGs as a whole speak to these, so let's embrace them – and keep inputting to the next round of them, as they form. While the environmental issue is the Big One, there are so many other big things, like public health, racial justice, gender inequity, conflict, war and poverty. But if the ecosystem collapses, all those things will get exacerbated. Jobs like mining coal, or even driving buses are not helping the ecosystem; and stopping doing these things will involve difficult conversations, particularly as working-class people depend on these jobs and resources. But there are older and newer occupations and livelihood activities that are less harmful, more supportive of human health and well-being (salutogenic) and conducive for the environment, too. The big future direction is going to be *environmental work psychology*. So far, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has arguably been more about corporate green washing than actual change – more C than SR, and that must change up. But corporations too aren't the only form of work organization in town; there are a whole range of different platforms and ways that people can work to make their livelihoods. We need to understand these more.

We've just had the wettest months on record with huge amounts of rain coming into New Zealand; the climate is visibly shifting in front of us and becoming unstable. In many cases areas of the world are going to become uninhabitable, unsustainable. Climate Change requires climate Action (SDG-13). Slow it down; whilst figuring how to reverse it. This is going to need political courage from governments, but *work* has got to be in the conversation, because a lot of the time it isn't. Yes, it's about fossil fuels, but it's also

about consumption; without consumption you don't have production; and they feed each other. Connecting with consumer behaviour and consumer power is a good way to change things. We applied psychologists need to be in that space, as part of that ecosystem. We need to find sustainable production and consumption. That's where the work of the young scholars studying the voyage of the humble but ubiquitous coffee bean, as it connects livelihoods, is really important. You use it as a way of looking into and looking at those bigger issues.

**Angela:** *I think that's a suitable place to end our fascinating conversation looking at some of the positive work being done.*

**Stu:** Yeah, we want our species and others to continue. When the dinosaurs went, life carried on, but the dinosaurs weren't around anymore. Let's not be dinosaurs!

**Angela:** *Thank you so much for your time.*

**Stu:** It's been my pleasure.

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# Environment, social & governance (ESG): A new world for Work and Organizational Psychologists

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## About the author

**Sakshi** has an MSc in Work and Organisational Psychology from University of Nottingham, UK and is the recipient of the Diana Award – the highest civilian award for humanitarian work across the globe. She is also the world's first UNESCO Kindness Leader. As the founder of Project LEAP, a social service project committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and an Occupational Psychologist Sakshi spends her time consulting on a variety of topics including people and talent, sustainability and ESG. Currently living in the UK, she is originally from India and often uses concepts from Indian Psychology to facilitate change management sessions. She also advises multiple AI-Based start-ups after three years of her own start-up experience and is a passionate solo-traveller.

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## Introduction

Environment, Social & Governance (ESG) are three words that most of us are familiar with, which when put together in an acronym have made a very powerful impact in business in recent times. First, it is important to understand what is ESG?

### What is ESG?

In 2009, Johan Rockström led a group of 28 internationally renowned scientists to identify nine key processes that regulate the stability and resilience of our planet. They proposed quantitative 'planetary boundaries' within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come. So far, four of the nine planetary boundaries have been crossed (Steffen et al., 2015). These four are climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change, altered biogeochemical cycles (phosphorus and nitrogen).

As such, many researchers, scholars and leaders are invested in restoring these boundaries; or at best preventing them from worsening. One way in which the investment world hopes to restore balance, is by using ESG risk analysis. Environment,

Social & Governance started as an investing principle and in many ways it still is. It is a framework by which investors decide which companies they want to invest in, and in fact which socially responsible companies they should invest in. Environment, Social & Governance has so far taken many shapes and forms: like risk assessment for organizations; impact standards for industries; consulting on navigation of ESG related adverse impact issues and many others. Although ESG investing practice started in the 1960's (Morgan Stanley Capital International, 2022), the new-found interest in the topic can be attributed to the growing interest in sustainability, conscious consumer behaviour and zoning in on unhelpful practices that worsen the state of our planet (Bronstein, 2022).

### **Why be interested in ESG?**

Why should work and organizational psychologists be reading a paper on ESG? Well, the question perhaps is why not.

Environment, Social & Governance seems to be the hot topic of conversation in every room, train, bathroom and kitchen I enter. Yes, the topic has reached far and wide – almost like a Chinese whisper – majorly because the understanding of ESG that comes out on the other side is very different from what the experts in the field understand. This whisper has gone so far that many ESG experts have to spend time cleaning up the various definitions, understandings and applications of ESG that are going around in nooks and corners of organizations. Interestingly, this wildfire-like spread of the term 'ESG' and the various questions it has raised has prompted experts to begin to question the purpose of ESG. What indeed does ESG stand for? Why was it developed and what contribution does it promise for organizations around the world?

### **What is the opportunity?**

While I do not have all the answers to the questions above, I appreciate that this is exactly where our biggest opportunity lies. In all the conversations about ESG I have found the input of psychologists to be missing. In fact, so far, I have not seen any psychologist talk about ESG or actively offer to research the concept. This is not necessarily our fault but perhaps it is a missed opportunity.

