

**"EVERYONE COUNTS.
WE ACT ON EACH PERSON'S
RESOURCES NOT ONLY ON THEIR SHORTCOMINGS".**

Psychosocial Approach Manual

By RESILIENCE Onlus



**AUTHORS: Giovanni Galli, MARCELLO KREINER, VERA LOMAZZI,
MAYA RECHDANE AND CARLA SIMONI.**



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Special thanks to Maya Rechdane Karam for the great support given in the contextualisation of the conceptual framework in the Middle East area.

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FOREWORD

This manual illustrates a shared endeavor carried out by Resilience Onlus and AVSI Foundation in the Middle East. It sheds light on the combined efforts put into humanitarian work since 2005. Indeed, this joint initiative conducted throughout different countries in conflict has mainly involved a multidisciplinary team that has developed its expertise in training field operators in psychosocial work.

This manual was developed at a critical moment in history when the Syrian crisis revealed an increasing complexity. It was through working with children, adolescents and adults who had been forced to evacuate their homes and take refuge in host communities, that this manual has seen light. Many thanks to the refugees and Lebanese who pave the way for us, social workers, to get more in touch with our humanity.

Contextualising this manual has also been a great challenge. Uncovering real cases that support the theory, gathering key elements related to the sociocultural context, and unveiling unique and touching testimonies of beneficiaries, was a tough yet thrilling mission. This work owes its systematic accuracy to Mrs. Mawad whose significant contribution has ensured a reliable data collection process as well as an accurate data recovery. Thank you very much!

Finally, I would like to address all members of the AVSI team in Lebanon, in all four offices in Jounieh, Saida, Nabatieh and Marjeyoun, and express my gratitude to each and every one of them, not only for their endeavors but for their thoroughness regarding their sightings and coverage of the actual situations on the field. Each of their contributions has added to the wealth of this manual.

With great pleasure, I offer this manual to all humanitarian operators, whether they are members of the large family of AVSI or not. I hope that they can draw a solid conceptual framework from it and a noteworthy example that will enrich their psychosocial practice and subsequently give back valuable input to deepen its content.

Colleagues, I wish you all a good read.

Maya Rechdane Karam

Social Worker
Manual Coordinator
In charge of contextualisation
February 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian aid for populations affected by difficult events, such as natural disasters or wars, cannot focus its interventions only on material needs, believing that answering these needs may be sufficient to address and overcome these events, since the person's wellbeing also depends on psychosocial factors.

It must be considered that such events leave marks on a psychological and social level that persist over time, affecting the wellbeing of the individuals and the entire population. The wounds on a psychological level are less visible but just as essential for the wellbeing of the person as physical health. Providing for psychosocial needs can prevent the onset of psychological disorders. Humanitarian interventions for psychosocial protection, both in emergencies and in subsequent phases, should proceed in parallel with the interventions for the physical survival of the person (health, nutrition, etc.), since promoting culturally appropriate projects within the population, in the field of education, equality, social and family relations, and the development of personal resources, allow facing and overcoming life difficulties.

The non-profit organisation, Resilience Onlus together with AVSI Foundation, during their ten years of experience in humanitarian crises in different contexts, have developed psychosocial interventions, in which the starting point is the person (holistic approach).

A holistic approach means a specific way of viewing the human being as a whole, paying attention to his physical, mental, relational, cultural, moral dimension, and spiritual values. Holistic interventions in psychosocial projects are the ones that include all of these dimensions. In this manual, this concept will become clearer thanks to the covered topics.

If the holistic approach is the glance used to look and help the person, the resilience is the goal that drives all psychosocial projects.

The methodology applied to humanitarian interventions and proposed in the manual is participatory, which means that starting from the need of both the individual and the community, a culturally appropriate track is built with the beneficiaries through the use of psychosocial tools.

This approach stems from the understanding that every human being has the resources that play a fundamental role in the way he will deal with difficult situations, and in his recovery.

The approach will be described in the manual according to a track, with the following steps:

- a. The first step describes the needs of the person, how these needs are communicated in various stages of psychological and physical development of the human being, and the kind of response they receive. In fact, the kind of response that meets or does not meet these needs affects the wellbeing and psychosocial functioning of each person (Chapter 1);
- b. The second step shows the person's internal resources, which develop according to the type of response that these needs receive from communicative interactions with other individuals (chapters 1 and 2);
- c. The third step links internal resources with the development of the components of the world of the person and its resilience. In this step, the highlight is on all the constituent aspects of the world of the person. It is what we call an overview or a holistic look at the human being, and is the one that allows us to understand the value and significance of the intervention of psychosocial support in a humanitarian crisis (chapters 1 and 2);

- d. The fourth step introduces the concept of psychosocial trauma and how to help in overcoming it, according to an approach of Resilience (chapters 3);
- e. Finally, the psychosocial tools used in everyday practices of a helping relationship and the development of the beneficiaries' resilience through a participatory methodology are detailed (chapters 4 to 14).

Each chapter fits in a path that is not only theoretical, but also operational, and useful for the realisation of psychosocial projects.

Each chapter, starting with a brief introduction explaining the content, will focus on the importance of the argument related to the overall aim of resilience and its practical implications in psychosocial actions towards beneficiaries.

The manual is the result of a meeting between Resilience field workers' experience of ten years in the promotion of psychosocial development projects in emergency contexts, and AVSI Foundation in Lebanon, who has been working in this field for numerous years. This collaboration has resulted in the development of content that is culturally appropriated for the context in which Resilience Onlus and AVSI Foundation are operating.

Practical recommendations and operational tools will be included in the various chapters of this manual.

Although this document is the result of a collective vision, the ownership of the chapters is assigned as follows:

Chapter 1: The world of the person, *Giovanni Galli*

Chapter 2: The bond between vulnerability and resilience, *Giovanni Galli*

Chapter 3: Psychosocial trauma, *Giovanni Galli*

Chapter 4: Gender equality and resilience development, *Vera Lomazzi*

Chapter 5: Intercultural approach, *Vera Lomazzi*

Chapter 6: The operator's psychosocial approach, *Giovanni Galli*

Chapter 7: The helping process in psychosocial intervention, *Marcello Kreiner*

Chapter 8: Social networks and networking, *Marcello Kreiner*

Chapter 9: Assessment and monitoring, *Vera Lomazzi*

Chapter 10: The interview, *Carla Simoni*

Chapter 11: The home visit, *Carla Simoni*

Chapter 12: Working with groups, *Marcello Kreiner*

Chapter 13: Life Skills promotion activities, *Carla Simoni*

Chapter 14: The game, *Vera Lomazzi and Carla Simoni*

Our thanks go to Maya Rechdane Karam for proof reading and for the cultural integration of the content, Elisa Paganelli for the translation from Italian to English, and Lisa Romellini for creating the figures displayed in this manual.

CLARIFICATION NOTE

This manual was initially written in Italian and has been translated into English and Arabic. The use of the male form in all sentences were done for easing the reading and in respect to the Italian language. In fact, in Italian, the child and also the person refer to females as well as to males.

This manual contains 4 types of contextualisations done in Lebanon during the year 2015; these four types have been illustrated by 4 logos.



This logo refers to examples from the Lebanese context illustrating the theory.



This logo represents a unique story reported from the field.



This logo represents an attention point requiring a special consideration from the operator's part related to the context.



This logo is an invitation for the operator to complete an exercise in the attached workbook.

These added notes were integrated later on to this manual. Gender consideration has been respected and the use of the male / female form was applied. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the beneficiaries reported have been altered.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	CEDAW	اتفاقية القضاء على جميع اشكال العنف ضد المرأة
Child Friendly Space	CFS	الأماكن الصديقة للأطفال
Child Protection	CP	حماية الطفل
Child Protection Working Group	CPWG	فريق عمل حماية الأطفال
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders	DSM-5	الدليل التشخيصي والإحصائي للإضطرابات النفسية
Early Childhood Development	ECD	تنمية الطفولة المبكرة
Gender-Based Violence	GBV	العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي
Inter-Agency Standing Committee	IASC	اللجنة المشتركة الدائمة للتسيير بين الوكالات
Informal Tented Settlements	ITS	مستوطنات الخيم غير المنظمة
Internal Working Models	IWM	نماذج العمل الداخلية
Middle East and North Africa	MENA	الشرق الأوسط وأفريقيا
Ministry of Social Affairs	MOSA	وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية
Psychological First Aid	PFA	الإسعافات النفسية الأولية
Primary Health Care	PHC	الرعاية الصحية الأولية
Psychosocial Support	PSS	الدعم النفسي الاجتماعي
Psychosocial Support Programming/Program	PSSP	برمجة/برامج الدعم النفسي الاجتماعي
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	PTSD	إضطرابات ما بعد الصدمة
Social Development Centers	SDC	مراكز الخدمات الإنمائية
Standard Operating Procedure	SOP	الإجراءات التنفيذية الموحدة
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	UDHR	الإعلان العالمي لحقوق الإنسان
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR	مفوضية الأمم المتحدة السامية للاجئين
United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF	صندوق الأمم المتحدة للطفولة
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	WASH	المياه والصرف الصحي والنظافة
World Health Organization	WHO	منظمة الصحة العالمية
Woman Safe Space	WSS	الأماكن الآمنة للنساء

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PART I

Theories of the psychosocial approach

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Chapter 1

THE WORLD OF THE PERSON



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1.1 Psychosocial approach to humanitarian crises: defining the term psychosocial

A qualified support relationship underpins every humanitarian intervention, both in the acute phases of the crisis and in the subsequent ones, as well as in the development phase of the project. In order to perform this work best, it is necessary to know the human being and understand his constituent elements. Indeed, they can enable the wellbeing of the person and the community to which he belongs, and with which he daily interacts.

The holistic approach considers all these elements, and is presented by psychosocial actions that consider both the psychological and the social aspect of the intervention towards the individual. We use the term "psychosocial" in order to emphasize the close connection between the psychological aspects of personal experience (thoughts, emotions, behaviour), and the wider social experience (relationships, traditions, culture). These two issues are so closely interrelated, that the concept of psychosocial wellbeing is probably more helpful than others that are more restrictive, such as "mental health". For instance, interventions that focus on the concepts of mental health, such as psychological trauma, can lead to ignoring aspects of the social environment that are considered vital for personal wellbeing, such as the family and the community that define the membership scope. They also threaten to stigmatize entire populations in the pathological sense, and being incomprehensible to them.

The goal of psychosocial interventions is to build resilience, i.e. personal and community resources. Because they allow dealing with acute crisis situations, and they can avoid creating a dependency on external aid at later stages.

In order to become facilitators in developing individual and community resources, humanitarian workers start from needs assessments to help people affected by natural disasters or armed conflicts.

"The humanitarian workers are operators acting on resources and not only on deficiencies", this is the philosophy leading our efforts.

Defining the term psychosocial

By psychosocial, we mean to centre our intervention both on the psychological aspects of the person as well as on the world of his social relations as seen in figure 1.1.

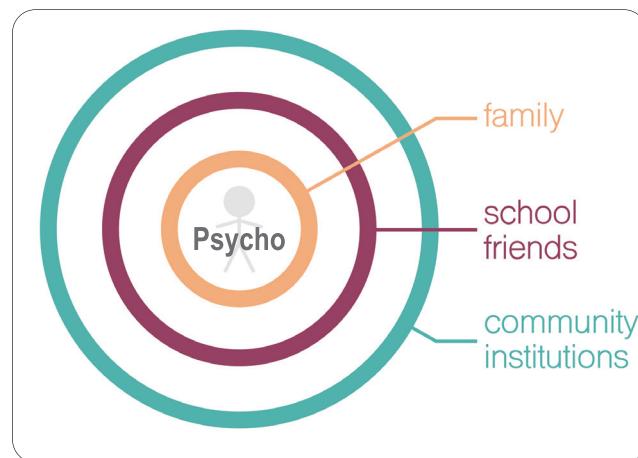


Figure 1.1: Psychosocial functioning of each person: an interaction between the Psycho (Mind and soul of the person) and the Social (External relationships and environment of the person)



AVSI is one of the NGOs working in the community of each Syrian refugee living in Marjeyoun, Nabatieh, Saida & Keserouan (area of AVSI's intervention in 2015-2016). Since Syrians are living a displacement situation, they might have a lack or an undeveloped family network. This fact should make every operator aware of the importance of his/her presence & role as part of the refugee's community network. Hence, he/she should be able to welcome any request from any beneficiary, respond to it by an intervention plan or refer her to other community resources.

When using the term "psychosocial", it is necessary to understand its meaning in the applied context: indeed, we talk about psychosocial wellbeing, psychosocial needs, psychosocial interventions, support programs and psychosocial care.

- *Psychosocial wellbeing*

The Constitution of the World Health Organisation defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing" and not just "the absence of disease or infirmity." (World Health Organisation, 1948).

According to this definition, it is clear that the psychosocial wellbeing of the person and of the community is defined in relation to the three domains mentioned above: physical, mental and social.

Psychosocial wellbeing is the result of the integration and interaction between these domains, and is also influenced by external factors, such as environmental conditions, the chance of a shelter, and the physical health status. Also, psychosocial wellbeing depends on the person's ability to use the resources coming from these three domains.

- *Psychosocial Needs*

They are all the people's necessities, affecting the physical, mental, and social domains, allowing them to grow and develop a satisfying life. When these needs are satisfied, it allows the person to be happy, creative, to belong to social groups and to have hope for the future.

- *Psychosocial interventions and the psychosocial support programming (PSSP)*

They are made with specific and formalized activities, by programs and by psychological and social services in the territory. These actions are intended to facilitate and develop resilience in persons, families and communities; a necessary condition to face and overcome the impact of current and future crises. It's important during any intervention for the humanitarian worker to be aware of his personal resilience factors in order to help the beneficiaries develop their own resilience.

Psychosocial support, through respecting the person's dignity and enhancing the coping skills of the individual and the community, promotes the recovery of social cohesion.

- *Support and taking charge (to care)*

This aspect enhances the interpersonal interactions that occur in care relationships in everyday life at home, at school and in the community.

For children, this means the chance to receive love and protection in familiar environments, as well as the chance for interventions that assist children and families in coping with difficult situations.

Taking care of and supporting children allows them to develop a sense of self-confidence and belonging, and is at the same time essential to learning everyday Life Skills, to facilitate their participation in society and to having faith in the future.

These interventions are based on one fundamental principle idea that if people are empowered to care for themselves and each other, their individual and community self-confidence and resources will improve.

The PSSP are projects where the beneficiaries are not considered taxable persons, but participative figures in adapting the kind of interventions and instruments for the real needs, and for the cultural context in which we are working.

Psychosocial interventions are put into effect through specific tools aimed at improving the person's wellbeing, which will be further addressed in the following chapters of this manual.

1.2 Personal development

Personal development is a multidimensional process that takes place at the physical, emotional, cognitive and relational level, responding to various people's needs.

These needs are necessary to grow and develop a healthy and satisfying life.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 1 in the workbook.



Figure 1.2: Needs of each person enabling him to grow, to develop, and to live a healthy and satisfying life

We can therefore conclude that human needs can be divided into three categories:

- **Material / Physical needs**
- **Social needs**
- **Psychological needs / spiritual needs/Values**

During this consideration, we will notice how different needs can be placed in the two dimensions of the psychological and the social world: it can help us to better understand the definition of psychosocial.

For example, to be respected and recognised is a psychological need, but it is also a social one: respect is important in a community's relationships and roles.

Sometimes the psychological needs are undervalued, although knowing about them is critical to help in an efficient way. Moreover, even the WHO, defining health, speaks of a "state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease".

Let us now delve more deeply into the subject, analysing the basic needs divided by age.

These needs are communicated in specific modes by each age group, and they evolve, becoming more and more varied and complex.

