

CHAPTER 2

EVERYONE BROUGHT TOGETHER BY THE EMBLEM: HOW CAN THE ORGANIZATION WORK TOWARDS THE PREVENTION AND TO THE WELL-BEING OF ITS VOLUNTEERS?

*by Emmanuelle Babaud, Alain Chiapello,
Marjorie Dolias*

The French Red Cross through different actions carried out by social welfare or in first-aid is present in people’s daily lives. The psychological support is integrated into all the French Red Cross activities and into all the rescue operations according to the principles of the Global Health Community: to treat the wounded, not merely the wound. Every day, during their missions, the French Red Cross volunteers provide support and listening to the population based on shared values of citizenship. The action of psychological support is based on the precept of being available for others, listening and dialogue. Yet, a lasting humanitarian psychological support will be possible if the organization takes care of its volunteers on a day to day basis and in case of disaster.

The European Network for Psychological Support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies defines the psychological support as: *all the means and attitudes which enable a volunteer, professional or non-professional in mental health, to help a person in psychological difficulty before or independently of prescribed medical help. Psychological support is a global action, complementary to and often before psychiatric care.*

During disasters, the mobilisation and the involvement of the volunteers, in a very short time, attests to the recognition and the importance of the psychological support activities by the volunteers themselves. On the field they realize the importance of providing support to people who are physically uninjured but psychically affected by an event. Some examples are:

- Reception and support of the French citizens at Roissy Charles de

Gaulle airport (France) after the events in Chad in February 2008, in Lebanon in 2006 or after the tsunami in 2004.

- Support to the bereaved families after an air crash, like in Sharm'el Sheikh or in Venezuela in 2004, where French citizens have been involved.
- Support to the disaster victims during floods or more recently after the tornado in the north of France in August 2008.
- Reception in emergency centres during extreme weather conditions.
- Psychosocial support to the elderly and homeless persons during heat waves.

For 15 years, considering all the operations during disasters in which the French Red Cross has been engaged, the first-aid volunteers haven't had to perform any technical action. Most of their activities have been devoted to psychological support or emergency social welfare. According to the modernization of the civil security law (13th August 2004) a specific agreement is intended for the disaster victims support operations for which the French Red Cross is registered. Thus, the activities of the first-aid volunteers are not limited to performing technical acts but to integrating global citizen action, "listening to the people is the other way of rescuing".

The World Health Organization's definition of health "*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being*" makes us understand that the psychological support is to the psychological life what first-aid is to physical life. The first-aid volunteers are not experts in psychological suffering but they are competent in bringing support and warmth to a person suffering. In a crisis situation, it's important to rely on a social network. When cultures consider a person as a member of the community and not as an independent human being, the community and its rituals will provide a support to the persons suffering. In western societies, associations play an important role in restoring the social bonds between citizens. In order to make psychological support activities durable and to be a strong link in the solidarity chain, the volunteers should have a support themselves. Indeed psychological support mission needs human involvement from the volunteers.

Thus, reflection about the way an organization can work towards the prevention and to the well-being of its volunteers is necessary.

I. FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE FRENCH RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS CORPS

1. Motivation and representation of work

During the RED workshop, the question of motivations to become a rescuer has been asked to the persons who attended to the meeting. Their answers were the following:

Everyone wants to become a rescuer:

- To wear a uniform;
- To drive an ambulance;
- To belong to a group who helps the others;
- To be a hero;
- To look for adrenaline rush;
- Because of trauma during the childhood;
- Because of trauma of relatives;
- But only 10% of the rescuers know what a rescuer really is.

If these answers are analysed more precisely, some of them refer to the job itself (to wear a uniform, to drive an ambulance, to be a hero, to look for adrenaline rush), or to more personal motivations (to belong to a group who helps the others, because of trauma during the childhood, because of trauma of relatives).

