



Research Project

Development of Standards and Recommendations for Structuring and Organizing a Network of Psycho-Social Support at the Federal Level

commissioned by the Federal Ministry of the Interior of the Federal Republic of Germany

Short title:

Network for Emergency Psycho-Social Support

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Initial position and objectives

Psychological aspects concerning support for emergency patients and for personnel involved in disaster relief and civil protection are not new; they are, however, receiving greater attention and importance as each new disaster occurs. Stress among emergency workers has become an increasingly important topic of interest as well. Nationwide, more and more relevant concepts are being developed, taught and realized by organizations involved in hazard prevention. Efforts are also underway in the areas of Emergency Pastoral Support und Emergency Psychology to develop a solid framework for the improvement of psycho-social support in emergencies. Despite, or perhaps because of, the increasing awareness of psycho-social aspects and questions in disaster relief and civil protection, there has been a considerable degree of divergence in the types of initiatives and concepts, as well as in the forms of implementation, that have evolved:

Structural aspects:

- The regional extension of emergency psycho-social support fails to provide area-wide coverage.
- The linking-up of specific forms of implementation offered by various professions, organizations, and regions is still in a very early phase.
- Psycho-social support for emergency personnel has been discussed mainly in the context of disasters or long term missions. Less attention has been paid to the long-term consequences of dealing (insufficiently?) with the pressures resulting from the nature of the work in question.

Quality

- Several concepts of psycho-social support in emergencies are currently being developed and implemented. These concepts differ greatly in quality.
- Approaches relating to support for victims and witnesses of disasters seem to be more developed than corresponding concepts for emergency personnel. Some controversy has arisen regarding transferability of these concepts.
- There has been a focus on the clinical psychological aspects of preventing post traumatic stress reactions/disorders, whereas aspects of maintaining work capability from a work- and organizational psychological point of view (psycho-social care as health promotion) have been neglected. It can be assumed, however, that maintaining the psycho-social health of emergency personnel can be directly linked to the quality of interaction between emergency personnel and victims and can thereby determine the quality of emergency (psycho-social) support.

The **objective of the project** is the development of a scientifically based concept for the **structural integration of emergency psycho-social support** for workers of relief organizations, professional and voluntary fire-brigades, as well as for the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW). The goal is to afford access to comprehensive emergency psycho-social care for emergency workers - primarily during **disasters** but also in everyday profession-related activities. In doing so, comprehensive (in regard to regions and organizations) technical standards as well as guidelines for the consideration of regional distinctions and task characteristics will be developed. An essential precondition will be a requirement analysis and a survey of existing emergency pastoral and emergency psychological approaches to training and implementation in different areas at the federal level and in organizations of hazard prevention.

On the basis of two **sample regions** (Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin), requirements and available forms of implementation are to be surveyed. Furthermore, a comprehensive network will be documented and suggestions for its further development given. Data from the sample regions shall be used for the development of recommendations and standards to be used in the **implementation of a network** of emergency psycho-social support at the federal level.

The network project will concentrate on structural aspects of psycho-social support for fire-brigade, rescue service and THW personnel.

The focus will be upon three tasks:

- a) **Existing forms of implementation:** Survey of existing forms of implementation of emergency psycho-social support for the target groups: Fire brigades, rescue services and THW (in the respective regions). Description of existing gaps and recommendations for further development.
- b) **Documentation and/or initiation of networking processes:** Documentation of forms and problems of networking to date. Possibly, recommendations for linking existing forms of implementation and for closing gaps by means of coordination and cooperation. Documentation of obstacles and resources in networking and successful processes of networking.
- c) **Development of standards and recommendations for a nationwide structural integration** of emergency psycho-social support into the structures of responsible agencies and authorities at the federal, state, and local levels.

Central characteristics of the project:

- **Nationwide networking involving aspects at the state level:** Consideration of state and local characteristics in the development of national standards.
- **Task reference:** Consideration of task characteristics and functions in responsible agencies and organizations.
- **Network orientation:** Concentration on problems in cooperation on the one hand and networking resources on the other with the objective of establishing a suitable, practical, and dynamic network.
- **Service orientation:** Contribution to the development of a service-oriented database with regard to availability, type of emergency psycho-social support, and relevant target groups.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Linking the views and methods developed in clinical psychology to those developed in industrial psychology to form a model for dealing with work-related stress among emergency personnel.

- **Integration of methods:** Linking of clinical psychological perspectives to those of industrial science to form a model for dealing with work stress among emergency personnel.
- **Process orientation:** Consideration of psycho-social requirements in training, field support as well as short- and long-term psycho-social support.