If the person receives positive feedback, he will develop some functional resources for the process of growth. For ease of understanding, please refer to the summary chart below:

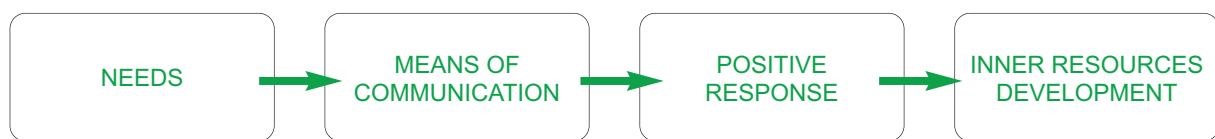


Figure 1.3: Path from needs to inner resources development

For simplicity, we identified the following age groups:

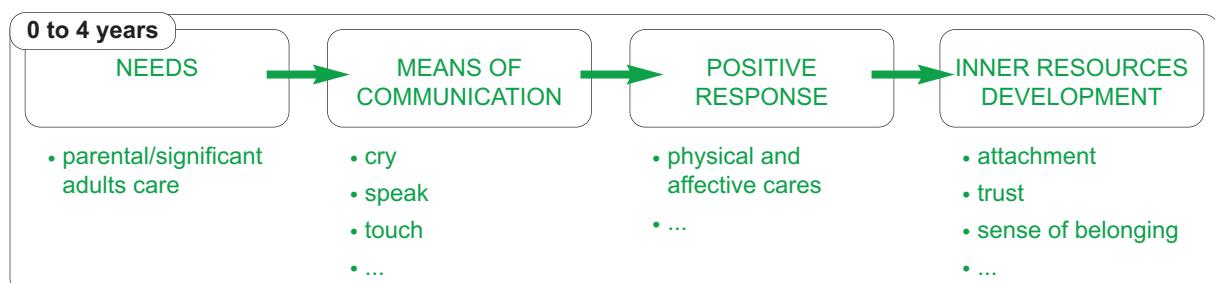
- 0-4 years old
- 5-11 years old
- 12-18 years old
- Adult



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 2 in the workbook.

1.2.1 Personal development from 0 to 4 years old

This is a rapid growth period at both the physical and the mental levels.



For completeness, since this is the age in which attachment is developed, we report the basic elements of one of today's most prominent theories regarding this topic.

1.2.1.1 The origins of attachment theory by J. Bowlby, K. Lorenz and M. Ainsworth

A child from 0 to 4 years old communicates his need for care and knowledge of the world through his five senses, movement, crying and smiling, through speech or vocalizations, games, interactive behaviour with peers and adults, and through the exploration of the environment.

If he receives positive feedback, he will begin to develop self-confidence and trust towards others with a sense of attachment to the people who care for him, and therefore develops a sense of belonging. In the first months of life, until the development of verbal communication skills, the only social possibility for a child is attachment.

Attachment is a form of emotional bond that links a person to the one taking care of him; it leads and affects the general nature of the relationship, the way he relates, thinks, perceives things and situations, behaves and acts.

At the beginning of life, being fed is equivalent to being loved. The biological urge to be fed is linked with another need, which is also fundamental: the need to be loved, nurtured with love, being desired, and being accepted for who we are.

The basics of the theory can be traced back to three reference authors: Konrad Lorenz, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. They offered us an explanation of those biological and social processes that lead to building maintaining and breaking affective relationships, during the entire course of life. They consider the influence that emotional relationships have on persons, and on their personality development.

Human beings have an innate predisposition to create relationships with the primary parent figures.

These relationships are created during the first year of a child's life and are intended to protect him.

The attachment theory provides good support for the study of phenomena related to childhood histories of severe abuse and neglect, which can lead to the development of a wide range of personality disorders, dissociative symptoms, anxiety disorders, depression, and alcohol and drugs abuse. In the last few years, this theory has raised a keen interest in an approach that investigates possible effects of negative events in childhood, the relational context in which these events took place, and the psychological aspects of the adult in relation to his early experiences.

The theory can also be applied in a broader context, and therefore it no longer refers only to the parent-child relationship, but also to situations that include interactions with other people.

Bowlby, looking at the behaviour of macaques, and of children in the first months of life, noticed that they all had the same behavioural patterns.

Specifically, he verified that the relationship with the mother (or the reference care giver) provides the child with a "secure base", from which he can get away to explore the world and then return to, entertaining forms of relationships with other family members.

The concept of a "secure base" was developed by Bowlby in 1969. The "attachment figure" is the one who "provides a secure base from which to explore the surrounding environment". Personality development is affected by whether or not we had experienced a strong "secure base", as well as the subjective capacity to recognize if a person is trustworthy, and can or

wants to provide a secure base. A healthy personality is able to rely on the right people and, at the same time, to have confidence in them and to give support to others in return.

When the child feels any threat, he stops his exploration to quickly reach the attachment person in order to receive comfort and security. Furthermore, the child protests vigorously if there is an attempt to separate him from this person.

For Bowlby, emotionally safe ties have a fundamental value for survival.

The term "secure base" is due to Mary Ainsworth, who devised it in the late 60's as a valuable investigative tool, the "Strange Situation", to classify the three main attachment styles of classifying pre-schoolers reunited with parents after a long recovery in a sanatorium.

Ainsworth distinguished a first group of children that showed positive feelings toward their mothers, a second that showed markedly ambivalent relations, and a third one that did not have expressive, indifferent or hostile relationships with their mothers.

1.2.1.2 Attachment styles

The strange situation is a laboratory procedure that consists of twenty minutes of observation of sequential episodes. In the room, there is the child, the mother and a stranger, and it is possible to observe the different behaviours and emotional reactions of the child in the presence of his mother, at the moment of separation from her, and when the child remains alone in the company of the stranger. From these observations, the famous classification was born, that initially provides three attachment styles: secure, insecure avoidant, and insecure anxious ambivalent, which subsequently was added to the disoriented/disorganized style.

Secure attachment style: the person has confidence in the attachment figure's availability and support, in case of adverse conditions or danger. Thus, he feels free to explore the world. This style is promoted by a figure sensitive to the child's signals while also available and ready to give protection when the child requires it. The features that characterise this style are: confidence in exploring the world, belief of being lovable, ability to endure long separations, less fear of abandonment, confidence in their abilities and in the abilities of others, positive sense of Self, and a positive perception of others. The predominant emotion is joy.

Insecure avoidant attachment style: this style is characterised by the belief that the person, when asking for help, will not only fail to meet the availability of the attachment figure, but will even be rejected. In doing so, the child builds his own experiences relying exclusively on himself, without the love and support of others, even seeking emotional self-sufficiency, with the risk of constructing a false-self. This style is the result of a figure that constantly repels the child every time he approaches in search of comfort or protection. The features that characterize this style are: insecurity in the exploration of the world, the conviction of not being loved, the perception of the secondment as "predictable", a tendency to avoid relationships due to a conviction of rejection, apparent exclusive self-confidence and no help requests, apparent positive sense of Self, and a sense of the other as negative and unreliable. The predominant emotions are sadness and pain.

Insecure anxious ambivalent attachment style: for the person, there is absence of the assurance that the attachment figure is available to answer a call for help. For this reason, the exploration of the world is uncertain, hesitant, marked by anxiety, and the child being inclined toward separation anguish. This style is promoted by a figure that is available on some occasions but not on others, and by frequent separations, or even threats of abandonment, used as a means of coercion. The features that characterise this style are: insecurity in the exploration of the world, the conviction of being unlovable, the inability to endure prolonged separations, abandonment anxiety, lack of confidence in their abilities and confidence in the

abilities of others, a negative and unreliable sense of Self (due to distrust of himself that comes from the attachment figure), and sense of others being more positive and reliable. The predominant emotion is guilt.

Disoriented / disorganised attachment style: Those considered as disoriented / disorganised are the children who, for instance, appear apprehensive, cry and throw themselves on the floor, bring their hands to their mouth with shoulders slumped in response to the return of their parents after a brief separation. Other disorganised children, however, manifest conflicting behaviours, like running in circles while they simultaneously approach the parents. Others instead appear disoriented, frozen in place, while having a trance-like expression. Also to be considered as cases of disorganised attachment are those where the children move towards the attachment figure with their head turned in another direction, so as to avoid their gaze. This style is caused by a caregiver that often induces concern and fear in the child.

As mentioned above, all normal children will "get attached" within the first 8 months of life, and they complete this process within their second year of life. The indicator par excellence that the attachment bond is established is the presence of *separation anguish*.

Thanks to the attachment theory, the importance of ties and their ability to give security, confidence and hope to the person, both in himself, in the world and in others, is now recognised.

The initial theories considered the bond of attachment as the link with the primary figure (almost always the mother) who takes care of the newborn; the quality of the developed attachment bond depends on the adult's availability to meet the child's needs. That bond would then be internalised and would provide a guide and relational representation: on the basis of those first experiences, the "*internal working models*" are built (I.W.M.). The I.W.M. have the function of directing the individual's interpretation of the information coming from the outside world, and guiding his behaviour in new relational situations.

In the last few years, the initial theory has been developed, and it has highlighted the importance of *multiple attachments*. Most of the babies in two-parent families develop attachments to both of their parents at about the same time (6–8 months), even though most mothers are much more involved than fathers in caring for and interacting with their infants. However these differences in levels of involvement do have an impact. In fact, most infants establish a hierarchy of attachment figures, such that the adults most involved in interactions (typically, mothers) rank higher than secondary attachment figures, including fathers. These preferences are most likely to be evident when infants or toddlers are distressed, sleepy or sick, and can choose which attachment figures to seek. The multiple attachments concept made it possible to overcome the deterministic point of view, where there is an attachment bond with a single figure of occurrence. It also highlights the possibility that the person develops multiple bonds of attachment in his life, which allows the amendment and enrichment of the experiences of the primary bond. We can, therefore, conclude that the meeting with *significant people*, able to respond to the other's needs, can help change the lives of people who lived deprived of attachment bonds. These meetings can help them to regain the confidence that they have been lacking, "earning" a secure attachment style and becoming the so-called "earned adult".

The attachment bonds are hierarchically organised, and during the development, are subject to change. The same parental bond, over time, might take second place to the sentimental and emotional bonds with other figures. It has not been established exactly when the transition from the parents' attachment to the peer's attachment occurs. However, some attachments

tend to be stronger than others, so that when more than one is available, some of these attachment figures are preferable to others, especially when infants are under stress.

How do we promote safe attachment?

Numerous research studies have consistently shown that secure attachments in children are associated with sensitive caregiving, as well as with the capacity to consider the infant's thoughts and feelings (to be "mind-minded"). Caregivers need adequate social and physical conditions to support them in providing the type and level of care that promotes positive attachment.



AVSI's experience in Lebanon with Syrian refugees has shown that Syrian caregivers need help in order to promote positive attachment with their children. In fact, very often, the social operators noticed some negative behaviours from which we can mention:

- a relationship characterised by verbal and corporal violence.
some mothers taking awareness sessions in Child Protection Sector had confessed to daily beating their children for many reasons: playing loudly, being lazy, ignoring parents' indications,...
- a relationship in which the child doesn't get his rights from his parents (ex. boys are sometimes forced to work and girls to be married early).
- a relationship in which the child isn't recognised as a child but as a substitute to a caregiver.
When doing outreach, many times, the social operators met very young girls (7 years old and up) left alone to take care of younger siblings and to do household chores.
- a differentiation in the way of behaving between caregivers and children according to their gender and age.



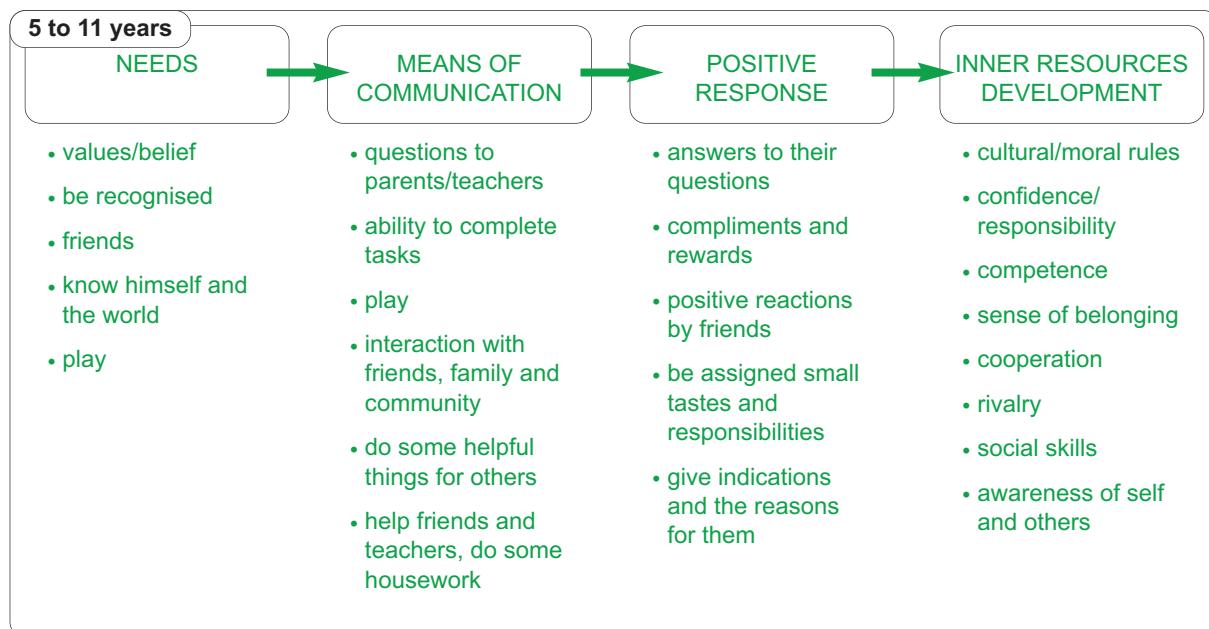
In the context of AVSI's work with refugees, the operator should be well trained in parenting since on one hand, he/she will often have to be an example when dealing with children, and on the other hand, need to discuss this issue with caregivers.

1.2.1.3 Attachment styles summary

	CAREGIVER	CHILD
SECURE ATTACHMENT	sensitive to the needs and to the signals of distress from the child.	balance between proximity and exploration; internal self-confidence and confidence in general. He shows signs of separation discomfort, but upon his return to the mother, he himself desires to be consoled.
INSECURE AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT	insensitive to the child's signals; rejecting physical contact.	does not expect an appropriate response from the mother; detachment contact avoidance. Excess of autonomy; indifference to separation.
INSECURE ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT	unpredictable responses, dictated more by their needs than by the child's.	uncertain of maternal availability, he cannot relate to her as a secure base, and he is completely absorbed by her. Strong separation discomfort, then inconsolable at the mother's return.
DISORIENTED/ DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT	dominated by unresolved traumatic experiences, not responding to the child's needs.	does not have stable strategies. Contradictory behaviour, misguided, stereotyped and asymmetrical actions, freezing, immobility, disorientation.

1.2.2 Personal development from 5 to 11 years old

The child becomes more aware of himself and of his surroundings.