Indeed, the motivations to become a rescuer linked to the job itself are sometimes related to the social image of the rescuer. In fact, the activities of the rescuers are often idealised by the society. They are considered as heroes. The representation of work is idealized by the volunteers themselves. Indeed, when they apply to become a rescuer they think that they will save lives. Sometimes, becoming a rescuer is a new lease on life for some people who failed in their professional or private life. Thus, some secret motivations are possibly hidden behind the declared ones.

According to Barthold Bierens de Haan¹, former psychiatrist at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and who was re-

¹ B Bierens de Haan, *Sauveteurs de l'impossible, un engagement à haut risque*, Paris, Belin, 2005.

sponsible of the psychological support program for the ICRC's volunteers, involving oneself in rescue activities and helping the others could be a consequence of some events during the childhood. The motivations explained during the RED workshop such as trauma of relatives and trauma during childhood are clearly referring to the conclusions of Bierens de Haan. The involvement with the victims could be a way allowing the responders not to think about their own problems. According to Bierens de Haan, becoming a rescuer could also be considered as a resilience process. It's a way to live one's life being neither victim nor aggressor. And more than the decision of being a rescuer, the behaviour of the rescuers during their missions takes root in the individual psyche. Indeed, the need of repairing could illustrate the will to fix their suffering outside of themselves instead of thinking about their inner suffering.

Even if these aspects can't be generalized to all the rescuers, the organizations should take them into account for several reasons:

- The reality of work might be different from the representation the applicants had before becoming rescuers. So they perhaps won't find in their activities what they expected and feel disappointed about that;
- It's not always possible, for the organizations, to assess the motivations of applicants. How far an organization should know about the private life of its volunteers? But it doesn't mean that the organization can't do anything. The motivations of the rescuers will have an impact on their relations with the victims. The different actions carried at the French Red Cross in order to prevent the rescuers from psychological disorders will be presented along this chapter.

How will the group of colleagues and the organization give the possibility to an individual, with his strengths but also his vulnerabilities, to cope with the work on the field and particularly the psychological support of the victims?

2. Team and psychological support

The group, as an envelope, gives to the individuals a reassuring relational and social area.

When the individual identity vanishes, the *esprit de corps* becomes apparent by a strong cohesion, by unanimity and invulnerability feelings. The group has common values influencing the representations and the individual actions. The group belonging or the reference to a group

such as first responders conveys a superman image in which each one roots his dreams and draws his models.

But if the group has a containing function for the volunteers, is the group also able to support them when the image of the hero is broken because of an intervention which failed or when the contact with the victims reminds the volunteer his own injuries?

Indeed, the virile and male chauvinist culture often existing in the emergency centres does not support the expression of the emotions, which can be regarded as weakness. “The members of the first-aid organizations often think they do not have the right to have emotions. They are asked to face this type of situation. “*If not, they have to choose another job*”: this is often heard in the emergency environment from old colleagues or from chiefs. The firemen, for example, are primarily composed by men who often learned during their training that crying is a sign of weakness and/or is reserved to the girls²”.

This quotation illustrates the institutional dimension which prevents the expression of the emotions and which leads to the stigmatization and the setting aside from the group.

According to De Soir, the first responders as a group often use black humour or cynicism and adopt a typical masculine and extrovert behaviour in order to distance themselves from a highly emotional intervention. The first responders wouldn’t accept the support from an external mental health professional but would agree to be supported by their peers³, and this peer support is necessary in a team.

The organization should allow this support to be operative making the culture of the organization evolving.

Transmission and peer support

The French Red Cross considers that the organization of teams composed by two volunteers when it’s possible is a means to promote the peer support.

Indeed, experience is a protecting factor for the stakeholders but al-

² E De Soir, *Le modèle CRASH de l’intervention psychosociale dans le contexte de calamités et de catastrophes*, Journal International de Victimologie.com, Octobre 2004, 3 (1).

