

Psychological First Aid and Psychosocial Support In Complex Emergencies

PFA_PSS for beneficiaries in emergencies (Family and community activation) Additional material (action sheets, literature)

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The objective of PFA-CE is to reach improvement of Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Psychosocial Support (PSS) competencies of staff and volunteers; Enhancement of disaster response capacities of emergency and volunteer organisations in Europe; Involvement and active participation of affected communities, families and groups in emergency response; Coordination and support for new volunteer types including spontaneous volunteers. This is specifically done through structured experience exchange between the partners from Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Austria,

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Abbreviations

ERU	Emergency Response Unit
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NVO	Non-governmental voluntary organisation
OR	Official Responders
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PSS	Psychosocial support
SUV	Spontaneous Unaffiliated Volunteers
SV	Spontaneous Volunteers
ToT	Training of Trainers
VRC	Volunteer Reception Center
WHO	World Health Organisation



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1. Action sheets

General principles in MHPSS Action Sheet Nr. 1: MHPSS¹ Core Principles

Area

All event types, all target groups, all phases

MHPSS Core principles in both IASC and NATO TENTS guidelines^{1,2}

- **Principle 1: Ensure human rights and equity**
 - Humanitarian actors should promote the human rights of all affected persons and protect individuals and groups who are at heightened risk of human rights violations and at the same time ensure Participation
- **Principle 2: Do no harm**

Humanitarian aid is an important means of helping people affected by emergencies, but aid can also cause unintentional harm. Work on mental health and psychosocial support has the potential to cause harm because it deals with highly sensitive issues. Also, this work lacks the extensive scientific evidence that is available for some other disciplines. Humanitarian actors may reduce the risk of harm in various ways, such as

 - Participating in coordination groups to learn from others and to minimise duplication and gaps in response;
 - Designing interventions on the basis of sufficient information
 - Committing to evaluation, openness to scrutiny and external review
 - Developing cultural sensitivity and competence in the areas in which they intervene/work;
 - Staying updated on the evidence base regarding effective practices; and
 - Developing an understanding of, and consistently reflecting on, universal human rights, power relations between outsiders and emergency-affected people, and the value of participatory approaches. (Anderson, 1999)
- **Principle 3: Build on available resources and capacities**

All affected groups have assets or resources that support mental health and psychosocial well-being. a key principle – even in the early stages of an emergency – is building local capacities, supporting self-help and strengthening the resources already present.
- **Principle 4: Use Integrated support systems**

Activities and programming should be integrated as far as possible. The proliferation of stand-alone services, such as those dealing only with rape survivors or only with people with a specific diagnosis, such as PTSD, can create a highly fragmented care system.
- **Principle 5: Provide a multilayered support**

In emergencies, people are affected in different ways and require different kinds of supports. A key to organising mental health and psychosocial support is to develop a layered system of complementary supports that meets the needs of different groups. All layers of the pyramid are important and should ideally be implemented concurrently.

 - Basic services and security.
 - Community and family supports
 - Focused, non-specialised supports
 - Specialised services

The NATO TENTS guidance suggests a stepped model of care (see Action Sheet Nr. 7)

This stepped model should have its roots in providing basic services, proceed through responses that are made by communities, families and particular people, to non-specialised but focused services and thence to specialised services. Progression through these levels should be based on knowledge of people's needs.

¹ Mental health and psychosocial support

Additional MHPSS core principles from the NATO TENTS guidance¹

• **Principle 6: Anticipation, Planning, Preparation and Advice**

- The services, including the psychosocial and mental health services that are required following disasters and major incidents, are much more likely to work effectively if the need for them has been anticipated and defined.
- This requires understanding of the dynamic shifts that occur with the passage of time and of the clarity about how these services are to collaborate with other services that offer humanitarian aid and responses to people's welfare and psychosocial needs after disasters and major incidents.
- Knowledge about how people may react psychosocially to disasters and major incidents is likely to assist responsible people in making effective decisions prior to events and when they are making decisions while under strain during events.