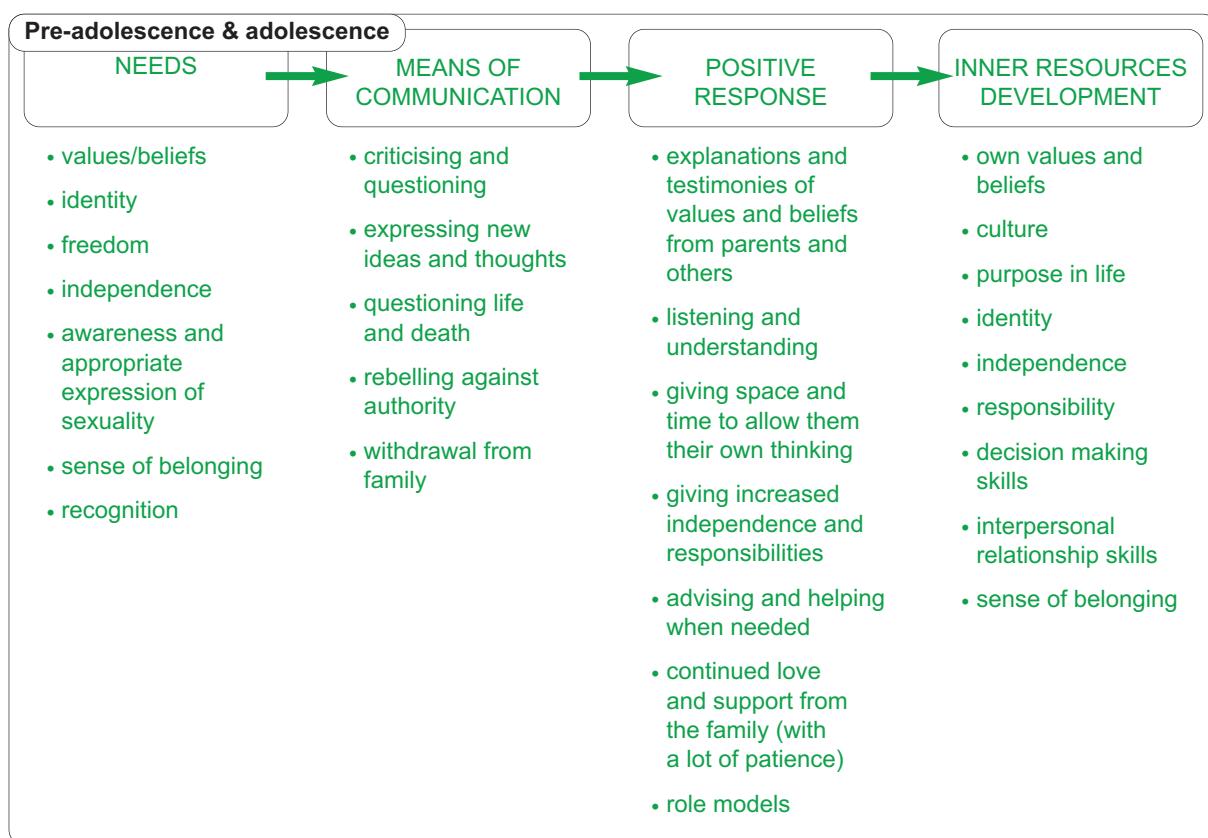


At around 4-5 years old, the child becomes more aware of himself, of his own self and of his own identity, even the sexual one. The concept of himself includes "I" as a separate entity from others, that begins to develop from birth; an ego that begins to have specific characteristics of sex, nationality, and a sense of self-esteem (I positively or negatively judge these characteristics of mine). The child communicates this need through a system that becomes more complex. He is curious and asks questions about the reasons why, and here he begins to take on small responsibilities such as helping friends and some adults figures of reference (parents, teachers).

Starting schooling, the child also begins to engage systematically in cognitive skills (math, memory efforts, reading, writing...) and relational skills (he spends many hours outside the house, he must follow different rules, knows many children his age). At this age, the child strengthens his cognitive development, passing through the concrete operations to the full use of inductive logic. During this period, he also chooses the roles and styles of play, the tendency to control is made up, and the level of sociability and popularity among peers. At around seven, the fear of death, or of his family members appears sometimes particularly pressing, which become an important concept with which to compare and question himself.

1.2.3 Personal development during pre-adolescence and adolescence

Adolescence and pre-adolescence (for girls begins at around 10 years old, and for boys at around 12) are terms that must be used in the historical and cultural context to which they refer. In this phase, the rapid physical and cognitive changes make this period particularly problematic, and can lead to feeling strong and conflicting emotions, along with feelings of insecurity or excessive security.



At this stage, the adolescent develops the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically, doing generalisations. In this phase, he begins to be interested in ideas, future realization, and political, religious and social problems. The adolescent develops and strengthens the sense of identity that is influenced by relationships (positives and negatives) with others; from his family history, traditions, culture, religious beliefs, and political views, to social values and cultural norms; by the role he holds and by his physical and mental wellbeing.

During this time, the search for a personal identity gives the adolescent a strong sense of who he is, what he believes in, and what he can or cannot do. If there is no formation of an identity, uncertainty can lead to anti-social behaviour that reflects a constant insecurity. The process of separation from the family finds its maximum expression in adolescence, and is gradual, while relationships with peers become more important. However, despite the attempt of the adolescent to develop independent thinking and take responsibility for his actions and choices, he continues to rely on parents for a while as a source of security, council and material support.

The teenager is no longer a child, but not yet an adult. This double movement that rejects his childhood identity, and searches for a new stable picture of his new adult self, constitutes the essence of the "crisis" that every teenager goes through and manifests in different ways.

These modes include criticism and discussions of various topics, the affirmation of ideas and opinions, reflection on life and death, attitudes of rebellion and provocation against the figures representing authority, and departure from the family.

The resources developed in this age depend on the adult's ability and averilability to respond constructively to this stage of life by understanding and listening. These conditions, as said before, enable the development of resources such as the sense of identity, independence, responsibility, belonging, the creation of values, decision-making and problem-solving skills, as well as interpersonal skills.

These resources may strengthen the person's ability to faster growth through the years, not only of his own, but also of others, allowing the formation of a family.

1.2.4 Personal development during adulthood

An adult has built many inner resources and begins to pass his resources to others by giving positive responses to other people's needs. However, an adult continues to learn new things and to develop and strengthen his inner resources.



Being aware of the responsibility that each AVSI operator has, he/she should make frequent efforts to develop his/her inner resources as part of his/her professional growth.



To be more aware of the responsibility that each AVSI operator has towards beneficiaries, each operator should reflect on the expression the beneficiaries have after the activity/action he/she is implementing.

These are some of the beneficiaries' expressions reported by AVSI operators:

- Children wait for AVSI operators before the activity begins.
- Children do some drawings addressed personally to an operator, writing the operator's name on it even if they can barely write.
- Children offer the operators flowers.
- Children express verbally their love and their happiness when being with an AVSI operator.
- Children rush to present greetings to the AVSI operators when they see him/her passing by.
- Adolescents help AVSI operators by pointing out other youths who can benefit from the activities and accompanying him/her to meet them.
- Parents reporting their children's interest in the operator's words, advice and opinions.

1.3 The world of the person and his resilience

As mentioned above, the person develops individual and community resources for each different age group, according to the positive responses received to his needs. This contributes to his psychological wellbeing, the ability to design his present and his future, and to face difficult life situations.

These resources can be summed up in the following scheme:

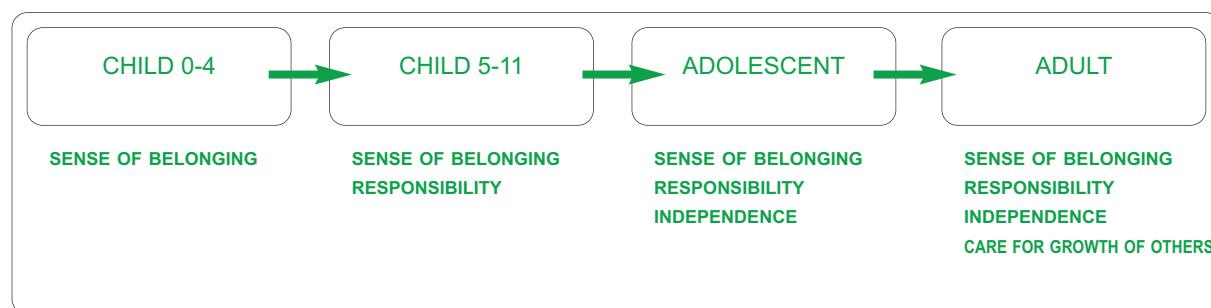


Figure 1.4: Growth of inner resources by age

Example: From the sense of belonging we develop relationships, from independence and responsibility we develop “the value of ourselves” and the ability to act in real life.

These resources are the constitutive aspects in the formation and development of what we call the "**world of the person**".

These constitutive dimensions can be represented by three verbs (in singular or plural when referring respectively to the person or the community):

1. *I HAVE / WE HAVE* = relational/social dimension
2. *I CAN / WE CAN* = activities / action / skills capacity dimension
3. *I AM / WE ARE* = psychological, spiritual and cultural values dimension

We can represent the three constitutive dimensions of the world of the person in the three sides of a pyramid as seen in the figure 1.5.

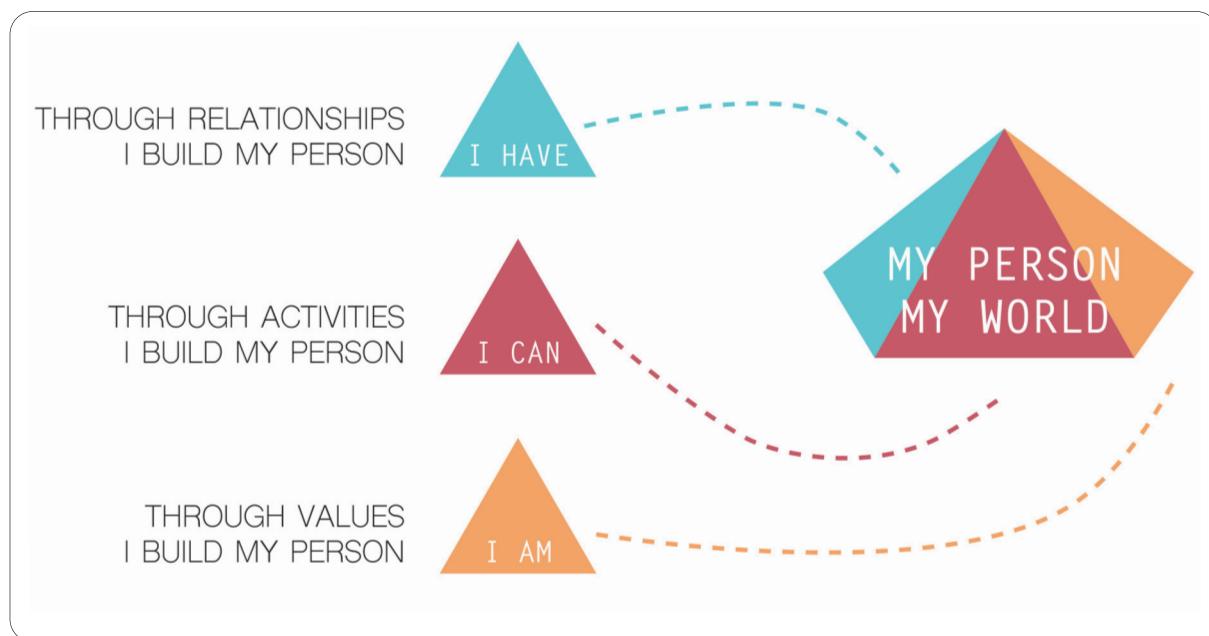


Figure 1.5: Three constitutive dimensions of each person's world

The psychosocial wellbeing and the harmonious development of the human being, continues to depend on the continuous interaction of these dimensions that mutually reinforce one another.

For instance, if for each age group we take the developed resources, and we place them in relation to each one of the three dimensions of the world of the person, we can see that the sense of belonging, which develops early in life, favours subsequent trusted relationships “*I HAVE*” and at the same time favours the sense of value and therefore self-esteem “*I AM*”. This will permit having the confidence to take in the reality of activities (leisure, work, etc...) and therefore enable “*I CAN*” acquiring skills, which in turn implement self-esteem “*I AM*” that promotes social skills.

These dimensions constitute the PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, shown at the base of the pyramid.

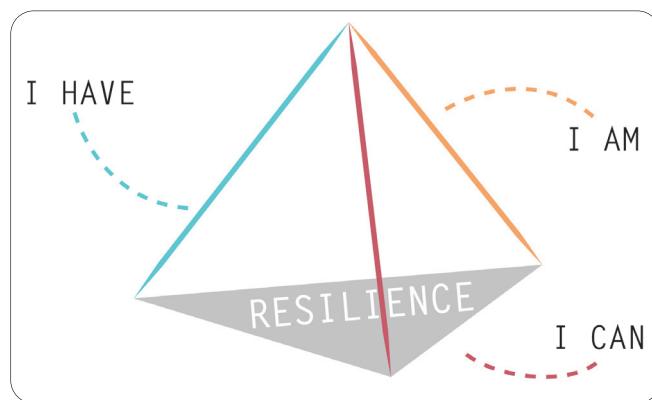


Figure 1.6: Three dimensions of the person's / community's world constituting personal and community resilience

In recent years, resilience is a concept of great importance for psychology and mental health in general.

Resilience is a term that comes from the Latin *resalio*, which means jump or bounce. In physics it indicates the capacity of a material to resist sudden shocks, very strong pressures or stress without breaking, or changing its own structure. It is the opposite of vulnerability.

In ecology and biology, resilience is the ability to self-repair after damage. In computing, resilience is the quality of a system that allows it to continue to operate in spite of faults related to defects in one or more of its constructive elements.

If you want to check it, you can try to test the resilience of wood or of a rubber band.

In psychology, Resilience is the capacity of a person, a group or a community to address, prevent, and overcome the negative effects of existential difficulties and end up reinforced by negative experiences (Grotberg, 1995).

According to Steven and Sybil Wolin (1993), resilience has seven characteristics:

- insight: the ability to examine ourselves, having difficult questions and answering them with sincerity;
- independence: the ability to keep a certain distance from physical and emotional problems, but without becoming isolated;
- relationship: the ability to establish intimate and satisfying relationships with other people;
- initiative: the ability to deal with problems, understand them and be able to control them;
- creativity: the ability to create order, beauty and goals, starting from chaos and disorder;
- humor: disposition of the spirit towards joy, that allows us to move away from the tension's focal point, and view events that affect us in a positive way;
- morality: refers to all the values accepted by a community at a determined time, that each person internalises throughout his life.

The factors that come into play in resilience are:

- the meaning we give to life
- determination to keep on going despite difficulties
- self-confidence and a limpid knowledge of our own abilities and limits
- ability to stay calm

- accept ourselves as we are, recognising our value
- interpersonal relationships quality of both within the family and with the community
- cultural, moral and spiritual values which give meaning to the existence of the person

Resilience is not a static quality, but rather an active process that unfolds in the dynamic relationship between the person and the context (social, relational, institutional). Resilience is never absolute, but it varies depending on the circumstances, the nature of the trauma, the context and the stage of life. It can also be expressed in different ways according to different cultures (Manciaux, Vanistendael, Lecomte & Cyrulnik, 2005).

The same event, depending on the moment in which it occurs, will not have the same effects. Like the person, it is different depending on the circumstances. Resilience overcomes difficulties, but does not make a person invincible. It is not a characteristic present throughout life: it depends on a convergence of variables that sometimes occurs and sometimes is absent (Anaut, 2003).

Resilient people are not, therefore, invulnerable, in the sense of being completely immune to adversity; rather, they are individuals who find in themselves, in human relationships and activities, the elements and strength to overcome difficulties. Only a few people appear resilient in all spheres of life, whereas, in most of them, such an ability can be observed only in specific areas (Luthar, 1997).



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 3 in the workbook.

Resilience is, therefore, the process by which certain people, families or groups in difficult situations, fight back against a negative event and keep their sense of mastery, enabling adequate coping strategies. Let us describe coping, because defining it allows us to grasp its difference from resilience.

The term COPING, from the verb “to cope” (deal with, react to) means:

- the set of cognitive and behavioural strategies used to face a difficult situation;
- the way that we emotionally adapt to a situation.

To address and overcome difficult and stressful experiences, it is necessary that new information coming from these experiences is processed until the potentially traumatic experience is assimilated and integrated into our present and future life. This is called “coping process” and is considered a normal process experienced by all people exposed to stressful experiences. The ‘normality’ of the process refers to the lack of a mental disorder, but does not imply that the psychological process of coping aimed at facing emotions such as helplessness or anger is a guarantee that in the future, these emotions may not reappear in determining circumstances.