³ E De Soir, *Gestion du stress traumatique chez les Sapeurs-Pompiers et les Ambulanciers*, Urgences pratiques.

so for the victims. Experience, should prevent from psychological risks and should allow to the less experiment volunteers to be supported in good conditions. The sharing of experiences and the team work as described above facilitate the transition from the theoretical stage (training to psychological support) to the practical and operational stage. It allows the verbalization of feelings and the calling into question of one's limits with the support of the peers. Indeed the transmission between the generations is the initiation of juniors by seniors. The elders are their guides and the essential idea is to consider this transmission in a dynamic way: the culture of the rescuers can't be dissociated from the individuals who make it alive. It's thus necessary to prepare the rescuers to support the victims but also their colleagues without an excessive psychologization.

The organization can give meaning to the experiences of the rescuers

The first-aid world progressively changes at the French Red Cross. Indeed, the increase of the activity of psychological and social support ask to the rescuers to take into account more and more the psychological dimension of suffering and not only to perform a technical action. Through this humanist conception, the myth of the rescuer as a hero changes to become more human. Responding to the physical and psycho-social needs of the victims reinforce the human dimension of the rescuers: their past, their life projects, their aspirations. That's why to face these demands the rescuers have to listen, to reassure but also to protect themselves. The way the rescuers will deal with the emotion generated by the work with the victims depends from the way the organization takes into account the psycho-social dimension of work. The organization doesn't always take into account this dimension which, as a result, won't be considered as important by the rescuers. Pushing this dimension aside leads to the denial of the human being of the victims but also of the rescuers'. The rescuers won't verbalize their emotions and it won't be possible for them to give a meaning to their experiences. The rescuers might live the reality of the event in resonance with their history. It remains important for them to keep the necessary distance from the victims in order to avoid the identification with the victims because otherwise they won't be able to provide a support. Thus, the rescuers have to recognize their limits, their signs of stress and the signs of stress

of their colleagues. The organization should admit the rescuers' stress reactions and propose answers.

The organization will give meaning to the experience of its volunteers during their mission by different ways. A first distinction can be made between the precautionary principle and the prevention principle.

Elements of the precautionary principle are described hereafter:

- Goodwill isn't sufficient;
- Listening to someone cannot be improvised, the listening behaviours should be learned;
- To prevent oneself from the identification with the victims;
- To be aware of ones limits;
- To identify the resource persons.

The prevention principle could be defined as the necessity for the organization to take into account and to train its volunteers to all the dimensions of a mission, the technical aspects but also the psychological support aspects. As a social body, the organization can be considered as a buffer in front of the reality as the culture at larger scale plays a protective role from trauma⁴.

II. TRAINING IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT: HOW TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE FRENCH RED CROSS?

Even if it is not required to be a mental health professional to support someone, training is necessary. Volunteers are used to perform a technical action such as resuscitation, but when they have to deal with psychological suffering, they don't know what to say or how to behave. One of the results of the focus group on the well-being of the responders during the Red workshop was that self-confidence is an important aspect. The responders meant by self-confidence knowledge, skills and the ability to perform. Some of the responders of the group thought that they had insufficient knowledge about the difficulties they would have to cope with in the field.

That's why training for psychological support is so important, not only to provide support to the victims but also for the well-being of the

⁴ Tarquinio C., Tarquinio-Mousel P., *Aspects psychosociaux et culturels du trauma*, Stress et Trauma, 2002 ; 2 (3) : 157-162.

responders themselves. To train doesn't mean giving some recipes, but giving reflection tools that will be helpful on one hand during the mission but on the other hand before the mission by helping the volunteers to identify their personal limits.

1. Emotional reactions of the stakeholders

The stakeholders who are working during disasters can present some specific emotional reactions.

The specific emotional reactions are feelings of helplessness, guilt, anger, failure. They can also present an acute stress disorder or later a trauma. These reactions or these pathologies are well known.

The "Mille-Feuilles syndrome" results from observations made at the French Red Cross on the emotional state of mind of some rescuers during operations. Some of them indeed didn't want to go home or were looking forward to go on another operation. It could be qualified as a need of more and more. They feel helpless and guilty because they think that they could have done much more and they try to fill these feelings by actions.