• **Principle 7: Needs oriented planning for Families and Communities**

- All aspects of psychosocial and mental health care should only be provided with full consideration of people's wider social environments, the cultures within which they live, and, particularly, their families and the communities in which they live, work and travel. The service responses that are provided from within societies and, in the case of disasters and major incidents that cause greater devastation, the actions that are taken by external countries and organisations should be titrated against awareness of the needs of the people who have been affected.
- This requires a strategic stepped model of care to underpin a variety of levels of planning and preparation before events and multi-layered support that is provided afterwards.

• **Principle 8: Developing, Sustaining and Restoring Psychosocial Resilience**

- This principle means that actions taken, including those that determine how services respond to the needs of communities and people for psychosocial and mental health care, should actively maximise participation of local, affected populations whatever the degree of devastation in each area.
- Restoring, first, the functioning, and second, the social fabric of communities is highly important in how societies, communities and services respond effectively to the psychosocial and mental health effects of disasters and major incidents.
- If communities are to receive comprehensive responses to their psychosocial and mental health needs after disasters and major incidents, the following types of service are required: (a) humanitarian aid; (b) welfare services; (c) services that are able to assist people and communities to develop and sustain their resilience; and (d) timely and responsive mental health services.

• **Principle 9: Integrating Psychosocial and Mental Healthcare Responses into Policy and into Humanitarian Aid, Welfare, Social Care and Health Care Agencies' Work**

Achieving comprehensive psychosocial care and mental health services for moderate and large scale emergencies requires that lessons learned through research and experience are translated into integrated, ethical policy and plans at four levels. They are:

- Governance policies;
- Strategic policies for service design;
- Service delivery policies; and
- Policies for good clinical practice.

Governance policies relate to how countries, regions and counties are governed. Governance policies require the responsible authorities to develop strategic policies. Strategy should be developed by bringing together evidence from research, past experience, knowledge of the nature of areas of the country for which they are responsible and of their populations, and the profile of risks, to design services. Responsible authorities are also responsible for evaluating and managing the performance of those services to meet the identified objectives

Service delivery policies concern how particular services function and relate to their partner services and how affected populations are guided into and through them according to the evidence and awareness of the preferences of people who are likely to use them. Service delivery policies include evidence-informed

and values-based models of care, care pathways and protocols and guidelines for care as well as processes for demand management, audit and review.

Policies for good clinical practice concern how clinical staff take account of the needs and preferences of patients, deploy their clinical skills, and work with patients to agree how guidelines, care pathways and protocols are interpreted in individual cases.

Policy at each of the four levels should be informed by culture and values as well as by evidence and experience gleaned from practice. The Madrid Framework (see Annex A) can be used as a framework for benchmarking how policies deal with the values that are inherent in designing and delivering services.

- **Principle 10: All planners, incident commanders as well as practitioners, volunteers, researchers and evaluators should agree to work to a common set of standards**
 - In certain circumstances, especially those in which there is widespread devastation, high standards may not be achievable until there has been restoration of basic community functioning and resources including clean water and food supplies, shelter and protection, communications, and healthcare. Situations of this kind should be anticipated and covered by planning. Planning should consider what are the minimum standards in a range of different circumstances.
 - The standards adopted have substantial implications for training, research, evaluation and information-gathering because all of these capabilities should be core parts of all disaster and major incident response plans. This means that the requirement for them is anticipated and standards for research, evaluation and information-gathering should be developed and planned before disasters occur.
 - Research and evaluation should identify the factors that contribute to either the success or failure of particular types of service, their organisation and delivery, and particular interventions.
 - Research and evaluation should include follow up studies that are designed to learn about long-term effects that may be associated with psychosocial intervention programmes a substantial time after they have been completed.

CITATION:

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²IASC Mental health Guidelines: Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007). IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, **p.9ff**. Available at www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf

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PSS and Crisis Management

Crisis management is a major element in enhancing the psychosocial functioning and wellbeing of all affected groups. We define crisis management as follows: Crisis management refers to all efforts to deal with a threat before, during and after a threat has occurred (see, for example, Shrivastava et al., 1988; Asis, 2009).

This may involve the following aspects:

- Methods used to respond to both the reality and perception of crises.
- Establishing metrics to define what scenarios constitute a crisis and should consequently trigger
- The necessary response mechanisms.
- Communication that occurs within the response phase of emergency management scenarios.