The way people face violence, for example, depends on their culture, personality and the availability or lack of support from their family and community.

The individual's ability to deal with a stressful event can also be influenced by the style of coping used during this event.

The Canadian Mental Health Association defines three different coping styles:

- *task-oriented*: it is characteristic of people who tend to analyse the situation and deal with it in a direct way;
- *emotion-oriented*: it is characteristic of people that face, instead of the situation, their own emotional reactions and seek social support;
- *distraction-oriented*: it belongs to those who immerse themselves in work and activities, not thinking about the stressful situation.

Each of us is mainly characterised by one of these styles, although, depending on the circumstances, we can adopt one or the other (or both) or adopt them at different times because coping also has a timing feature.

This timing feature has been well illustrated by Beehr and McGrath (1996), who identified five time levels of coping in relation to the fact that coping is used before the stressful event, when it occurs, and after it has occurred. In timeline order, the authors divided the coping into:

- preventive, long before the stressful event has occurred or may occur (for instance, stop drinking alcohol to avoid the consequences of alcoholism);
- anticipatory, when the event is about to happen (for example, take an anxiolytic in anticipation of an imminent surgery);
- dynamic, while the event occurs (for example, adopt relaxation techniques to reduce an anxious state);
- reactive, after the event occurred (for example, change our lifestyle after myocardial infarction);
- residual, after a long time to counter the long-term effects (for example, contrast intrusive images related to a traumatic event that occurred a year before).

Instead, resilience involves the ability to cope with adverse situations and change our life by discovering new possibilities. Coping is one of the tools of a resilient person. We can say that when we drive a car, our resilience depends on our driving skills and the quality of the car. When we rush to get to an appointment on time, and if there is a lot of traffic at the time, the ability to recognise that we can take the shortest route is problem-focused coping, whereas resilience is our ability to drive and maintain the target to be reached, while also developing other strategies.

Resilience is also defined as the ability to recover while maintaining a reasonable level of adaptation, even in particularly unfavourable conditions of life (ability to be flexible and to resist shock).

Resilience affects our coping skills. We can add that resilience is not only the gradual psychological recovery before the negative even but is also a possibility of transformation and change in line with the wellbeing of the person.

Resilience is built through the dynamic interaction of the three dimensions constituting the world of the person, and of the resources they contain.

When one of these factors is fragile, other factors can help the person to overcome difficulties. Take, for instance, a child with a physical disability. Certainly the activities "I CAN" with his peers are limited, but if there are good relations with these same peers, with family members and the community "I HAVE / WE HAVE" and there are values of respect for human life "I AM / WE ARE", the child with a disability cannot only overcome this difficulty, but can also find a new dimension as part of the community.

This happens because we do not define the person for what he cannot do, but for what he is and has, managing to find constructive solutions for his fragile appearance. Striking examples are the Paralympic Games.



In our Lebanese context, the concept of resilience can be linked to the metaphor of the phoenix bird, a well known myth.

The phoenix myth

According to The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable 2006 (originally published by Oxford University Press 2006), phoenix (in classical mythology) is a unique bird, resembling an eagle but with rich red and gold plumage, that lived for five or six centuries in the Arabian desert (it is also known as the Arabian bird), after this time burning itself on a funeral pyre ignited by the sun and fanned by its own wings, and rising from the ashes with renewed youth to live through another cycle.



Ali is a young man of 18 years old met by AVSI in the Informal Tent Settlement (ITS) of Wazzani. Before escaping from Syria, he lost his leg in the war. He arrived in this ITS grieving for this loss that affects his whole life. In fact, due to his handicap, he wasn't able to continue all the activities he was used to doing "I CAN" and he was feeling down. However, each time AVSI operators had to organise activities for children in the camp, he was always present to offer any help needed. He was very appreciated by the children. AVSI recognized his capacity to deal with children and offered him the opportunity to be part of its team. This job helped Ali in reconstructing himself and finding more will to continue his life "I AM".



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete the exercises # 4 & 5 in the workbook.

1.4 Resilience and attachment

We have seen that one of the three dimensions of resilience is the psychological dimension "I AM". Its development influenced by attachment bonds created during the child's life with the reference figures.

The child who experienced a secure attachment has a better perspective of development and resilience: this child who was loved and was able to be loved as an adult, can become, in turn, a secure base of attachment. This means that through secure attachment, the three aspects of resilience (relational, values and skills in action) develop harmoniously. It is clear that a child who has developed a secure attachment, recognises that an adult can help him to face difficulties, and has the ability to ask and to feel confident in implementing strategies that can help him to survive.

The avoidant, anxious-ambivalent or disoriented/disorganised attachment styles increase trauma vulnerability, because the opportunity to benefit from developing alternative tutors is reduced. For example, the avoidant child does not reward the adult, the ambivalent child exasperates him, and the disorganised one discourages him.

An environment full of different sources of safe attachment facilitates the development of resilience factors.



This is the AVSI operator role in all sectors of work (Protection, Education, Nutrition, etc.), to be primarily a source of safe attachment to every single child met.

1.5 The IASC Pyramid

So far, we have tried to provide the necessary information useful to explaining the theoretical approach developed by Resilience Onlus over the years, often in collaboration with AVSI foundation in several countries. The approach's effectiveness seems to be validated by the results obtained in recent years in many countries where the model has been presented. However, this reference model and the resulting tools developed (see Part III - Psychosocial tools), require an implementation set-up standardized by guidelines shared by the community of organisations that operate in emergency and development contexts of the psychosocial sector.

This implementation set-up is provided by the IASC system (Inter-Agency Standing Committee), which we will mention in this paragraph.

The IASC is the primary coordination system between agencies dealing with humanitarian assistance.

It was founded in 1992 in response to the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations No. 46/182. The IASC guidelines offer the essentials needed to facilitate an integrated approach to the urgent problems in psychosocial and mental health, which matches the holistic approach of Resilience Onlus well, described in the first part of the manual.

The IASC model is perfectly inserted in the IASC pyramid at different levels:

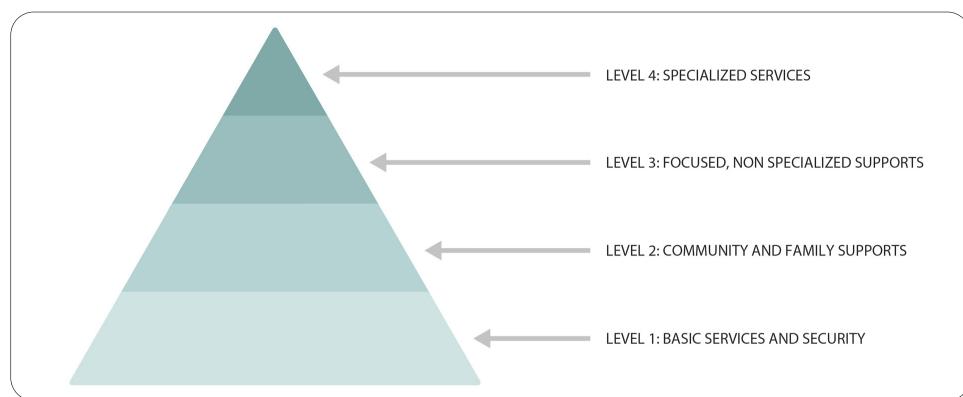


Figure 1.7: Intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies

Level 1: Basic services and security, is the basic level, designed to preserve people's safety and dignity by enabling local social networks.

Level 2: Community and family supports, targeted at small numbers of people who are able to maintain a sufficient level of psychological wellbeing, if supported at the community's points of reference and if followed up in the family.

Level 3: Focused, is the level at which small numbers of people require an intervention by both the community and individual work by a trained and specialised staff.

Level 4: Specialised services, is the specialised intervention reserved for sections of the population who have serious difficulties in conducting basic activities of daily living.



AVSI has experienced, in every region of intervention or gateway, the work on different levels according to the IASC pyramid.

For example, in the Informal Tent Settlement (ITS) of Marj el Khokh, some of the actions that were held on different levels were:

- on level 1, AVSI had distributed food parcels, cleaning products, stoves & fuel oil, blankets and mattresses,...
 - on level 2, AVSI had identified the necessity of the support of:
 - vulnerable children for whom Psychosocial support activities were organised
 - vulnerable woman for whom awareness sessions and vocational trainings were proposed.
- Part of the support on this level of the pyramid was also the networking work with other NGOs working in the same area.
- on level 3, AVSI has identified some critical cases of children who required specific intervention. A case management procedure was opened in order to help each child by supporting him and his family.
 - on level 4, some of the critical cases presented by children were followed by a psychologist in order to overcome severe difficulties and traumas.

The PSS approach, proposed in this manual, can be used at every level of the IASC Pyramid. The tools proposed fit with the first three levels of the pyramid, because the fourth level requires the knowledge as well as the employment of more specialised tools.

The proposed activities, in fact, often take into account the whole community as well as the particular vulnerable groups. When intervening within a community, we act on its relational components and on its values and activities. In summary, we believe that, with different degrees of specialisation, the instrumental device, developed starting from the world of the person's model, is perfectly inserted into the IASC pyramid at all the different levels considered.

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Chapter 2

THE BOND BETWEEN VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE



48 PAGE BLANCHE

Resilience does not match “social competence” or “positive mental health”; it is not an observable psychological trait or a single quality.

Resilience is essentially a quality that the person acquires in the course of development that comes from life experiences where risk factors and protective factors, both personal and social, interact. The presence of these factors makes resilience multidimensional and multi determined, being the result of the interaction of several factors. In fact, there aren't, for instance, only genetic predispositions, which may occur in the temperament, intelligence, personality or in the different susceptibility to possible environmental events, but also social skills and self-esteem, which are interwoven with a number of environmental factors (family ties, expectations, learning, type and quantity of stressful environmental events, etc.).

2.1 Risk factors and protective factors

Risk factors are those that endanger the personal development process, while the protective factors are those that promote a healthy development. The protective factors are the reassuring elements that, at the individual, family and community levels, strengthen a person's ability to resist and transform in the face of stressful life events, stimulating skills and adaptability. The protective factors depend on the individual's inherent capabilities and on the relational environment in which he lives. Table 2.1 summarises the most important ones.

	RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
PERSON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-esteem • Difficulty to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships • Poor attachment to parental figures • High level of anger and aggression • Inadequate expectations relative to themselves and to others • Mental Illness • Destructive Behaviours • Hyperactivity • Use of psychoactive substances • Social isolation • Scholastic failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open to social relations • Good intelligence • Autonomy • Problem solving skill • Ability to set goals and be able to reach them • Good self-esteem • Ability to modulate angry and aggressive emotional reactions • Ability to realistically consider personal opportunities and those of others • Mental health
FAMILY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong family disagreements • Absence of one parent • Abuse • Alcoholism • Anti-social behaviour • Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesion • Emotional support • Involvement in social activities and awareness of their own value • Co-parenting • Deep bond with their children during childhood • Support from extended family and friends • Economic Autonomy
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Highly populated urban areas • Frequent relocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of peer groups in activities of solidarity in the school and the community • Initiatives to promote social cohesion, solidarity and participation • Interventions aimed at promoting the person's well-being • Material support for groups with economic difficulties, offering employment

Table 2.1 Main risk and protective factors on personal, family and community level



The main risk factors reported by AVSI operators on a PERSONAL LEVEL are:

FOR CHILDREN/ADOLESCENTS

- Refugee children with special needs who do not have any education center / school that can welcome them.

Usually, when AVSI team identifies these cases, it is possible to keep them in classes, integrated with other children, and accompanied by shadow teachers who will help each of them to follow the class's rhythm.

- Refugee children out of school for more than 2 years and who need to continue schooling with younger children. This fact usually affects their self-esteem.

- Children under 5 years who have not had any vaccination, with parents un aware of the risks this involves.

On this issue, AVSI team has made a lot of effort to spread the word on the importance of vaccination.

- Working children, and sometimes having bad child labor conditions such as long working hours, a very low income, and exposure to many other risks (harassment, violence, etc.).

Recognising the importance of accompanying these children, AVSI operators made an effort to do so by changing their activity schedules in order to welcome them during their spare time.

- Engaged adolescents waiting for marriage.

AVSI operators organise awareness sessions on early marriage for these girls and for women, to make them aware of its negative effects, and trying to begin a change in this dominant mentality.

FOR WOMEN

- Women who are single mothers in the ITS, especially with the ultimate migration of husbands

AVSI team identifies these women and supports them in many ways orientation for extra resources, welcoming them in community activities etc...

- Pregnant women in the ITS not having access to health care services

AVSI team provides these women with vitamins and minerals while sensitising them on the importance of medical follow ups. Some of these women were as well oriented for primary health centres

In the Syrian refugee context in Lebanon, one of the frequent risk factors suffered by a child/adolescent at FAMILY LEVEL is the violence used against her by her parents/caregivers. *AVSI operators report frequent violence as a way of communicating, but also as a behavior.*

This violence is more highlighted on a gender basis, where girls/women suffer much more severely from this situation, living in a patriarchal system.

AVSI operators in Nabatieh encountered some hard conditions of poverty while working with Syrian refugee children at the FAMILY LEVEL. They report it below:

A little girl, one of the participants of PSS activities in Nabatieh Fawka Centre, brings a sandwich with her made of oil and salt. When she received a snack, she did not eat it... Her mother was waiting for the biscuits inside the snack's bag in order to feed her younger child.

Another little girl arriving to Nabatieh Fawka Centre in August, in the middle of summer, was wearing woolen clothes. She did not have anything else to put on that day.

As for the risk factors present at THE COMMUNITY LEVEL, living in a camp presents a risk for any resident (regardless of age and gender distinctions) because of:

- hard living conditions present (lack of food, lack of basic necessities).
- living in a closed society dominated by habits and traditions inconsistent with children's rights (regarding the devaluation of education, early marriage for girls, ...) and where no other perspectives/role models and alternate ways of thinking are present.

As seen in table 2.1, in relation to the person, we recognise his intelligence, social skills, self-esteem, the attachment style that developed with the caregiver, the coping strategies, the locus of control¹, empathy, hope and all other important aspects seen previously in the world of the person (chapter 1). Among the protective factors related to the environment, we can recognise, for instance, the relationship with loving parents, care, services available in the community, the mental health of family members, and the extent and quality of the social network.

Risk factors challenge the person to find adaptation strategies in order to face and overcome critical situations. The concept of risk factors include genetic, biological, psychological, environmental and socioeconomic factors, associated with an increased likelihood of poor adaption. There are not just innate factors, but also factors that develop during the course of growth and life, such as mental illness, quality of attachment, difficulty relating with peers and adults, and a poor ability to handle stress. Regarding family, both structural and functional variables are relevant: the economic situation, deviations, lack of affection, and suffering from trauma such as sexual abuse or physical abuse. Once again, we can see the dimensions' involvement in the world of the person.

The risk factors have a cumulative effect in influencing the person's development from childhood to adulthood. They do not necessarily cause damage in the development phase, but make the occurrence of behaviours and problematic situations more likely. What distinguishes a high-risk person from another is not the amount of exposure to a single risk factor, but a life story characterised by the presence of multiple risk factors. It is therefore the number of risk factors to which he is exposed, and their combination exerting a deleterious effect on adaptation and development. Furthermore, the concept of risk only describes a condition of probability, and it is good to keep in mind the differences between potential and actual risk. For instance, one of the risk factors often considered is the socioeconomic factor, but children living in poor households may not necessarily experience poor health, or that the uncomfortable situation in which they live will endure throughout their childhood, as it may only be a fleeting moment.

It is important that the operator knows and evaluates the risk and protective factors specific to each person, which is beneficial to creating an appropriate intervention.

Resilience in the face of aversive situations thus appears to depend on a combination of interactive risk factors and protective factors that are personal (e.g. self esteem), family-related (eg. family interactions) and social (eg. community support systems).