The nature of the mission can play a role in the way the stakeholder will live through it.

During their mission, the Red Cross volunteers can perform a technical action (for instance resuscitation) or psychosocial missions without technical first-aid actions.

Indeed if the stakeholders have to perform a technical action, a common defence mechanism consists in acting automatically⁵. The human being of the victim is not recognized, the stakeholder isolate himself from the situation, from all the stimuli. This mechanism is efficient during the operation and allows him to work efficiently without being involved emotionally. But when this situation of "automatic pilot" ends, the repressed emotions and the tension are released. In the long view, this defence mechanism doesn't allow a real understanding. Therefore when a technical action has to be performed, the stakeholder won't always be able to support the victim. That's why team work is so important. When one member of the team is concentrated on his performance, the other one can support the victim or its family.

⁵ E. De Soir, *La gestion du stress traumatique chez les sapeurs pompiers et les ambulanciers. Expériences avec le debriefing psychologique en Belgique*. Médecine de catastrophe-urgences collectives, 1999; 2:139-152.

In case of psychosocial operations, Serniclaes⁶ identified some difficulties in the work of the psychosocial stakeholders. Some of the main difficulties are the following:

- The reality of the situation which might be the death or an aggression (not a imagined situation);
- The victim constantly reminds the stakeholder of his own vulnerability;
- The traumatic experience of the victim could remind the stakeholder his own traumatic experiences;
- The victim could transfer her aggressiveness and her helplessness to the stakeholder;
- The stakeholder has to find necessary distance. He can't be too close to the victim because it could be harmful for him but at the same time if he doesn't invest himself in the relationship there might be a break of confidence;
- The stakeholders will feel a great helplessness because of the fact that they can't change the reality of the traumatic experience of the victims;
- The traumatic experience of the victim will change the stakeholder's vision of the world and the meaning of life.

To face these difficulties, the stakeholders can present some defence mechanisms generated because of an empathetic contagion to the victims. Some of these reactions have been identified by Serniclaes. The stakeholders can over identify with the victims (empathetic enmeshment) or on the contrary can avoid work with the victims (empathetic withdrawal).

He describes some reactions such as:

- Cynicism, black humour;
- Dehumanization of the victims;
- “Magma mater complex”: I take care of everyone's problems;
- “Jehovah complex”: I am powerful to help victims;

⁶ O Serniclaes, *Intervenants psychosociaux face aux victimes, Processus psychodynamique de la traumatisation indirecte*, Journal International de victimologie, Janvier 2003 ; 1, (2).

- To escape by alcohol, drug or tobacco abuse;
- Non constructive hyperactivity.

These reactions could lead to a secondary traumatic stress. Serniclaes defines the secondary traumatic stress as the result of the stress generated by helping a traumatized person or someone in psychological difficulties and particularly if the victim is a beloved person. This process is described as a breakdown concerning the fundamental assumptions of life. He defines this process as an existential gap.

2. How training in psychological support could meet the needs of the stakeholders?

In all cases, the emotions of the stakeholders have to be considered by the organization.

The organization should indeed have a role in the prevention of the psychological risks of its volunteers.

Training to psychological support could be a way to help the stakeholders to face their mission.

Considering what has been said concerning the emotional reactions of the stakeholders and the difficulties they have to face during their work, training in psychological support could meet the needs of the volunteers of the French Red Cross in different ways:

- Helping the stakeholders to keep the necessary distance from the victims. Indeed they shouldn't be involved personally but at the same time they should feel empathy for them. They should learn and experiment with the necessary distance to keep from the victims in order to avoid identification with the people they support;
- Helping them to recognize and to understand the emotions generated by their work with the victims and helping them to recognize their limits and the limits of their colleagues. Indeed, they should recognize these emotions and find their subjective limits. The subjective factors play an important role in the way each stakeholder will live a mission. During the training they should be made aware of the fact that their life experience can have an impact on the way they will live a mission but also in the way they will support the victims. The experience will help them to support the victims with empathy and not falling down in sympathy and to recognize their own limits. A reference to the RED workshop could be made. Indeed, one of the most

important elements of well-being according to the participants was the importance of learning to know oneself;