Key aspects in crisis management can be seen in the following Action Sheets that may be used as handouts (AS 8 and 9)

Action Sheet Nr. 8: Key MHPSS² Aspects in General Crisis Management

Area

All event types, all target groups, all phases

Key Actions

- **Appraise the threat and what it is about**
Policymakers have to make sense of the critical nature of development. They must appraise the threat and what it is about
- **Make decisions under uncertainty and high risk; Coordinate actions**
Many of these decisions are not taken by individuals but they emerge from “various loci of decision making and coordination” interagency and intergovernmental coordination is crucial
- **Provide an authoritative account of what is going on**
Meaning making is aiming at reducing uncertainty and providing an authoritative account of what is going on. Problems arise as leaders are not the only ones who give and shape information and authorities cannot often provide accurate information right from the outset of a crisis
- **Be accountable and do not engage in defensive post-crisis blaming**
Governments cannot stay in crisis forever. Shifting back from crisis to routine mode is one aspect. “Blame games” often start after termination of the crisis. Leaders must be able to cope with accountability and not engage in blame designation and defensive blame avoidance
- **Learn from crises and use longterm studies of impact**
Lesson drawing is often not done Long term processes are needed to study the impact of a crisis on society. Collective learning after a crisis is a very important factor that has high implications for further crises and how they are dealt with

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² Mental health and psychosocial support



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Action Sheet Nr. 9: Key Principles in MHPSS³ Crisis Management

Area

All event types, all target groups, all phases

Key principles

Principle 1: Effective command, control and coordination before, during and following a disaster or major incident

Principle 2: Appointing psychosocial and mental health trained advisers at the strategic, tactical and operational levels of command to assure full integration of the services that respond to communities' and people's psychosocial and mental health needs within disaster and major incident plans.

Principle 3: The responsible authorities, incident response commanders, service managers and professional practitioners adopt an ethical framework for planning and delivering services.

Principle 4: The responsible authorities, incident response commanders, service managers and professional practitioners adopt a framework for good decision-making.

Principle 5: Commanders should ensure that appropriate services are made available in each phase of response and recovery and this requires services that offer

- immediate humanitarian aid and welfare services for everyone who needs them;
- service responses that recognise that the intensity and duration of people's exposure to stressors, certain prior experiences, and the availability or otherwise of social support are related to their likelihood of developing more serious psychosocial problems or mental disorders;
- long-term and persistent follow-through; and
- care for responders.

Principle 6: The responsible authorities, incident response commanders, service managers and professional practitioners adopt pre-planned frameworks for:

- corporate governance; and
- clinical governance.

Principle 7: Execution of psychosocial and mental health care plans depends on effectively managing and caring for staff.

Staff and agencies should be provided with:

- clear plans;
- statements of the expectations that are likely to fall on them;
- opportunities for training and rehearsal; and
- increased supervision and social support.

Principle 8: Roles, standards and support

Staff and volunteers should have

- clear roles and responsibilities that are agreed in advance;
- professional standards and expectations that are clear, practical and realistic;

³ Mental health and psychosocial support

- effective leadership and access to the support of colleagues.

CITATION:

¹NATO-TENTS guidance: Williams, R., Bisson, J., Ajdukovic, D., Kemp, V., Olf, M., Alexander, D., Hacker Hughes, J. & Bevan, P. (2009). Guidance for responding to the psychosocial and mental health needs of people affected by disasters or major incidents, **p.16-17** Available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/majorhazards/ressources/virtuallibrary/materials/uk/Principles_for_Disaster_and_Major_Incident_Psychosocial_Care_Final.pdf

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Containing

- Planning, Preparation and Management (E-Module)
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Containing

- Part 2: Seizing opportunity in crisis: 10 case examples (p. 25)
- Part 3: Spreading opportunity in crisis: Lessons learnt and take home messages (p. 95)

Crisis Communication

Information is the most important need in the acute phase of disasters. Psychological First Aid depends on the ability of the helper to provide information on what has happened, what is done by the helpers and what can be done by the affected themselves. This requires a communication structure between crisis management and helpers that allows the helper to be part of the communication process between authorities and affected population. Psychosocial support has the task of opening up a communication channel between the affected population and the authorities. Therefore the first question in a disaster situation is “how and where can we best reach the affected?” and “how can we open up a dialogue with the affected?” Psychosocial support therefore has to be an integrated part of crisis management. Psychosocial experts have to be part of the command staff in order to enable the dialogue.