In the "Practical Guidance for Child Protection Case Management Services In the Emergency Response in Lebanon" issued in May 2014, the risk assessment guide notes four types of risks and their definition as:

- High risk (level 1) when the child is significantly harmed or in immediate, serious risk of harm;
- Medium risk (level 2) when the child is harmed or at risk of serious future harm;

¹ A person with *locus of internal control* believes that his behavior influences and determines external events.

- Low risk (level 3) when the child is at risk of harm and when monitoring is required;
- No risk (level 4) when the child is no longer at risk and no further monitoring is required.

The type of harm/risk identified in this manual are defined as below, with indicators for categorising each identified case (beneficiary) by the level of risk.

- Violence (physical abuse)
- Abuse (sexual and emotional abuse)
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Psychosocial distress (parent not coping, or not protective and/or no services involved)

2.2 Vulnerability

Vulnerability, however, is a psychosocial phenomenon in which risk factors outweigh protective ones.

Vulnerability cannot be defined without reference to an event that threatens the physical or mental integrity of the world of the person. For instance, people living in coastal or river areas may be vulnerable to seasonal storms and floods, while the inhabitants of the countries with social, political and economic difficulties may struggle to have a sustainable quality of life due to internal conflicts or wars. Vulnerability becomes more evident when you have to face difficult life situations (war, economic crisis, natural disasters) and to which, at the personal and community levels, the imbalance between protective factors and risk factors causes a threat to the human's survival and dignity. This does not allow the person to adapt, to face and to overcome critical conditions resiliently.



The “Practical Guidance for Child Protection Case Management Services In the Emergency Response in Lebanon” issued in May 2014, also identifies four categories of highly vulnerable children as:

1. Unaccompanied and Separated Children
2. Adolescent pregnancy/ Child parent
3. Child who is disabled or chronically ill
4. Domestic violence present in the home



When an AVSI operator meets a potential vulnerable beneficiary, he/she should be aware of the safe identification and referral mechanisms, and behave accordingly. He/she should also be aware of the Case Management Services that include the referral pathways and the Case Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) applied in his country. Obviously, the AVSI operator should work accordingly.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 6 in the workbook.

It should be specified that we cannot merely consider protection factors as the positive equivalent of risk factors, because the factors involved are different, as is the interaction between the elements, and not just every element by itself, in order to have a significant effect on the person's growth and wellbeing. For instance, for a child, having alcoholic parents is a growth risk factor, but having other significant caregiving figures (e.g. grandparents, uncles and teachers) allows the child to grow in a balanced way.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercice # 7 in the work-book.



Fadi, a 7 year old boy fled Syria with his parents and his two siblings when he was 2 years old. AVSI operators met him in AVSI's educational centre in Ghazieh-Saida. These were some of his protective and risk factors:

	Personal level		Family level	
	Protective factors	Risk factors	Protective factors	Risk factors
Health		Congenital anomaly on the left arm	Good relationship between Fadi and his parents	
Personal factors			Parent's awareness of Fadi's difficulties	
Proper development		Low self esteem (lack of eye contact)		
Activities during spare time		Rejection of being in classes and participation in educational or recreational activities		
Relations with others		Rejects all type of communication with his teachers		

Fadi was a vulnerable child, very affected by his congenital anomaly. He had never been to school, having had one bad experience that had completely blocked his desire to go back again to school. An intervention plan was fixed by the AVSI operator in order to help Fadi build back his resilience. After a few months of intervention, Fadi showed great signs of growing resources: he enhanced his communication skills in more than one level: he began to make eye contact, to express his happiness and satisfaction, to play with his mates and to participate in class. Additionally, he gained self-confidence and began to take initiatives.

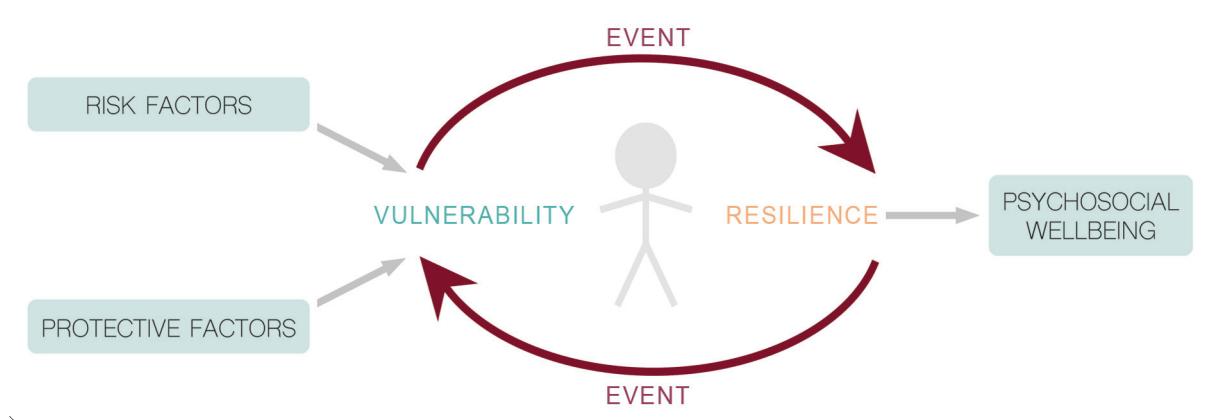


Figure 2.1: Summary of key concepts in the psychosocial approach

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Chapter 3

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL TRAUMA



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To treat the subject of trauma in a comprehensive way, we must first define the concept of stress. The existential condition of stress is, in fact, the condition that may give rise to trauma since it is the basic condition that outlines the response capacity of the person.

STRESS is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes body or mental tension. Stress is a normal response to a physical or psychological challenge, and it occurs when demands are made without being balanced with resources for coping.

In this regard, it is important to quote Selye (1956), who noted during his research, that the stress' characteristic physiological responses could also be evoked by psychological stimuli. We can therefore say, for example, that emotional pain over the death of a loved one, is an event that determines generalised responses of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, identical to those produced by physical stimuli, such as heat, cold, and physical pain. Reactions to stress depend on the characteristics of the stressful event (such as its potential controllability, its imminence, its expected duration and its danger). It also depends on the response capabilities of the person: his system of values, beliefs concerning both himself and the environment, the purposes that he determined "I AM", the ability to have meaningful relationships that support him in dealing with the situation so he does not feel alone "I HAVE", as well as on his physical health – "I CAN".

3.1 Features of stressful events

Physiological response to stress is not caused by only one kind of stimuli. The nature of the stressor and other characteristics, are also very important such as:

- intensity
- quality
- frequency
- duration

In other words, powerful, frequent and prolonged stressors are able to overcome the possible resistance of the person, and cause him chronic stress and diseases associated with it. While other stressors, which have a lower intensity and are perceived by the person for a few seconds, do not have negative consequences.

Generally the stressors can be divided into three categories based on their origin:

1. Social Stressors (reflecting a disturbance in the interaction between persons)
2. Environmental Stressors (entailing consequences on the physical and metabolic level)
3. Psychological Stressors (life changes, mourning)



AVSI operators identified some stressors lived by Syrian refugees.

1. Social stressors:

In Marjeyoun, the educational team recognised that Syrian children are exposed to pressure from the Lebanese community in school and any other mixed environment due to their differences.

In Saida, the educational team also highlighted the fact that Syrian children experience feelings of inferiority. They do not feel very accepted in Lebanon.

In the ITS of Marj el Khokh, one of the social stressors is the bad relations between all its residents. In fact, ITS are divided into different parts according to the birthplace of the residents or according to their political affiliation.

Another social streesor reported by many AVSI operators is the need, for some Syrian families, due to lack of income, to live with many other families in the same place.

2. Environmental stessors:

- Living in an unsalibrious area full of moisture, unheated, without even the minimum standard conditions for a decent home (for example, a garage).
- Living in ITS where residents are directly exposed to sewage and to waste accumulated near the tents.

3. Psychological stressors:

- Anxiety, confusion and uncertainty due to the need for displacement.
- Loss of homes and professions.
- Loss of some beloved persons from the family.
- Bad memories regarding destruction and death.

Concerning the quality of stressors, we can say with certainty that those caused by man, such as war or terrorist attacks, have consequences far more severe and long-lasting than natural stressors like disasters, such as an earthquake or a heavy snowfall.

From the point of view of duration, we can consider three categories of stressors:

- Daily stress is all the daily difficulties that are within our reach, keeping us alert and making life interesting (i.e. traffic on the way to work, etc.).
- Cumulative stress occurs when sources of stress become prolonged in time and their intensity interferes with the regular patterns of life (chronic disease).
- Acute stress (shock) appears when a situation is above the physiological and psychological response capacity (suffering a sexual assault).

Response capacity, i.e. resistance to stressors, as widely reported, is highly subjective and is closely linked to the world of the person and his resilience. Considering that, for example, a person can respond adaptively to a car accident with very serious physical consequences (car accident on the highway at high speed), and then resume an independent and quiet life in a short time, while, another person can remain very upset after a simple collision with a stationary vehicle.

3.2 Stress signals

Stress is the psychological and biological response to life events that requires the person to adapt to a new situation. Stress can generate the "fight or flight" response, which triggers a combination of biological reactions at a neurological and hormonal level. Emotions and reactions that follow a natural disaster are normal responses to an abnormal event.

As we said, these responses occur at several levels:

- Somatic: stomach pain, fatigue
- Cognitive: impaired concentration, losing track of time
- Emotional: anxiety, sadness

- Moral: life seems pointless
- Behavioural: alcohol abuse (unconsciousness), feeling useless
- Relational: isolating persons, and/or often in conflict with others

These responses are normal and usually disappear within a few weeks.

However, if these reactions continue for a prolonged period of time, due to the persistent intensity and duration of the stressors, they may give rise to physical and psychological diseases.

For many people, these reactions are temporary, and generally do not lead to chronic problems.

The solution is specific to each person, and it is important to recognise that these reactions are normal responses that we all experience in some form and intensity.

Such reactions should be reduced over time, and if that does not happen, then we have to look for help from qualified personnel (e.g. psychologist).

Stressful events may cause psychological and physical discomfort the more they strike against the quality, intensity and duration of the different aspects of the world of the person. An armed conflict, for instance, since it is man-made, strikes against the relational aspect "I HAVE", has an impact on daily activities "I CAN", and undermines spiritual and moral values "I AM". This causes different effects on every dimension of the world of the person, and these effects are simplified in the following graphical representations as seen in the figure 3.1 and figure 3.2.

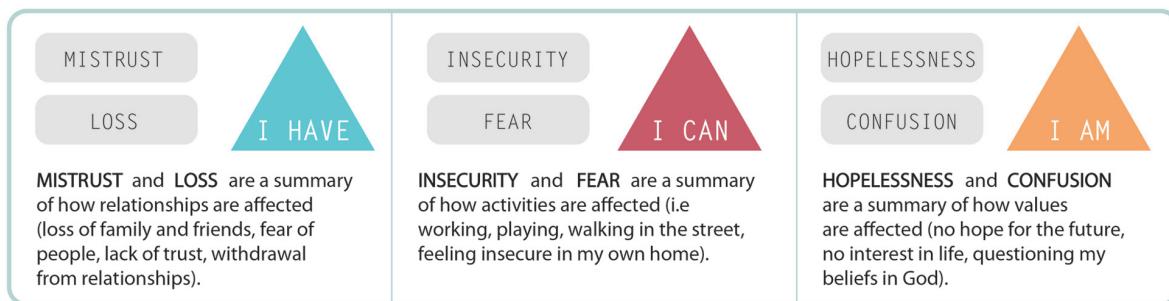


Figure 3.1: War effects on each dimension of the person's world

When affected by trauma, each person can forget his "I HAVE", "I CAN" and "I AM" because his perception of his own world is clouded by feelings caused by the trauma. The person should remember, or have someone to help him remember that the base – his resilience – is still there, even if he forgot it is there for a period of time and focused on what he lost and his painful situation.

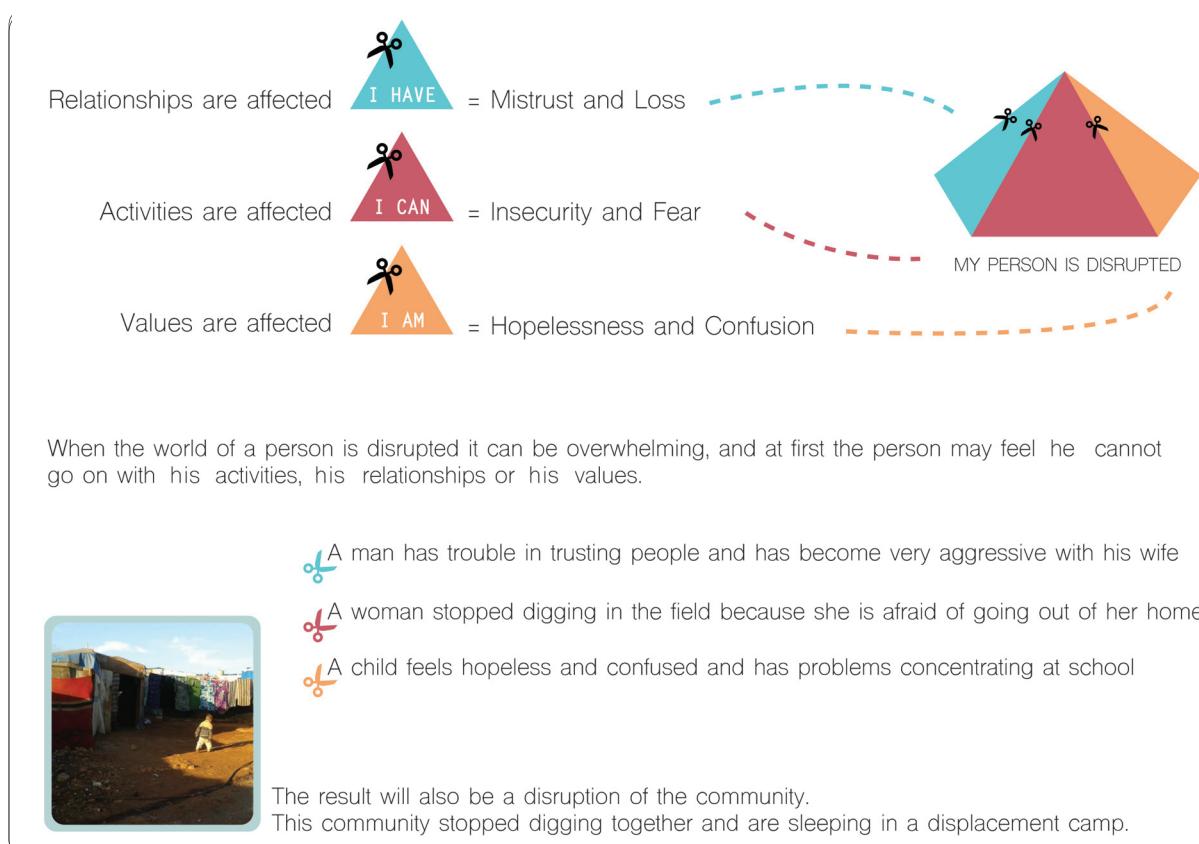


Figure 3.2: Disruption of the person's world after a traumatic event



AVSI Syrian beneficiaries shared, many times and on different occasions, some traumatic events that they lived through. AVSI operators reported them as:

A boy saw fighters from ISIS storming his village and killing every person they met, including his father.

A girl witnessed the death of her mother, who was shot by ISIS fighters.

A boy has a brother who talks very little and who suffered from amnesia after being electrocuted while attempting to escape the war in Syria.

A girl was suffering from burns on her face and body as a result of missile fragments during the Syrian war.

A boy suffers from a state of fear and panic because of the missile sounds and bombs heard during the war. This boy does not communicate with anyone; he is aggressive and does not go to school.

An adolescent girl was exposed to direct shelling and gunfire that threatened her and her family's lives.

All these reactions are normal responses to an abnormal situation (the war).