- Giving common values and reference framework (fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement). Indeed during the workshop of the RED project it has been said that volunteers who trained in the technical aspects of the work but also in the ethical values of the organization were more efficient and stayed longer in the organization than volunteers who were only trained to the technical aspects of the work. But training could also be an area where it could be explained that the first responders are not invulnerable and can feel some emotions and sometimes need psychological support. In general the culture of the organization spread a representation of the first responder as a hero. It was said during the workshop that even during the training some organizations let the trainees believe that they will act heroically. It is important to integrate in the culture of the organization that the responders can feel emotions and that it doesn't mean that they are weak or unable to do their job. Thus, the emotions of the stakeholders won't be denied by the organization, their superiors or their colleagues.

The role of the organization is also to define what is expected from the stakeholders in terms of psychological support and human relationship with the victims on a daily basis but also in case of disaster. But the organization should be clear concerning the limits of the involvement of the volunteers in their relation with the victims. Training of the people in charge of the operations is important because the way the stakeholders will behave with the victims depends partly on the way the persons in charge of the operation will behave with the stakeholders. Training is a means which allows the sharing of common values like the importance of peer support and team work.

3. Trainings in psychological support at the French Red Cross

The objectives and the contents of the **First Approach Session to Psychological Support** which is compulsory for all the volunteers will be presented. Indeed, as it was said before, the psychological support is integrated in the social care and first-aid activities carried by the volunteers on a daily basis but also in case of disaster. The Complementary

Training in Psychological Support will be also presented. Several other trainings have been set up to respond to the specific needs of the volunteers on the field.

The aims of the First Approach Session to Psychological Support are:

- To be aware of the importance of emotions, their expression;
- To explore psychological suffering: to recognize the different modes of expression of psychological suffering and to recognize its signs;
- To identify the listening behaviours;
- To have notions about the mourning process.

The videogram is a pedagogical tool used in the First Approach Session to Psychological Support. During this session, the trainees watch a video showing different situations they could encounter as a volunteer in the French Red Cross. The objective is to discover the psychological support dimension and the way suffering could be expressed by the victims but also by the volunteers themselves. The videogram shows objective elements like emotions, behaviors, and tone of voice. These elements are analyzed and a response to the situation can be proposed. There is no one unique response, the importance is to give an adapted response.

For instance, one of the little role plays deals with a volunteer who has been affected by an intervention which failed (the victim died despite the attempt of resuscitation). One of her colleagues understands that something is wrong with her and tries to understand what's happened and supports her. This role play tends to make the trainees understand that psychological support is not only for the victims but also for the colleagues. In this way the culture of the organization can be transmitted.

A **Complementary Session** is available for those who are interested. The aims are:

- To go into detail concerning some theoretical issues (mourning process, psychological suffering);
- To go into detail concerning the listening behaviours. *Active listening* is the technique used by the volunteers in their work. The different listening attitudes are presented and experimented with the trainees. Active listening allows the improvement of relational capacities of the volunteers and allows the perception of the victims' needs without presuppose these needs;

- To know the strategy of the French Red Cross in terms of psychological support and its scientific and ethic basis. The RED workshop showed the importance of the philosophy of work which helps the stakeholders to prepare themselves and to refer to common values;
- To identify the possible relays to mental health professionals on a daily basis and in case of disaster. Indeed, even if the French Red Cross volunteers are trained to psychological support, they are not professionals of mental health and they are not asked to provide psychiatric care;
- The differentiation and the complementary points between psychiatric care and humanitarian psychological support are presented. Indeed in France during a disaster the Red Cross works with the emergency medico-psychiatric units composed by mental health professionals. The role of the Red Cross volunteers is to provide a psychological support to the victims. If one of the victims presents some signs of acute stress disorder, they have to orient her to the emergency medico-psychiatric units. That’s why the signs of stress and trauma are illustrated during the trainings. In this way, the volunteers know the limits of their work and the framework of their activity. Therefore the training gives them benchmarks.