The crisis manager has the task to provide information according to the following principles
Key aspects of crisis communication can be seen in the following action sheet (AS 10) that may be used as handout

Action Sheet Nr. 10: Key MHPSS⁴ Aspects in Crisis Communication

Area

All event types, all target groups, all phases

Key Principle: "Establish an open and fair dialogue with all relevant stakeholders" (Olsson, 2011, p. 143)

Key Actions

- **Integrate the communication strategy into the decision making process and link the communication strategy to the ongoing process of crisis development**
When crisis communication follows a process model, it is more comprehensive and systematic in addressing the entire range of strategies from pre- to post-event
- **Pre-event planning and update plans regularly**
Planning includes identifying risk areas and corresponding risk reduction, pre-setting initial crisis responses so that decision making during a crisis is more efficient, and identifying necessary response resources. Significant case-based evidence exists, for example, that it is essential to conduct risk analysis and assessment for the management of risk and the prevention of crisis. All organizations should identify the potential hazards they face
- **Accept the public as a partner**
Accepting the public as a legitimate and equal partner emerged from the literature as a best practice in crisis communication
- **Listen to the public's concerns and understand the Audience and respond in an adequate manner**
In order to achieve a standpoint of dialogue, an organization managing risks or experiencing a crisis must listen to the concerns of the public, take these concerns into account, and respond accordingly
- **Honesty**
Effective crisis communicators are honest in their public communication. Such honesty, in the long run, fosters credibility with both the media and the public. Moreover, a response that is less than honest may, ultimately, create the perception of wrong doing
- **Candor and Openness**
Furthermore, communication should be candid, and open. Be aware that there are cases where there could be good reason for not releasing all information. There is a big difference between responding to a difficult or sensitive question with a flat out lie (or even a white lie, e.g. "I don't know", "I don't have that information") and with either an honest acknowledgement of uncertainty, or an "I'm not prepared to answer that question". The latter, which is honest, but not fully open, will be sometimes appropriate and sometimes not. The guiding principle could be: you do not always have to say everything but what you say must be honest and "true" (based on the facts that are known at the given moment)
- **Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources**
Collaborative relationships allow agencies to coordinate their messages and activities. Developing a pre-crisis network is a very effective way of coordinating and collaborating with other credible sources. To maintain effective networks, crisis planners and communicators should continuously seek to validate sources, choose subject-area experts, and develop relationships with stakeholders at all levels. Coordinating messages enhances the probability of consistent messages and may reduce the confusion the public experiences. Consistency of message is one important benchmark of effective crisis communication
- **Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible**
Since some sections of the media thrive on crisis and scandal – and since other sections have an important democratic role in uncovering incompetence and corruption – it is necessary for senior crisis managers

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(above all, politicians or their representatives) to collaborate with the media at the preparedness phase to ensure that they are both able to go about their business if a crisis hits. Rather than viewing the media as a liability in a crisis situation, risk and crisis communicators should engage the media, through open and honest communication, and use the media as a strategic resource to aid in managing the crisis. When communicating with the media, organizations should avoid inconsistency by accepting uncertainty and avoid any temptation to offer overly reassuring messages. Media training should be completed by crisis communicators prior to the onset of a crisis situation. Crisis spokespersons should be identified and trained as part of pre-crisis planning. Politicians/senior responders need to know that the media are reporting responsibly (rather than just trying to "get a story"; and the media need to know that politicians are being appropriately honest, open, and cooperative (rather than trying to "spin a story"). But this is difficult, given that outside of disaster contexts, openness is not necessarily the norm

- **Communicate with Compassion, Concern, and Empathy**

Whether communicating with the public, media, or other employers, designated spokespersons should demonstrate appropriate levels of compassion, concern, and empathy. These characteristics significantly enhance the credibility of the message and enhance the perceived legitimacy of the messenger both before and after an event