If the stressor exceeds the response capabilities, and therefore the person's resilience, he will be subjected to increased vulnerability to mental or somatic illness, and this situation can cause an Acute Stress Disorder, which, if it persists over time, becomes Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 8 in the workbook.

3.3 Stress evolution

According to the latest revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), a traumatic event is defined as that event which exposes the person to actual death or a threat of death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:

- a. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
- b. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
- c. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend.
In cases of actual death or a threat of death concerning a family member or a friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
- d. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)
(e.g., first responders collecting human remains, police officers handle many child abuse cases).

This does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work-related.

Examples of traumatic events should include the individual experience or the recurrence of more experiences like:

- being injured
- being threatened with death
- being subjected to serious human rights violations
- significant loss of people or things
- living in a context of armed conflict (crossfire, bombing)

or be a witness or learn about:

- torture
- sexual violence
- murder (strangers or loved ones)
- corpses, mutilation, serious injury

On a personal level, mental disorders after a traumatic event can give rise to an acute stress disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder.

An *Acute Stress Disorder* occurs if these symptoms last only a month, while the *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD) requires the duration of the symptoms to exceed a period of one month.

It is important to know that not all those who are experiencing a traumatic event will develop PTSD.

However victims of trauma related to physical and sexual violence have the greatest risk of developing PTSD. Women are almost twice as likely to develop PTSD comparing to men. This maybe due to the fact that women are more likely to be victims of interpersonal violence, such as rape or physical or sexual abuse, especially during childhood.

Epidemiological studies indicate a prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ranging from 1% to 9% in the general population. This percentage reaches 50-60% in groups of people exposed to traumatic events that are particularly intense, with a higher percentage among

women and children, who are the most vulnerable. This rate differs depending on the category of the events considered, ranging, for example, from 11% of the individuals involved in road accidents, 50% of victims of sexual violence, war veterans, etc. About 20-40% of these individuals will suffer from PTSD for more than a year; 15-20% for a period greater than two years; about half will develop a chronic form of the disorder (Qouta *et al.* 2003).

Psychological symptoms observed to make the diagnosis of a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be detailed in four categories:

a. Intrusive Symptoms

- Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s).
- Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dreams are related to the traumatic event(s).
- Dissociative reactions (e.g. flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring. (Such reactions may occur on a continuum, with the most extreme reaction being a complete loss of awareness of the present surroundings).
- Intense or prolonged psychological distress with exposure to internal or external cues that symbolise or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).
- Marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues that symbolise or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).

b. Avoidance Symptoms

- Avoidance of, or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).
- Avoidance of, or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, and situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).

c. Cognitive and mood impairment

- Inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s) (typically due to dissociative amnesia and not to other factors such as a head injury, alcohol or drugs).
- Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations of oneself, others or the world (e.g. "I am bad", "No one can be trusted", "the world is completely dangerous", "my whole nervous system is permanently ruined").
- Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that leads the individual to blame himself or others.
- Persistent negative emotional state (e.g. fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame).
- Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.
- Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others.
- Persistent inability to experience positive emotions (e.g. inability to feel happiness, satisfaction or loving feelings).

d. Hyperarousal

- Irritable behaviour and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation) typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression towards people or objects.
- Reckless or self-destructive behaviour.

- Hypervigilance.
- Exaggerated startle response.
- Problems with concentration.
- Sleep disturbance (e.g. difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless sleep).

To confirm that we are dealing with a post-traumatic disorder, there must be at least:

- an intrusive thought;
- an avoidance symptom;
- three hyperarousal symptoms;
- three symptoms among the cognitive and emotional impairment ones;

and they must impair social functions.



Sara is a 12 year old Syrian girl, she is the eldest child of her family that is composed of her parents, two sisters and a brother. Before coming to Lebanon, she was exposed to direct shelling and gunfire that threatened her and her family's lives in Syria. When she is not at school, she is taking care of her brother and sisters while her mother is working. Her father stays at home due to his mental disability. Sara showed intrusive, avoidance, cognitive and hyperarousal symptoms and was diagnosed with PTSD.

Sara is actually being followed by AVSI's case manager and psychologist in order to help her to overcome her trauma.

Furthermore, we can talk about **PTSD with dissociative symptoms**, i.e. when in response to a stressor, the individual experiences persistent or recurrent symptoms of one or two of the following:

1. **Depersonalization:** persistent and recurrent experiences of feeling detached from reality, and as if one were an outside observer of one's mental processes or body (e.g., feeling as though one were in a dream; feeling a sense of unreality of self or body, or of time moving slowly).
2. **Derealisation:** persistent or recurrent experience of unreality of surroundings (e.g., the world around the individual is experienced as unreal, dreamlike, distant or distorted).

The dissociative symptoms should not be attributed to the physiological effects of a controlled substance (e.g. blackout, behaviour during alcohol intoxication) or another medical condition (eg. complex partial seizures).

After this description of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the international scientific society criteria, we can reaffirm that experience is more likely to become traumatic the more it destabilizes all three elements of the world of the person (relationships, activities, values), and consequently the resilience of the individual and the community.

The DSM describes the kinds of symptoms, but does not take into account their manifestation in different cultures.

In particular, it does not consider how certain factors, such as environmental, social, political, economic, spiritual or moral factors, influence the definition of the trauma, its history and its symptomatic expression.

An approach to mental disorder becomes modern the more it considers, in the classification system, the cultural context and the identity of those involved.



In an official document published by UNHCR in 2015, entitled "Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians" A Review for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Staff Working with Syrians Affected by Armed Conflict, a table was published on p. 25 giving a brief overview of common expressions and idioms of distress, used by Syrian people with problems related to mental health, psychological wellbeing, social problems, and corresponding physical symptoms. It is reported here in order to help all AVSI operators in recognising symptoms experienced by Syrian beneficiaries.

TABLE 1: COMMON EXPRESSIONS AND IDIOMS OF DISTRESS IN SYRIAN ARABIC			
Arabic term or phrase	Transcription	Literal translations	Emotions, thoughts and physical symptoms that may be conveyed through these expressions
متضايق كثير هالفترة حاسس حالي متضايق ضاجع نفسی مخنوقة	- Meddayyek ketir hal fatra - Haassess haalii meddayyek - Dayej - Nafsi makhnouka	- I am very annoyed these days - I feel annoyed - To be cramped - My psyche is suffocating	- Ruminations tiredness, physical aches, constriction in the chest, repeated sighing - Unpleasant feelings in the chest, hopelessness, boredom
حاسس روحي عم نطلع	- Hassess rouhi 'am tetla'	- I feel my soul is going out	- Dysphoric mood, sadness - Inability to cope, being fed up - Worry, being pessimistic
قلبي- مقبروض انعمي على قلبي	- Qalb maqboud - In'ama 'ala kalbi	- Squeezed heart - Blindness got to my heart ¹	- Dysphoria - Sadness - Worry, being pessimistic
تعبان نفسياً- حاسس حالي تعبان- حالي تعبانة- نفس تعبانه	- Taeban nafseyan - Hassess halii ta3ban - Halti taebaneh - Nafs ta'bana	- Fatigued self/soul	- Undifferentiated anxiety and depression symptoms, tiredness, fatigue
ـ ما قادر اتحمل ـ الضغط على كثير- ـ مو قادر ركز من الصغوطات -	- Ma ader athammel - El daght 'alayy ketir - Mou kaader rakkezz men el doghoutaat	- Can't bear it anymore - The pressure on me is too much - Can't concentrate because of the pressure	- Feelings of being under extreme stress or extreme pressure - Helplessness
فرطت-	- Faratit	- I am in pieces	- General state of stress, sadness, extreme tiredness, inability to open up and to control oneself, or to hold oneself together
و الله مو شايف قدامي-	- Wallah mou shayef oddaamii	- By God, I can't see in front of me	- General state of stress, feelings of loss of options, loss of ability to project into the future, - Confusion, hopelessness
ـ حاسس الدنيا مسکرة بوشى ـ ما في شي عم يربط معى -	- Hases eddenia msakkra bwishi - Ma fi shi 'am yizbat ma'i	- I feel the world is closing in front of my face - Nothing is working as planned with me	- Hopelessness, helplessness, state of despair
ـ شو بدبي احكي...الشكوى لغير الله متنله ـ الحمد لله	- Sho baddi 'ehki... el shakwa le gher allah mazalleh - Al hamdullillah	- What am I supposed to say... it is humiliating to complain to someone other than God. - Praise be to God.	- Reference to shame in asking for help - State of despair, surrender
ـ ما بعرف شو بدبي اعمل بحالى	- Maa ba'ref shou beddi a'mel be halii	- I don't know what I am going to do with myself	- General state of distress - Feeling upset, edgy, helplessness - Hopelessness, lack of options
متوتر	- Mitwatter	- I feel tense	- Nervousness, tension
خفاف حاسس بالخوف مرعوب	- Khayfan - Hases bil khof Mar'oub	- I am afraid - I feel fear - Frightened, horrified	- Fear, anxiety - Worry - Extreme fear
معصب	M3asseb	- I feel angry	- Anger, aggressiveness - Nervousness

Sources: This table is based on suggestions by Arabic speaking mental health professionals, including: Alaa Bairoutieh, Tayseer Hassoon, Ghayda Hassan, Maysaa Hassan, Hussam Jefee-Bahloul, and Mohamed el Shazli.

Referring to the theories of attachment previously discussed, (see Chapter 1), some research (Crittenden, 1997; Herman et al., 1989; Hesse, Main, 2000) show that a safe attachment can protect the person from psychological consequences caused by traumatic events.

On the other hand, a child with an insecure and disorganized attachment gets through life with a burden characterised by emotions, information, images and experiences related to the trauma, and the fear that these characteristics may be on standby mode, and can be reactivated in the face of certain events.

3.4 The answer to trauma

There are different kinds of interventions that respond to people who are experiencing potentially traumatic serious crises. PSS includes a series of interventions that develop the situation from the early stages of a critical event.

The first step for humanitarian operators is called **Psychological first aid**, which helps to deal with the post acute stress disorder and prevents its development into PTSD.

Psychological first aid means all those interventions involving practical support and psychological comfort that try to ensure the safety of the affected population. The operator listens to the person who needs to talk about his experience, but it is not appropriate to consider treating psychological reactions at this stage. Ensuring connections with families and with significant others becomes important, and we should provide the greatest possible support in case of families separating.

All the psychosocial operators, in case of a disaster, should be familiar with the principles of psychological or emotional first aid.

According to Sphere Project (2011) and IASC (2007), the psychological first aid (PFA) consists of a supportive response to another human being who is suffering, and who may need support through listening.



AVSI operators have to be aware of the importance of listening to refugees even if they cannot ensure material assistance.
Listening to a beneficiary is already a form of help.



One of AVSI operators experienced the importance of listening to refugees. She reported that many times, just by wearing AVSI's vest in Nabatieh souk, many refugees approach her only to share their difficulties, knowing that AVSI's staff will listen to them without the possibility of providing them material assistance.

The components of psychological first aid are as follows:

- Comforting and consoling a person in need is the most important component of psychological first aid. This also means providing their basic needs (water, food, healthcare) and protecting the person from further threats to his integrity.
- Bringing together family and friends is important in order to reestablish the feeling of security. When reunification is impossible, it is useful to provide as much information as possible on relatives and friends, particularly if they were in danger or affected by traumatic situations. Guaranteeing a reunification with important figures of attachment may be essential for recovery in the acute phase, and in situations of adaptation to persistent existential discomfort.
- Giving the opportunity to carry out basic activities of daily life (such as cooking, environ-

ment cleaning, and small maintenance work). The activities during these phases of emergency can be productive or unproductive. The productive activities are reality-oriented and involve the survivor having a growing and active role (i.e. responsibility for a small group in a refugee camp). As soon as possible, survivors of a disaster should be encouraged to participate in simple but useful activities.

- Listening to people, but not forcing them to talk. Once the survival and safety of loved ones is assured, people may wish to share their experience with others, especially with those who have gone through the same vicissitudes and know the way to deal with them. Such sharing is often the beginning of the process to give meaning to the experience, and of the management of strong emotions that accompanies it. Furthermore, talk to others results in feeling understood, and starts to create security conditions that must be supported in the humanitarian organisations reality as well. The opportunity to talk about our experience with others should not be forced in any way. It is important to know that certain somatic and psychological reactions are a normal response to an abnormal life situation. A specific intervention should be provided only when these reactions create an evident and intense discomfort through various everyday aspects of the world of the person.

After describing this first intervention aimed at acute stress disorder, and before starting the development of psychosocial tools to help overcome the possible occurrence of PTSD, we must make three assumptions:

- a. The first is that a person with post-traumatic stress disorder lives as if the traumatic experience caused a rupture between the present and his life before the traumatic event, and which will therefore obstruct his planning for the future. Symptoms freeze the traumatic experience, making it always on-going and present, and failing to place it as a past experience. The person is unable to connect the symptoms to their origin, unable to evaluate the resources used in difficult moments of his life before that experience, and unable to recognize that having survived that experience shows that he has the capacity for resilience.

A kind of interruption occurs that we can represent in figure 3.3.



Figure 3.3: Interruption of a person's life journey after a painful situation

- b. The second assumption, is that in this interruption of our life's journey, we identify ourselves through the painful and traumatic experience that we lived through, no longer able to evaluate other aspects of our person.

This is why it is important to help people with this disorder to conduct an exercise in disidentification from the negative experience (reported as exercice n° 9 in the workbook). We can also apply this exercise to other moments of our lives, as it allows us to discover other elements of our own person.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 9 in the workbook.

- c. The third assumption is that, to overcome the trauma, we need to elaborate it through a process that goes through several steps, allowing the reconstruction of the world of the person.

This is what we call a LIFE WHEEL.

The Life Wheel is a way to summarise how people deal with difficult situations. It represents the steps a person goes through after a traumatic event, and can also be used in the case of mourning for a loved one. It describes the whole process of healing or rebuilding the world of the person. The Life Wheel shows stages of behaviour and feelings that are a normal reactions to difficult event in life. Each stage involves some particular feelings and reactions.

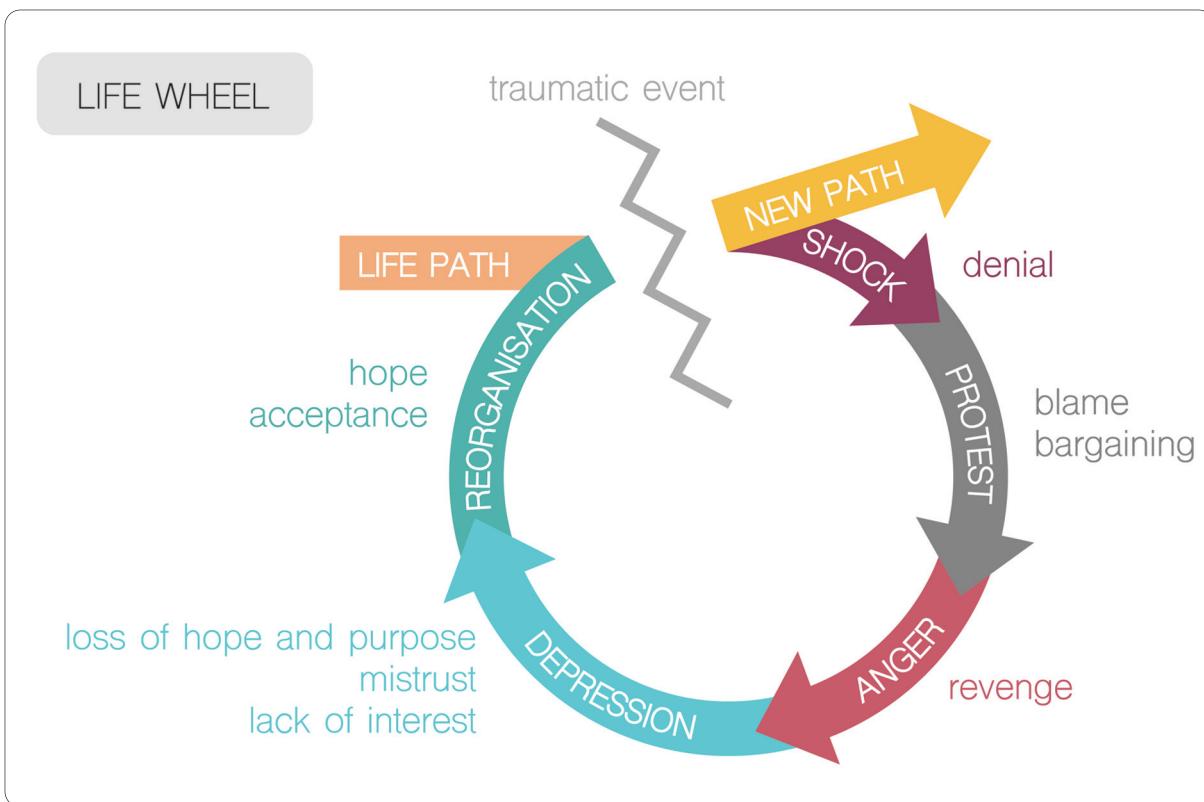


Figure 3.4: Life wheel: a way to explain the whole process of healing or rebuilding the world of the person

If the person passes each stage, then it becomes possible to build a new path for his life. The Life Wheel can be a useful tool for humanitarian operators, to know the steps a person goes through while experiencing a painful situation.