But in the aim of the prevention of psychological risks of the stakeholders themselves, it’s important that they can understand the factors and the mechanism leading to stress reactions and how they can manage stress daily but also during an operation. In this way they will be able to identify on the one hand the factors and on the other hand the signals of stress reactions for themselves and find their own limits. It’s also important for them to understand that these limits might fluctuate according to the situation they are involved in during the operation or according to what they are living in their personal life. The message that the organization wants to deliver is clear, the volunteers can say “no” if they don’t want to be engaged in an operation or if they want to quit the operation. But the organization also takes into account that this move is difficult for the volunteers who might feel guilty or might be afraid to be judged. That’s why a training module about stress reactions is included in the training that the volunteers follow to take part in the disaster operations. That’s also in part why a network of referents to psychological support has been created at the French Red Cross. These referents will

indeed help the volunteers in collaboration with the director of the operation to find some adapted solutions.

III. TAKING CARE OF THE VOLUNTEERS: THE NETWORK OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT REFERENTS AND TECHNICAL ADVISERS

Taking care of the psychological life of the first responders consists in listening to them in case of disaster but also in a daily basis. The organization has to recognize the fact that they could be in difficulties or to be destabilized and to permit them to express their feelings without being considered as weak by their colleagues or by themselves. In order to change the “culture of words”, the French Red Cross has been developing since 2005 a network of psychological support referents and technical advisers in France. Promoting self-expression is not limited to eat a pizza together after an operation as can be often observed. The first responders need to be supported by a mental health professional who will help them to verbalize and to think about the most important stages along their progression in the organization.

1. The network of the psychological support referents and technical advisers (RéSPECT)

The network of the psychological support referents and technical advisers gathers the departmental referents to operational psychological support (RéSPOD) and the national referents to operational psychological support (RéSPON). They are mental health professionals and volunteers at the French Red Cross.

Apart from operational emergency settings, the RéSPOD conducts and facilitates the psychological support activities in his department. Daily he can be solicited to intervene for the volunteers, he participates in the elaboration of the emergency rescue program and in the implementation of the convention with the emergency medico-psychiatric unit (CUMP) of his department. The emergency medico-psychiatric units are linked to the SAMU which is the service for medical emergencies. The emergency medico-psychiatric units are engaged by the prefect in case of emergency setting. These units are composed of mental health professionals and intervene directly for the public in order to prevent or to treat traumatic disorders linked to disaster or extraordinary events.

The volunteers of the French Red Cross provide a humanitarian psychological support to the victims upstream from the psychiatric care. On the field, the French Red Cross and the CUMP have complementary actions.

In emergency settings, the missions of the referents to psychological support are:

- To ensure the coordination with the CUMP;
- To assess the needs, to coordinate the psychological support missions by advising the person in charge of the operation in human resources: recruitment and management considering the specificity of the mission;
- To participate in the briefings before the mission, to support the volunteers during their mission and to help them in identifying psychopathological reactions and stress reactions of the victims. They also have to identify the volunteers who present these kinds of disorders;
- To ensure a post-immediate follow up for the volunteers: reception when they come back from a mission, organization of a debriefing or talk groups, advising the first-aid management concerning the follow up of the volunteers back in their departmental delegation, orientation to a mental health professional if necessary.

