

## Occupational health and safety for Humanitarian aid workers

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Humanitarian aid workers (HAWs) operate in complex and unstable political, economic and social emergencies. The consequences of such conditions for their health have not been systematically explored. This paper presents an exploration of the occupational health risks (psychological, social, organisational and physical) to HAWs, their coping strategies, and the availability and quality of organisational support systems. It examines the perceived effects on individuals and organisations. Findings will be offered non-governmental organisations to inform HR and occupational health policies, and to design interventions to improve working conditions.

A review of the scientific literature and pilot interviews informed the design of a semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with 28 HAWs working for governmental and non-governmental organisations in the same field of operations, (13 women, 15 men, aged from 25-60). Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed with NVivo9. Themes were derived deductively. Five main themes described factors relevant to the health and well-being of HAWs: (i) Physical environment and facilities (e.g. natural habitat and climate, personal safety and security, accommodation and leisure facilities), (ii) Psychological and social factors (e.g. separation from family and friends, exposure to distressing situations, relationship between colleagues), (iii) Organisational factors (e.g. selection, induction, workload, feeling valued, support systems), (iv) Health Effects (e.g. stress, infections), and (v) Coping strategies (e.g. peer support, humour, communication with family and friends). The study provides an insight to the challenges HAWs face in their work and provides a foundation for better support. Recommendations will be outlined.