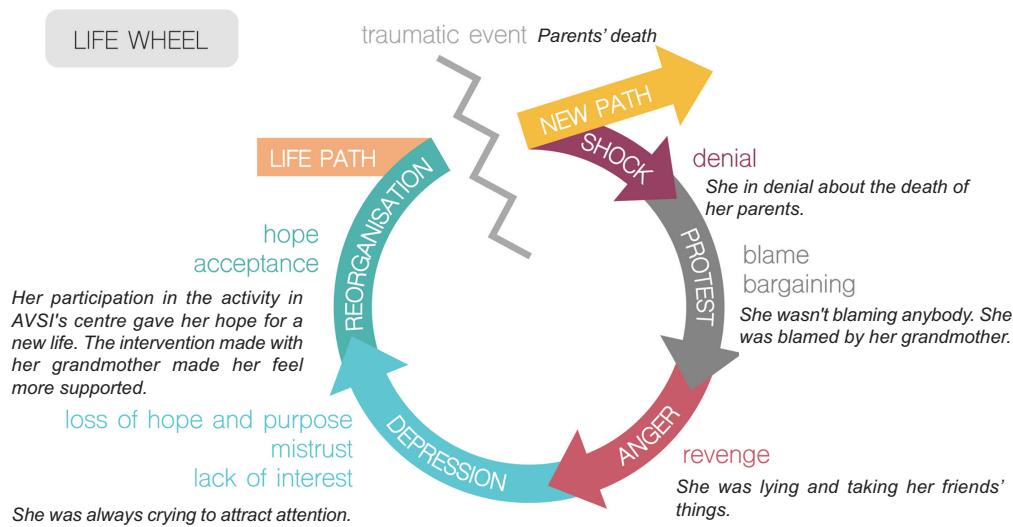


AVSI operators met, in one of the centers in Nabatieh, a young Syrian girl isolated and refusing to interact with other children.

After investigating the case, it was found that this girl witnessed the death of both her parents. Their house was demolished in front of her while she watched her mother carrying her younger, dying sister.

After having lived this traumatic event, she was welcomed by her grandmother with her four brothers and sisters, and displaced in Lebanon. Her grandmother was rude and violent in treating her and her brothers.

In the life wheel, we reported, as an example, the different steps taken by this girl.



In any case, only qualified professionals, using different treatments, can treat PTSD.

The humanitarian operator should be able to recognise symptoms of PTSD, and then refer the person to professionals in order to start a specific treatment.

There are many reasons why this may be difficult to refer:

- people who have experienced a severe traumatic event, may hope and believe that they are able to overcome any psychological problems by themselves;
- sometimes people feel guilty about what happened, and may mistakenly believe that they are somehow guilty of what happened and deserve the suffering that they are experiencing;
- sometimes the experience might be too personal, painful and embarrassing to expose to other people;
- some people try everything to avoid remembering the traumatic experience, especially while trying to return to "normal" activities of everyday life;
- PTSD disorders can cause the person to feel isolated from others, and make it difficult for him to ask for help;
- people with PTSD do not always connect the symptoms they feel with the traumatic event that caused them. In fact, the feeling of emptiness, anger, and anxiety, including somatic symptoms, often unexpectedly occur even after months or years after the trauma;
- sometimes people do not know what kind of help is available, and whom to turn to.

For psychosocial operators that help people affected by stressors and potentially traumatic events, it is useful to undertake as many participatory programs as possible, because they help to strengthen the person and community's resilience, and therefore strengthen the world of the person's dimensions. In fact, psychosocial programs only focused on reducing the symptoms, tend not to consider the holistic view of a person's wellbeing. Instead, the programs that are aimed at strengthening resilience, act on the world of the person's components. These components are represented by the following factors:

- **Materials**

Trauma survivors often have many survival issues. Those who have enough food and water, have adequate health and housing, have less stress factors and are therefore in a better position to face eventual psychological problems as well. The promotion of physical wellbeing facilitates a psychosocial program's successful outcome, as it allows the expression of psychological coping strategies.

- **Mental**

About 80% of people are able to cope with their traumatic experiences without external support. The normal psychological coping mechanisms are sufficient for most people to overcome the consequences of traumatic experiences. The coping process is promoted by a feeling of security and control of the situation, and it also facilitates the self-help competence.

- **Social**

Social support affects health mediating stress' negative effects.

Many elements make up social support, including personal support, social participation in groups and associations, and the company of family and friends. A positive social environment in the community could, for example, be promoted by cohesion initiatives, such as the participatory organisation in the construction of refugee camps, the ability to care for and accept vulnerable people, the presence of a social order and a respect for cultural and community roles (e.g. by continuing traditional activities and typical festivities). This promotes community resilience, because it improves the sense of stability, the ability to control reality, the possibility of self-help and finally, nurtures a sense of belonging.

- **Spiritual**

Spirituality has been defined in many ways. The term "spirituality" has been preferred over the term "religion", because it describes a wider range of religious experiences, even outside of organised groups. However, spirituality and religion are inseparable, because spirituality is an essential element of religious life. Spirituality presupposes the existence of a transcendent dimension, and the ability of the human mind to relate to it. Modern medicine, with its technological advances, is endlessly fascinated with how diseases occur, but it cannot answer the question "why me?"

Traumatic experiences can lead to major changes in the person's inner belief system. These changes can become powerful motivators for some people to support the peace process or, if the need for vengeance prevails, to become a destructive force against social networks. We often promote spiritual health by facilitating the expression of religious rituals, or providing access to places of contemplation as an important element of the healing process.

- **Moral**

Moral values can play an important role in overcoming the mass of violent negative psychosocial effects. For example, the will to contribute to the greater good (I sacrifice myself for my country, for the sake of my children and others), can provide meaning to, or a motivation to face, the situation.

Sometimes, moral values are placed above the need for retaliation, and are used to strengthen

the sense of controlling the situation for the survivor. For instance, the adherence to a moral code ("do not do to others what was done to me"), promotes compassion and the recognition of rules.

All these factors are included in the programs defined by the Psychosocial support Program (PSSP, see chapter 1) and are directed towards the persons, their families and community, while respecting the values and culture to which they belong. This strengthens the ability to face and overcome critical life situations, preventing the onset of mental disorders.

To realise this process, we will use specific methodologies and operational tools that will be presented in the second part of the manual, and that will aim to develop the resilience of the person and the community.

It is essential for any psychosocial operator to have some basic qualities that facilitate a relationship with the beneficiaries (Chapter 6).



AVSI interventions with Syrian refugees were diversified and covered many of these factors.

- **Materials:** AVSI has done food distributions for hygiene, dignity kit, stationary, school bags, blankets, mattresses, stoves and fuel, and ensured transportation for participants in any activity.
- **Mental:** The feeling of security was promoted by the Cash for Work initiative, in which adults had the security of being able to ensure an income for their families.
- An organised vocational training had the possibility of teaching self-help competence to all participants.
- **Social:** organising Psychosocial Support Activities for children, Life Skills sessions for youth, awareness session for adults, and events for all family members, gives social support to all beneficiaries.
- An initiative targeting the painting of the shelters' walls by the residents, coloring in some drawings in some communal parts, and refurbishing some old swings, seesaws and a table football was a great experience of cohesion efforts in the Al Iman shelter in Saida.
- **Spiritual:** a remarkable experience is the communal prayer combining Muslims and Christians in the ITS of Marj el Khokh, that spread a message of the peace desired in all Middle Eastern regions.
- The organisation of the International Peace day in Marj el Khokh was also a great activity in this regard.
- **Moral:** all interventions done preventing gender-based violence (awareness sessions, referral, follow-up,...) are part of this factor.

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Chapter 4

GENDER EQUALITY AND RESILIENCE DEVELOPMENT



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The possibility of equally accessing human rights and fundamental freedoms applied in social, cultural, civil, economic and political contexts despite the gender, is an aspect of society and people development that is increasingly at the heart of both local and international debates.

Although the concept of equal opportunities may encounter a wide formal recognition, there is unequal access to opportunities all around the world including health and educational opportunities, among men and women, boys and girls.

These unequal treatments are often justified by the biological differences between men and women; although they are obviously unquestionable, they are not an excuse reason for limiting the access to fundamental rights.

This chapter aims to promote the importance of adopting an approach to gender equality in the Psychosocial Support (PSS) activities as well as in emergency contexts. In order to reach this goal, first, some basic concepts will be explained such as 'gender equality' and 'gender norms'. References will be made to the main international conventions that protect equal rights, and to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPWG 2012), in which attention to gender equality experiences is expressed across all the different minimum Standards.

Hereafter, the focus will be on various gender-based forms of violence and, finally, it will be reflected on the way the adoption of this approach can improve the development of individual, familial and communitarian resilience. Whenever possible, precise references to the Middle Eastern context will be made.

4.1 The principle of gender equality

In the world, the chances of boys and girls growing up healthy and safely, are restricted by three main factors: poverty, geographic residence (born in a war context, in a deprived area, in a slum etc...), and gender; the girls have to make a disproportionate effort to achieve their human rights (UNICEF 2011a).

Broadly speaking, the principle of gender equality refers to the access to healthy environment, education, employment, welfare , etc... safely and regardless of being male or female.

This concept has become increasingly important, and is at the heart of the debate in all societies, representing a key role in development and in emergency situations.

Through development processes women can play an important role as mediators of social change. Women's literacy, their access to education, knowledge, and jobs, are not only merely an individual issue, but an issue concerning the community and family issues as well: when women increase their access to the opportunities, the community itself becomes more educated, more aware, and more economically active. This may stimulate new resources in the development process, as stated by Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize winner for economics, "nothing in the political economy of development is as fundamental as the adequate recognition of the political, economic and social leadership of women. It is a very crucial aspect of development, as crucial as freedom" (Sen 1999, 203).

In the world, and therefore also in the Middle Eastern context, the communities differ from one to another in the egalitarian roles' support (I have, I can) and in the recognition of equal rights to self-determination and to being (I am). Following different historical and cultural paths, different communities have developed into different cultures between the maintenance of traditional-patriarchal cultures and the adoption of cultures more focused on reciprocity than complementarity (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Pfau - Effinger 1998; 2004; Lomazzi 2015). For this reason, specifically for the different adherence levels to the equality culture, international conventions play a vital role in recognition of rights.

4.2 Gender equality: a human right

Promoting gender equality between men and women, and the empowerment of women, mainly through the access to educational support, is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. But gender equality is also a human right, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. This statement declares the equality of all human beings :

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (...)

In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Adopting such a women-specific treaty was considered necessary because, notwithstanding the existence of general human rights treaties, the widespread and systematic discrimination against women in all spheres of life was still a global reality.

CEDAW defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” (Article 1).

Not all the signatory nations of the CEDAW adopted it in full. Some nations (also in the Middle Eastern area) ratified it with some terms, because some articles would not be compatible with some religious laws. For a thorough investigation on how the CEDAW has been implemented in different countries, references may be made to the report prepared by UNICEF- MENA (2011a; 2011b; 2011c ; 2011D ; 2011e ; 2011F).

Perceiving equal access to opportunities as a fundamental right is a critical step not only for its historical and social significance but it also assumes a core human value. The law in this case is not just the right to do "I CAN" or to have (I have). These two dimensions, which are perhaps more practical and visible, are closely linked to the dimension of being (I am). In the world of the person, the interaction between these three aspects is essential (see chapter 1).

4.3 Few core definitions

Before we go any further, it is appropriate to clarify some key concepts of the debate about gender equality, so that they can be a clear reference to understand the topics of discussion.

4.3.1 Difference between “sex” and “gender”

First of all, it should be clear that sex and gender are two different concepts. If the term sex is now commonly used to distinguish biological differences that characterise the body of a man and woman, with their reproductive functions, gender refers to the social significance of the sexual distinction (Crespi 2006 37; Nicholson in 1996, 41-43). The concept of gender is thus semantically extended, encompassing the whole body and then the sexual category, also including the subjective representations, individual perceptions and other aspects of personality and social exchanges, specifically the relations between the sex and the ways where these biological differences, and the meanings attributed to them, are managed by the community.

We can therefore explain the gender as a situated concept, because its social and cultural con-nature can vary over time, and depending on the reference society and culture of reference. Because of this nature, gender dynamics are closely related to the socio-cultural context and can evolve over time; what people consider as appropriate behaviour for a woman and a man may vary from one community to another and from one era to another. For instance, changes in financial and economic needs have contributed to increase in women's economic participation; in particular in urban areas, working women are much more common than in previous generations.



In order to illustrate how gender is a concept situated in time, AVSI operators noticed the difference in the role men and women play when they were living in Syria, and after their displacement.

Generally, in Syria, men were the family's breadwinners. With only the father's income, he was able to satisfy all the family members' needs.

After their displacement in Lebanon, a good number of Syrian refugee families found themselves without sufficient income to ensure their daily bread.

In some cases, all family members (father, mother and also, in some cases, children) found themselves obliged to work in order to ensure their basic needs. In this context, the woman's role was considerably changed.

She switched from housewife to breadwinner.

In other situations, since they were new in the hosted area, Syrian women were forbidden by their husbands to go out of the house alone for shopping. Women were obliged to be accompanied by their husbands when going out. In these cases, a woman's role was reduced, limiting her to her home.



AVSI operators should be aware of the importance of the role modifications between men and women in Syrian families. They have to be aware that these can impact the dynamic of the couple and, if not well assumed, can create marital difficulties.

The violence that husbands inflict upon their wives (reported by AVSI operators in many situations) can trace its origin in this difficulty of accepting the new wife's role in the family.

Discussing the role's modification with both men and women can make them aware of it and therefore able to consider its impact on their relationship and the relationship created with their children.

Discussing, with teens, the right, and sometimes the duty that both sex have to work is also important.



When planning activities, AVSI operators should be aware of the beneficiary's characteristics in order to take it into consideration. For example, in a specific context, if he/she knows that women aren't allowed by their husbands to go out alone, he/she already knows one of the reasons of low attendances. AVSI operator should be able to put a strategy allowing women participation without creating difficulties with husbands.

An issue for both genders

Another common misunderstanding comes from interpreting the promotion of gender equality as a perspective that only affects women. This is a huge misunderstanding, primarily because equal opportunity concerns both genders, although historically, the imbalance of conditions typically damages women more typically than men. Also, the ways communities define their own social norms regarding gender have a relational base. Finally, equal access to resources and opportunities generates a benefit for the whole family and community; when women (or men) cannot realise their human rights, the entire entirety of mankind loses something, and not just the women (or men) as individuals .