- **Accept Uncertainty and Ambiguity**

A best practice of crisis communication, then, is to acknowledge the uncertainty inherent in the situation with statements such as, "the situation is fluid," and, "We do not yet have all the facts." This form of strategic ambiguity allows the communicator to refine the message as more information becomes available and avoids statements that are likely to be shown as inaccurate as more information becomes available. Acknowledging uncertainty should not be used as a strategy, however, to avoid disclosing uncomfortable information or closing off further communication. In these cases context information about the search and rescue and other actions might be of more use as well as explaining in more detail that information is gathered and has to be validated continuously in the course of the developing situation and actions have to be adapted to the changing needs of the situation

- **Messages of Self-Efficacy**

The public health literature and risk communication research have emphasized the importance of messages that provide specific information telling people what they can do to reduce their harm. These messages of self-efficacy can help restore some sense of control over an uncertain and threatening situation. Moreover, these messages may, ultimately, help reduce the harm created by a risk factor

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The first steps in setting up a PSS mission

Psychosocial support needs a framework that provides all of the five elements that Hobfoll and colleagues have described in 2007, safety (including information and safe places), connectedness (including family reunions), calm (including child friendly spaces and restoring normalcy), self and collective efficiency (including decision making and active coping) and hope (including plans for the near future and activities that enhance positive emotions). In order to provide such a framework crisis management has to be well aware of PSS and PSS managers have to be part of the general crisis management. Therefore psychosocial crisis management and psychosocial crisis plans have to be established before disaster strikes.

After the disaster happened, first steps to take before starting the mission should include the following Action sheet (AS 19, 20 and 22) that may be used as handout

Action Sheet Nr. 19: Key MHPSS⁵ Actions before you start the Interventions

Area

All event types, all target groups, response phase, delivery design

Key Actions

- **Call in your crisis management team and set up a base**
You must ensure your own basic safety, evacuation, food etc.
- **Send out a team to conduct a rapid assessment of needs and capacities**
Using your pre-designed psychosocial response plan that gives you feedback rapidly and helps you design your first intervention plan
- **Find out how best to reach the people in need and then decide about the most adequate forms of support** (humanitarian assistance center, PSS integrated into evacuation center or in shelter, community center etc.) **according to the type and place of event** (international, national, regional event; relatives local or from abroad, infrastructure and other relevant resources destroyed or intact etc.)
- **Prioritize the needs and identify the target groups that are most vulnerable in order to first support those who have the most urgent needs for support and in order to give each group the adequate kind of support**
- **Make an intervention plan**
Set up activities to be carried out immediately and later on by – members of the community / community leaders / volunteers / trained PSS personnel / mental health experts, make a first estimate on how long the intervention might take and involve all groups that might be relevant for psychosocial care and support
- **Make contact and coordinate PSS activities with all the relevant stakeholders**
use your lists of partner organisations and inform them about the event and the planned activities, plan coordination meetings, give regular updates on your activities and coordinate all activities in such a way that parallel structures are avoided and each group can give the kind of support that they are most adequate to provide
- **Design the relevant communication campaign**
see Action Sheets Nr.10-14: Crisis Communication
- **Human resources management**
 - Call your teams together

⁵ Mental health and psychosocial support

- Assign your teams according to capacity and needs
- **Provide ongoing intervention plan changes based on ongoing assessments in order to adapt to changes in needs and situation that are very common and may happen rapidly in the early phases of a disaster**

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Action Sheet Nr. 20: Immediate MHPSS⁶ Response