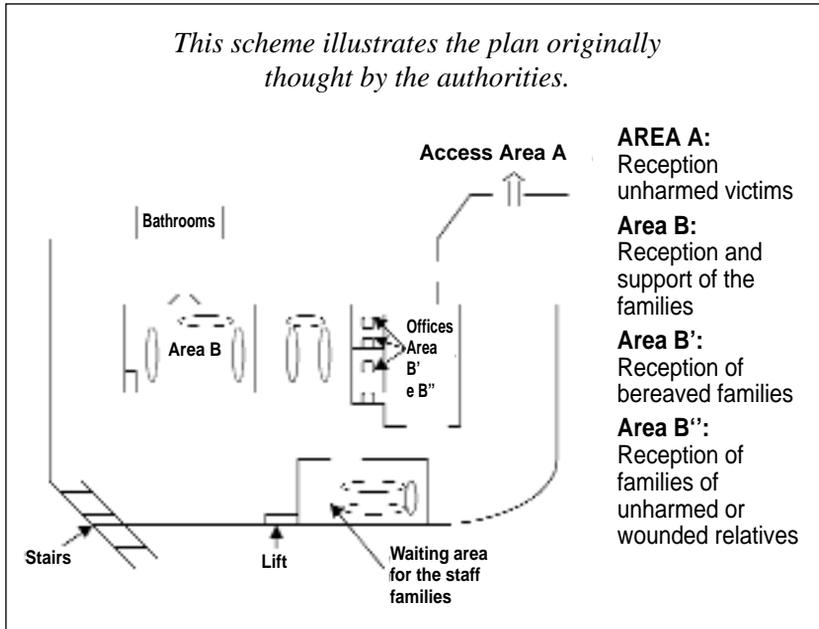
2. A simulation exercise

A simulation exercise which took place in Rennes airport, 19th June 2007 illustrates the role and the missions of the referent to psychological support and technical adviser at the French Red Cross. Such exercises allow a reflection upstream: analyse of the positive and negative aspects of the French Red Cross plan in terms of psychological support and an analysis of the quality of the coordination between the different stakeholders (Prefecture, staff of the airport, CUMP, other associations...). The exchanges between the stakeholders and the conclusions of each partner concerning the sequence of the events during the exercise lead to the learning of some lessons and to the development and improvement of a psychological support plan model.

Following the declaration of the Rennes Prefecture of a simulation of an air crash at the airport, the director of the emergency and first-aid of the local Red Cross asked for a RéSPON and a RéSPOD to be on the

field. The RéSPOD came from a nearby department. Two RéSPON with strong experience of the operations were observers, the first one stayed at the airport and the other one followed the RéSPOD during the mission. Students played the role of the victims and their families. They were identifiable thanks to a shirt front.

This exercise was an occasion for the first-aid volunteers to discover in emergency setting the role and the missions of the RéSPOD:



Assessment of the needs in terms of psychological support:

- The reception of families living a stressful or traumatic experience requires that the volunteers should be trained in psychological support and in the listening behaviours in the common interest of the families and of the volunteers themselves. The person in charge of the recruitment of the volunteers for an operation should make sure of the training's validation and of the availability of the volunteers to support others. In other words, the rescuers shouldn't be confronted to professional or personal psychological problems.
- Presence of the RéSPOD to support and supervise the volunteers in

their mission. The RéSPOD keeps contact by phone with a RéSPON whose role is to assure the back office.

- The RéSPOD has to keep watch over the families waiting area:
 - Waiting during long hours without any information about the relatives could lead to a climate of tension and to the contagion of the emotions.
 - The presence of the media in this area in the beginning of the operation might represent another difficulty which aggravates the tension.

Support and supervision of the volunteers concerning the psychological support activities:

- The director of the operations and the RéSPOD organize a briefing before the beginning of the mission.

General information given concerns:

- The situation: what happened, in which circumstances?
- The victims: are they wounded, are they in a critical state, are there some children, are people dead?
- Often the mission of the French Red Cross has to support the families in the waiting area. Indeed the humanitarian psychological support begins often by giving answers to the fundamental needs of the victims. A shelter has to be set up in order to take into account the material well-being of the victims: e.g. to provide survival blankets, water, coffee, etc.