What opportunity does ESG present to our field? ESG risk analysis is an attempt to understand what environment, social and governance related risks human beings, and by extension organizations, will continue to pose on the planet. Consulting in this

area involves helping organizations understand how human behaviour can be changed or addressed to minimise issues in these areas. The very central concept in all these areas are human beings! More specifically, human beings who are plugged into any organization or consumers who have decision-making power. These are the very people psychologists have vowed to understand, advise, help and support. Can we then continue to explore human behaviour and present our findings with an ESG angle?

A huge opportunity ESG offers us is to be *strategic*. By its very nature, ESG analysis is a preventative strategy (Henisz et al., 2019). It warns investors off from a bad investment before taking that risk (Amel-Zadeh & Serafeim, 2018). The attention that ESG has received from stakeholders, senior leaders and investors (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019) shows that this area has the ability to change, transform and lead the market changes that many of us are waiting for to ensure a healthy future for our planet. And isn't this what we have always wanted for work and organizational psychology; to sit on the strategic side of the business so we need to repair less damage and prevent more issues from happening?

Finally, ESG also offers us the opportunity to expand the world of work and organizational psychology and to find out what more about how businesses actually work. We allow ourselves as a field, and not just a few informed individuals, to find out more about supply chains, logistics, operations and economics and what forces make people behave the way they do at work. This offers tremendous expansion from the traditional work characteristics model (Taylor, 2015) to explore a multitude of market forces that influence business success or failure.

## What impact can WOP make on ESG?

So far, we have captured what ESG can do for work and organizational psychologists. To paraphrase a famous saying by John F. Kennedy (Kennedy, 1961), instead of asking what ESG can do for us, we must ask what we can do for ESG? There are two ways in which I see our contribution to the field of ESG: a) find links with our work and ESG; and b) combine our work with finance / risk management. I will outline my thoughts in these areas.

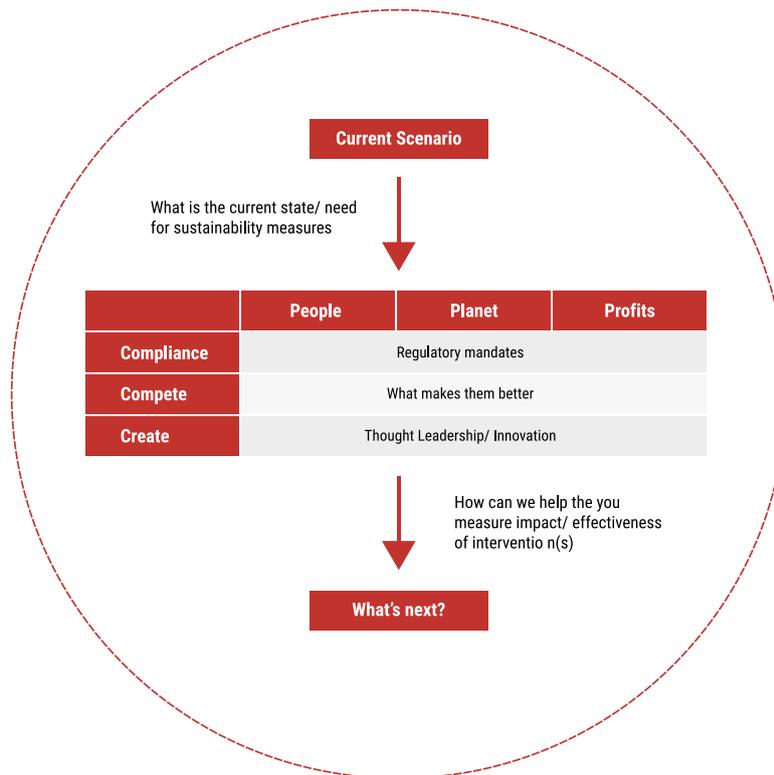
### Find links with our work and ESG

One way to make an impact is to keep doing with what we are doing and find links in our work with the requirements of ESG. This is a seemingly easy task but with the width

and the depth of what work and organizational psychologists cover, it can be hard to visualise, explain and clearly assess how we could help. I have come up a framework (you may refer to this as a guide, a starting point or a visualisation tool) to map out where and how we can begin the conversations on ESG and what our ‘offering’ to the field can look like.

In Figure 1 I use a three-by-three matrix to categorise the three components of ESG: Environment, Social and Governance. These are the three areas that an organization needs to work on across three levels within the organization. The levels include Compliance, Compete and Create. Compliance is what must be done and is a regulatory mandate. Compete is what gives the organization a standing in the market and, Create is when the organization becomes the industry leader and sets the benchmark for everyone else. The dotted boundary are the communication channels, the sponsorship level and the organizational context within which we operate to support the organization.