Area

All event types, all target groups, response phase, service delivery design

Key Recommendations and resulting Actions

- **Coordinate**
Establish coordination of intersectoral mental health and psychosocial support
- **Assess**
Conduct assessments of mental health, needs and psychosocial issues
- **Monitor**
Initiate participatory systems for monitoring and evaluation
- **Promote Human Rights**
Apply a human rights framework through mental health and psychosocial support
- **Protect**
Identify, monitor, prevent and respond to protection threats and failures through social and legal protection
- **Activate**
Facilitate conditions for community mobilization, ownership and control of emergency response in all sectors of the response
- **Recruit, train and support staff and volunteers**
 - Identify and recruit staff and engage volunteers who understand local culture
 - Enforce staff codes of conduct and ethical guidelines
 - Organise orientation and training of aid workers in mental health and psychosocial support
 - Prevent and manage problems in mental health and psychosocial well-being among staff and volunteers
- **Provide support on all levels**
 - Include specific psychological and social considerations in provision of general health care
 - Provide access to care for people with severe mental disorders
 - Protect and care for people with severe mental disorders and other mental and neurological disabilities living in institutions
 - Learn about and, where appropriate, collaborate with local, indigenous and traditional health systems
 - Minimise harm related to alcohol and other substance use
- **Provide special support for children and adolescents**
 - Facilitate support for young children (0–8 years) and their care-givers
 - Strengthen access to safe and supportive education
- **Provide Information**
 - Provide information to the affected population on the emergency, relief efforts and their legal rights
 - Provide access to information about positive coping methods
- **Embed the psychosocial support into the overall support system**
 - Include specific social and psychological considerations (safe aid for all in dignity, considering cultural practices and household roles) in the provision of food and nutritional support
 - Include specific social considerations (safe, dignified, culturally and socially appropriate assistance) in site planning and shelter provision, in a coordinated manner
 - Include specific social considerations (safe and culturally appropriate access for all in dignity) in the provision of water and sanitation as well as other sectors of support

⁶ Mental health and psychosocial support

CITATION:

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Action Sheet Nr. 22: General Recommendations for MHPSS⁷ Response to Mass Emergencies

Area

All event types, all target groups, response phase, service delivery design

Key Recommendations

- **A telephone helpline** staffed by trained personnel that provides emotional support should be launched
- **A website** concerning psychosocial issues should be launched
- A humanitarian assistance centre/one stop shop should be established where a range of services potentially required can be based
- **If needed other forms of intervention** are recommended (shelters, evacuation centers etc.) Those overseeing the initial psychosocial response should work closely with the media
- **The creation of a database** to record personal details should be considered
This should be planned well in advance in order to minimise concerns re privacy and data protection

Key Actions

- The initial response requires practical help and pragmatic support provided in an empathic manner including a thorough assessment of needs before intervention and an (interagency) intervention plan (see Action Sheet Nr. 17-18: Preparedness; see Action Sheet Nr. 25: Psychological First Aid)
- Information regarding the situation and concerns of individuals affected should be obtained and provided to them in an honest and open manner
- Written leaflets containing education about responses to traumatic events, helpful coping and where to seek help if necessary should be provided
- Individuals should be actively provided with education about reactions to traumatic events if they are interested in receiving it
- Psychological reactions should be normalised during the initial response (see Action Sheet Nr. 6)
- Individuals should be neither encouraged nor discouraged from giving detailed accounts

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Containing

- Tool 1: Who is Where, When, Doing What (4WS) in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (Mhps): Summary of Manual with Activity Codes (p. 30)
- Tool 2: WHO-UNHCR Assessment Schedule of Serious Symptoms in Humanitarian Settings (WASSS) (Field-Test Version) (p. 34)
- Tool 3: The Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs Scale (HESPER) (p. 41)
- Tool 4: Checklist for Site Visits at Institutions in Humanitarian Settings (p. 42)
- Tool 5: Checklist for Integrating Mental Health in Primary Health Care (PHC) in Humanitarian Settings (p. 47)
- Tool 6: Neuropsychiatric Component of the Health Information System (HIS) (p. 53)
- Tool 7: Template to Assess Mental Health System Formal Resources in Humanitarian Settings (p. 55)
- Tool 8: Checklist on Obtaining General (Non-MHPSS Specific) Information from Sector Leads (p. 59)
- Tool 9: Template for Desk Review of Preexisting Information Relevant to MHPSS in the Region/Country (p. 60)
- Tool 10: Participatory Assessment: Perceptions by General Community Members (p. 63)
- Tool 11: Participatory Assessment: Perceptions by Community Members with In-Depth Knowledge (p. 70)
- Tool 12: Participatory Assessment: Perceptions by Severely Affected People (p. 74)

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 - h. Appendix 8 - Example Participant Information Sheet / Consent Form (p. 89)
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