Information concerning the psychological aspects is also given:

- Some benchmarks about the expected reactions of the victims according to the different area of the plan: the families waiting area or the victims' area.
- Some benchmarks about the behaviours to adopt (to introduce themselves, to explain what they are going to do, to assess the needs of the population, to propose some solutions when it's possible, to orient to the other stakeholders when necessary...)
- Instructions concerning the orientation of the people showing an important psychological suffering (The CUMP takes over from the Red Cross).

- If one of the volunteers is in difficulty they should ask a colleague to take over from them and not hesitate to appeal to the RéSPOD.
- Announcement of the organization of a debriefing with the RéSPOD at the end of the mission.

The RéSPOD stays in contact with the director of the operation:

The communication and the coordination with the director of the operation allow the taking into account of the importance of the psychological support in the mission of the volunteers. During the exercise, the volunteers gave the RéSPOD a good welcome and identified his missions even if sometimes his role had to be specified again. The work of the volunteers was relevant despite an important agitation and confusion in the families waiting area.

The RéSPOD stays in contact with the CUMP:

When a RéSPOD arrives on the field of an operation, he introduces himself to the coordinator of the CUMP and explains to him the nature of his mission. The role of each stakeholder is thus perfectly identified, which permits a good collaboration afterwards. When the families or the victims present some psychological disorders, a professional of the CUMP takes care of them and the RéSPOD discuss the intervention with the volunteers if necessary.

The RéSPOD may ask the CUMP to intervene and vice versa.

The constant exchanges between them about the assessment of the psychological needs permit to modify the interventions.

For instance during the simulation exercise, the exchanges between the RéSPOD and the coordinator of the CUMP permitted:

- To the CUMP to ask the volunteers of the Red Cross to intervene in another area than the families waiting area. So the Red Cross volunteers also carried their activities in the area for the unscathed victims of the air crash;
- The identification of the person in charge of the area who will benefit from the support of the RéSPOD during the briefing according to the specificities of this area. The person in charge of the area will assure the operational link with the CUMP;
- The organization of teams composed by a volunteer of the French Red Cross and a mental health professional of the CUMP;
- In close cooperation with the CUMP, the volunteers of the French

Red Cross reorganized the families waiting area and closed the blinds in order to prevent the families from viewing the crash area.

The debriefing of the volunteers:



The aim of a debriefing, on the spot of the simulation exercise, is to allow to the volunteers to call into question the operation according to their own feelings. The debriefing is also an occasion for the group to share questions and remarks about their role during the operation. But the debriefing is also a mean for the RÉSPOND to identify the volunteers who have been weakened or shocked by the mission. This is also an occasion to highlight the normality of the emotional reaction they might feel and the difficulties they encountered on the field. The RÉSPOND can possibly propose a second debriefing if he judges it necessary. If a volunteer needs an individual support the RÉSPOND can propose an appointment or an orientation to a mental health professional outside of the Red Cross.

The well-being of the rescuers should be restored by the debriefing.

This simulation exercise leads to the calling into question of the fundamental aspects of the psychological dimension of our mission.

Lastly it would be advisable to clearly define the role of each stakeholder in each zone.

As part of the coordination between the French Red Cross and the CUMP, it could be interesting to envisage:

- A specific zone where the volunteers could orient the persons showing psychological suffering;
- To organize teams composed of one volunteer and one mental health professional when possible;
- The presence of the coordinator of the CUMP during the briefing of the volunteers;
- The presence of the RéSPOD during the briefing of the CUMP.

In conclusion

The organizations have to play a role in the well-being of its volunteers even before an operation considering them as persons with their strength but also their weakness and not as heroes. Considering the evolution of their missions, the organization should train the stakeholders about stress reactions, coping mechanisms, insist on the normality of the reactions, promote the emotional process and give the possibility to identify the resource person.

The training in psychological support should give a reflection tool box for the volunteers. It doesn't mean giving some recipes, but giving them the technical elements which will help them in their work in order to prevent them from identifying with the victims and to help them to understand their emotional reactions generated by their work.