

World Mental Health Day 2016

Psychological First Aid

When disaster impacts an individual or a community, psychological first aid is a tool for first responders alongside with life support and security interventions. Besides promoting wellbeing and adjustment, this intervention can prevent the onset of mental disorders and disruptive behaviors. Psychological first aid prevents chronic suffering and minimizes social impact of a disaster and so helps preserve the individual and community resilience.

This year's World Mental Health Day is devoted to psychological first aid. By selecting this theme, the World Health Organization recognizes both the relevance of the impacts of critical events and the importance of psychological crisis intervention for individual and community well-being.

Every year millions of individuals are affected by disasters and catastrophes. These range from single events affecting thousands of individuals simultaneously to particular individuals continuously. The numbers involved are staggering. In 2015 alone, 98.6 million individuals were affected by natural disasters and every day throughout the world 1.25 million die every year in road accidents which amounts to more than 3 000 fatalities per day. These events may increase with the advent of global warming, refugee migration and other factors.

In the absence of psychological first aid, the consequences of these events are severe. Anxiety disorders, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, mood disorders and drug and alcohol abuse have been found to be associated with the experience of these events. Even when the disruption is not enough to meet diagnostic criteria, the psychological suffering and interpersonal impact are significant. And despite the fact that the majority of individuals do not need formal intervention, the incidence of these problems justifies the relevance of psychological first aid.

Psychological first aid is an intervention and a set of orientations in providing care in a crisis context. It involves the understanding of the crisis and human response according to psychological models. The main function of psychological first aid is to ease psychosocial disintegration caused by the crisis and to support people's strengths (like individual and community resilience, coping potentials, etc.) which help normalize the victims' state of mind. At time disasters first aid means also screening individuals at risk and helping them to get the appropriate treatment in some supplying institution.

Considering the importance of this issue, the European Federation of Psychologist' Associations (EFPA) has a Standing Committee on Crisis and Disaster Psychology with recommendations on Psychological First Aid [on its website](#).

Psychological first aid can be provided everywhere and should be made available for all.

Standing Committee on Psychology and Health

Standing Committee on Crisis and Disaster Psychology