Figure 1  
Applying ESG to organizational practice



As experts of human behaviour in organizational settings, we are in a unique position to offer research and insight in all these nine categories. For example, an organization is compliant from a pay policy perspective but is struggling with employee retention

they may seek help in the ‘Social’ category. Your solution could involve a range of offerings like employee upskilling and development programmes; employee well-being interventions; or changes to talent attraction and assessment strategies.

The percentage of attrition (people leaving organizational roles) has a direct bearing on costs for an organization thus making your contribution relevant and essential. But there are further connected issues. A high attrition rate also hampers the public image of an organization. Both of these things will impact the ESG ratings and colour the investor perspective and thus your work will directly help the organization to improve its ESG rating.

While the jury is out on whether or not ESG ratings will provide an efficient long-term solution (Walter, 2019), organizations are paying close attention to their ESG ratings and spending a lot of money to improve them (Perez et al. 2022). There are various methodologies of providing an ESG rating in the market. Some are score-based on a range of 0-100 with a threshold of 70 or above being considered a good score. Other forms use a letter-based notation where C is the worst and A is the best scoring (Infogrid, 2022)

Similarly, an organization with big plans to improve their energy efficiency will value your expertise on initiating organization-wide behavioural changes on how much electricity and plastic employees use. You may also support the organization to build an effective communication strategy to help achieve their goals. Since Environment practices and transparency are a big investor concerns (Petraki, 2021), again your work will play a direct role in improving the ESG rating. You may be doing this sort of work already and had never thought about it in ESG terms.

A word of caution is to learn from our colleagues in the risk and investment field. We must conduct analyses on which ESG area poses the greatest risk to the organization. This will guide us to enable an organization to prioritise its actions; showing them where to begin.

But we don’t always know the best approach. Sometimes, the organization has a better view on where they need help; they have seen the warning signs (e.g., increased number of people leaving, difficulty in recruiting staff). So, this is where our listening practices and ability to provide evidence to support organizational decision-making comes in.

## Combine our work with finance / risk management

The second way to contribute to the field of ESG is to combine our work with the finance/ risk management field. While this may seem a tough call this strategy fits well with current educational and business expansion. For example, in education there is now a greater emphasis on inter-disciplinary degrees and supporting people establishing their own businesses. Personally, I have had the privilege (and a bit of naivety) to start my own business at the age of 17 years. At this age, it was easy to learn the 'ins and outs of business', including finance, commercials, supply chain and marketing. After selling my own business, I stayed close to the world of start-ups, as an advisor, where I work with individuals from all age-groups, backgrounds and education level, who have a sound understanding of all these areas of the business as well. This is critical to keep your business afloat and to make sure you know who to hire, where to invest and how to grow the business from all parts. Therefore, anybody in our field who has set up their own business or aspires to truly to grow the company/organization they work for, finance and risk management should not be alien fields to them, at all. There are fellow psychologists who have done this well. For example, some of their work combines the requirement of sound waste management practices and sustainable supply chain for manufacturing plants to efficient organizational design and pro-environmental behaviour (McGuire, et al., 2019).

For this option, I have taken the route of Humanitarian Psychology where we can combine our expertise from the study of psychology for the purposes of greater social good (e.g., Olson-Buchanan et al., 2013). This could be any cause, specifically one that organizations are struggling with. For example, fair pay for all organizations in a product supply chain is currently a big issue. Humanitarian psychologists around the world are engaged in work to find out if there a Global Living Wage that enables people, organizations and communities to prosper and thrive (Carr et al., 2016).

## Conclusions

I am sure people might argue that ESG is just another fashionable label or a greenwashing mechanism (Edwards, 2022), but it is a very current concept. It might also be that due to excellent marketing and a bandwagon effect, the word ESG in the coming years loses its credibility. But the fundamental idea that ESG seeks to achieve, that is putting Environment, Social and Governance in the centre of money-related decision-making is here to stay. I am sure of this for two reasons.

One, because ESG ratings will impact where investment money goes and how it helps grow certain markets. And when actions are tied to money, people will always seem to care about it.

Two, because we are urging all psychologists to get involved. While many think that goal of work and organizational psychology is to put people in the middle of all organizations, I challenge this notion strongly because putting people in the middle also means putting people's greed, desires and adversity in the middle of our planetary boundaries.

Currently, very few ESG scoring indexes provide a holistic list of 'Social factors'. While I have personally witnessed an increasing demand from organizations to understand what these factors are, work still needs to be done on how to score them and link them to organizational outcomes of profit, loss and risk. With this article, the hope is that more of us get involved in the conversation on ESG. That with our involvement, we together figure out a way to put 'Social' indicators and risk factors firmly in place.

From a planetary perspective, I urge psychologists to put our mother earth into the middle of their professions and to reflect on how our work impacts the planetary boundaries. We don't need to become experts in sustainability, ESG or activism to do so, but we can contribute by becoming humanitarian psychologists and using our field of psychology for the greater social good and not just the good of human beings. This will allow us to ensure ESG doesn't become just another fad or loses sight of what it set out to achieve.

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