4.3.2 Gender norms

Each society, as well as each community and even each family, is equipped with social norms to regulate their own behaviour in the society. These norms, which referred to specific values and traditions, concern also gender issues, in particular in relation to:

- the social roles of men / boys and women / girls (acted actions and expected expectation)
- relationships between men / boys and women / girls in a given social context

Gender norms thus impact people's lives at an individual, domestic and social-community level.

The appropriate way of dressing for a woman or a man at each stage of life, the behaviors considered more or less adequate in a private and in a public contexts, the "right" roles of a woman or a man, the distinction in tasks and caring responsibilities between husband and wife, and the tasks assigned to sons and daughters... these are all aspects that correspond with the gender norms of that particular social context. Every culture has its own gender norms. It is especially important for the operators working in the humanitarian field in multicultural contexts to be aware of them.



AVSI operators found dealing with the gender norms adopted by Syrian refugees to be challenging.

Here are some of the observations made by them on this issue:

- Inequality between a man and a woman, showing the domination of man in a couple or in a family. Frequently, a woman is obliged to obey her husband or her son. Sometimes, she is not allowed to go out if she is unchaperoned. She can be a victim of all types of violence. Often, she does not have the right to choose her husband.

- The right to education is also related to gender norms; in some cases, some parents refused to send their children to school because it's a mixed one. That is the case also for adolescent girls. Sometimes, since they are at a marriageable age, according to Syrian traditions, and they are no longer allowed to go to school.

In the ITS of Deir El Zahrani (saida), a group of adolescent girls explained to AVSI operators that they cannot even look any boy in the eye in their communities. They should look down and avoid being in a closed area (as in the same tent) with boys.



Even though boys and girls getting together is accepted in the Lebanese society, AVSI operators should respect this social norm present in the Syrian context. A first step to show this respect is, in a relevant context (maybe in ITSs), taking this norm into consideration when planning activities and whenever it is relevant, and to organise distinct groups of boys and girls.

AVSI operators should also keep in mind that some girls may come accompanied by their younger brothers and sisters. This may be due to two reasons:

- The girl forces her younger brothers and sisters to accompany her because she is taking care of them, as she is responsible of them in the absence of their parents.

This fact can have two explanations:

- The girl makes his younger brothers and sisters accompany her because she is taking care of them and she is responsible of them in the absence of their parents.
- The girl is obliged to be accompanied by her brothers (even if he is younger) in order to have her parents' permission to participate.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 10 in the work-book.

4.4. From differences to inequality

Diversity does not automatically mean inequality. The latter occurs when people have unequal access to resources and opportunities because of this difference. Even the Minimum Standards (CPWG 2012) emphasises equality of access to resources. In particular, the Minimum Standard 26 refers to the equal distribution of humanitarian assistance: boys and girls can not be treated unequally because of their difference in gender, but both must have equal access to food, education, medical and health care.

Although we are pondering about the differences and gender inequalities, it is worth recalling that psychosocial work is actually measured by a composite system of inequalities. There are indeed some factors that, in any society, can contribute to experiencing conditions of inequality. For instance, factors such as age, religious belief, being part of a group with a particular cultural group or nationality, or belonging to a certain socioeconomic status, may fuel the risk of inequality and are often so intensely present that it becomes difficult to determine whether the disadvantageous condition is caused by one factor or the other.

The mechanism of gender inequality crosscuts all the others inequalities which means that compared to each of the categories mentioned (an elderly person or a small child, belonging to a certain religion or nationality, or people with a very low economic status), the woman's condition is generally worse than a man's, even with everything else being equal. For instance, think about the vulnerable condition of a Syrian refugee girl who comes from a poor family can experience in an ITS (informal tentes settlement). Most likely, the girl will face different various risky situations compared to a boy with the same conditions, and may have access to fewer resources. The risk of child marriage, a phenomenon that tends to affect more females than males, can cause her to drop out of school and thus have one less resource (education).

Among the factors that may aggravate the condition of vulnerability of this girl, there is the exposure to the risk of violence. Even this risk factor, as shown in the next section, responds to gender logic.



AVSI operators frequently face the issue of early marriage in some Syrian communities.

Even though many cases of early marriage were reported related to girls, AVSI operators also noticed some cases of early marriage for boys, in order to preserve the family lineage.



Ali, a 16 years old boy living in Marj El Khokh, was forced to marry his cousin who was 13 years old. His uncle did not have boys and wanted to insure his family's lineage. The couple was married even though both parties firmly refused their parents' decision. Both are uncomfortable with the marriage and feel resigned to what happened to them.

4.5 Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a global phenomenon that has no geographical limitations, culture, class or religion (UNICEF , 2011a). It is often a way to exercise control and power; the victim of violence is no longer considered a person but is objectified, treated as a property which the perpetrator of violence can use as he pleases. In other cases it is a manifestation of power in order to receive a form of respect based on fear and recognition of his strength from other men.

4.5.1 Vulnerability and gender-based violence risk factors

Gender-based violence and vulnerability are a two-way relationship: indeed, on one hand, violence is a risk factor that increases a person's vulnerability, and, on the other hand, already being in a situation of vulnerability increases the risk of becoming a victim of violence, because the person has fewer protective factors.

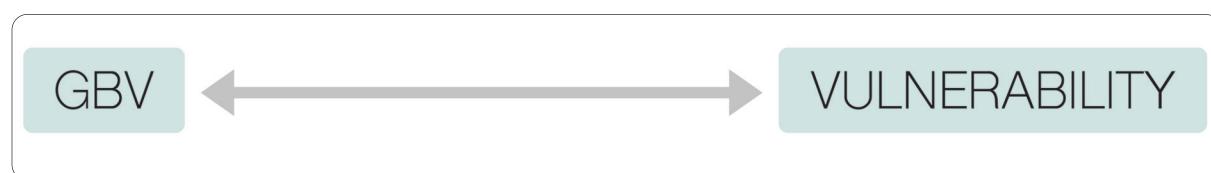


Figure 4.1 Two-way relationship between vulnerability and gender-based violence

According to UNICEF (2011a) and IASC (2005), special risk factors of gender-based violence, include:

- youth;
- great age difference between the spouses, especially in the case of early marriage;
- high fertility;
- refugee status (displaced);
- poverty and ethnic background;
- low level of education;
- exposure to traditional gender norms that reinforce the dominant male role.

As a recent UHNCR document (Hassan et al. 2015) states, the conflict in Syria caused a dramatic vulnerable condition that increased gender-based violence. This document in particular refers to risk factors such as: the breakdown of law and order inside Syria, increased poverty, lack of basic needs and safe services, family separation and disruption of traditional social networks and protection mechanisms.

4.5.2 Consequences on the world of the person

As pointed out by UNICEF (2011a) and IASC (2005), gender-based violence entails high costs. The experience of violence is a traumatic experience, and in many cases reflects problematic situations, not only for the victim, but also for the transgressor, often raised in and being integrated into a social life full of violence. The victims are faced with physical health problems, both acute and chronic, and often have mental health problems as a result of ill-treatment that affects the world of the person in all its aspects, causing fractures even (if not especially) in “I am” (see chapter 3). AVSI met such cases in its experience dealing with refugees, and when it identifies them, it refers them to organizations specialised in managing these vulnerabilities.



AVSI operators refer beneficiaries suffering from gender-based violence to specialised NGOs, according to the localities in which the beneficiaries live.

Such violence may jeopardise the survival of children, and their participation in school and leisure activities. In the case of sexual violence specifically the risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases increases.

Among the countries of the Middle East/Area, the legislative reaction against gender violence, particularly against women, is not unanimous. The penalties (if any) for rape can be different in some countries, a prison sentence is expected, while elsewhere, the rapist can escape conviction by marrying the victim. Domestic violence is not everywhere recognised as a crime everywhere, as well as crimes of honor. The details of legislations relating to the countries of the Middle East area considered in this manual, can be found in the reports dedicated to the female condition drafted by UNICEF- MENA (2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011D; 2011e; 2011f).

4.5.3 Forms of gender-based violence

The gender-based violence (GBV) manifests itself in different forms. Although women and girls are more exposed to this risk because of their subordinate status, since they often live in their own contexts, the phenomenon affects both males and females through typically different forms; table 4.2 indicates the main forms of GBV.

GIRLS	BOYS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual abuse • Domestic violence • Sex trafficking • Early marriage • Honour crimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment in armed groups • Sexual exploitation and abuse • Socialization and communication through violent behaviours

Table 4.1 Main forms of GBV by gender



One of the forms of gender-based violence noted by AVSI operators in the ITS in the South, is the forced women labor.

As men find it hard to accept the fact that they are receiving less wages for their daily work than they usually do, in some cases they force their wives to go to work in their place. As a result, women work in the fields, especially in agriculture, and the men stay in the tents. This affects the dynamic roles of women and men while both are emotionally and psychologically affected. This situation may also be a cause of increasing violence within the family.

Other forms of gender-based violence were noticed as well. In particular, among those listed in Table 4.2, AVSI operators identified early marriages regarding female cases, and the risk of recruitment into armed groups for the male ones. These are situations where it is very difficult to intervene, but it is also very important to be taken into consideration.

a. Early marriage

Among various forms of violence, the international community also recognises early marriage. In some contexts, this definition may still be perceived as improper, as it does not recognise the dimension of vulnerability and its risks as a social practice that has ancient roots in many areas of the world including Middle Eastern areas.

Furthermore, countries differ from one another in the way early marriage is somehow legitimised or sanctioned. Middle Eastern countries, for instance, differ also on the minimum age for marriage, which may also be different for boys and for girls. Again, for details on a country's situation, please refer to the reports presented by UNICEF- MENA (2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011D; 2011e; 2011F).

Early marriage is a vulnerable situation, both when the spouses are very young or when there exists a large age difference between the two. In both situations, the girl is in a situation of increased risk, that comes primarily from the possibility of early pregnancy. In fact, the risk of death during childbirth or pregnancy for a 15- year- old girl is 5 times higher than it is for a 20-year-old (Andersen, 2011; UNICEF, 2011a).

If the age difference between husband and wife is very high, it increases the risk of domestic violence and the woman will have in most cases a lower chance of being able to express her opinion regarding aspects of domestic life and about the children's education. Early marriage, for both males and females, can have a considerable impact on their psychosocial development (Unicef 2011a), as well as increasing the risk of isolation. This has negative effects on the world of the person, affecting all the sides of the pyramid.



In the context of Syrian refugees, early marriage is a widespread custom. AVSI operators identify both cases: very young girls getting married and a large age gap between the couple.

Parents' motivation when searching for accepting early marriage offers for their daughters are: decreasing the expenses of their numerous family members, while also accepting it as a normal progression in their daughters' life.

The testimony of one of AVSI operators on this issue is striking. She reports that girls of 10 to 16 years of age ask her frequently why she is not engaged/married. They are always surprised by her single status at this age (around 25 years). To them, she has an 'abnormal' status!

Early pregnancy, as well as consecutive pregnancies without any consideration for recovery time, is also an issue AVSI operators encounter in the field. Awareness sessions on this issue were organised in order to sensitise young girls against it.

Divorced adolescents also present a challenging issue for AVSI operators. In these cases, adolescents face a huge dilemma: do they identify themselves as adolescents or as divorced?

b. Recruitment into armed groups

Although this phenomenon may also affect girls and young women, it usually mainly involves males.

During emergency situations, the risk of being recruited by armed groups can be very high, even in the case of refugee children. The Charter of Principles of Paris 2007 (UNICEF 2007), makes a very important modification to the definition of vulnerability. It replaced the term "child soldier", that was used for some time, with a definition based on the different levels of involvement of the children in armed groups: A "child associated with an armed force or armed group" refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to, children, boys, and girls that are used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking, or has taken, a direct part in hostilities ."



Even though AVSI operators were not tackling the issue of recruitment into armed conflict, they reported some cases when dealing with adolescents. The syrian adolescents talked about cousins taking part in the fight in Syria, motivated by the financial income or by their love of carrying weapons.

Bearing in mind that the recruitment can be voluntary or mandatory, depending on the level of involvement in armed groups or in the armed forces¹, the child can become:

- *bound*: he participates actively in criminal actions (violence, killings, kidnappings ..);
- *affiliated*: he participates in base operations like cleaning the rooms, cooking, carrying delivering messages and information, as well as drugs and weapons, or as sexual partners of the soldiers. These cases are very common.
- *in charge*: he materially depends on the armed group. In extreme cases, for instance, between those encountered by AVSI in Haiti (AVSI 2012), children are educated by the armed gang. In return, the children or their families may be asked to provide certain services.

¹The term "armed forces" refers to the military institutions of a State on a legal basis: they have an institutional infrastructure, wages, basic services. The "Armed groups" are different from the armed forces, as defined by Art.4 of Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

As the experiences of AVSI in Haiti (2012) testifies, the vulnerable child finds solutions to his needs by getting involved in these armed groups. They can provide:

- Material needs: in conditions of extreme poverty that are exacerbated by war or refugee status, the benefits in economic terms, such as obtaining food and other material benefits, may be a reason for the affiliation not only for the child, but also for the family as well. You can see that this involvement is a way to cover basic needs.
- Psychosocial needs: having a role in an armed group or an armed force provides prestige, it can strike fear into others, and the person involved feels more respected, even among the family. He also acquires a greater autonomy which increases his self-esteem.

In these cases, the psychosocial work concerning Child Protection may act in giving the child, as a means of prevention, positive alternatives to these needs. For instance, this is achieved by assigning them small responsibilities, so that they are recognised and seen by others as persons who can "I CAN" and are worthy of respect and self-esteem "I AM", while, of course, working in sync with other sectors (e.g. nutrition) to meet basic needs and to develop relationships "I HAVE".

The Paris Principles (UNICEF 2007) contain important guidelines that emphasise the role of education, vocational training and the development of Life Skills (Chapter 13) as strategies of prevention and recovery, as well as programs at the Community level (Chapter 8) and, in line with what is stated in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPWG 2012), specifically in the Minimum Standards 11 (Children associated with armed forces and armed groups) and 25 (Camp management and child protection).

4.6 Gender equality in psychosocial work

4.6.1 “Gender lens” and humanitarian crises

In case of humanitarian crises and emergency situations, there is often a risk of putting aside the gender-equality oriented approach because it is not considered a priority. However, crises and emergencies such as the Syrian crisis, can exacerbate situations of pre-existing inequality, or trigger new forms of inequality, emphasising vulnerability. These situations, as we will further observe, tend to have different impacts on men and women in terms of risks and resources.

Emergency situations, like the Syrian crisis, add new problematic elements to pre-existing vulnerabilities due, for instance, to the occurrence of an armed conflict, or the sudden resource deprivation of those people who need, at any moment, the opportunity to escape the backdrop of war and poverty. Moreover, it is often the case that the existing forms of violence and hardship may be aggravated as a result of the stressful situation, or the intensification of living conditions. It can impact boys and girls differently. The latter, in fact, are more exposed to risks such as sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, rape, mutilation, and death (UNICEF 2011b).

Through another perspective, the crisis may also have positive effects in terms of gender equality. Indeed, it "forces" a cultural change which otherwise would not have occurred, or at least would have developed over a decidedly longer period of time. From the point of view of gender dynamics, this "forced" change can become the instrument for a wider social and cultural change, because it can, even if slowly, change gender norms.



The experiences derived from the activities of AVSI in Lebanon, can provide a good example of this change process. It is not uncommon for young Syrian girls to abandon their schooling, and sometimes even extra-curricular activities, because they got married early or after giving birth to children, even if they had

participated in the PSS activities proposed, such as those regarding the promotion of Life Skills. Apparently it may seem that the activities carried out have not led to the desired results. However, the changes might manifest in the longer term. Indeed, these young mothers, may have developed new skills, and gained a greater awareness of themselves and their resources, and therefore are able to pass on some gender-related ideals to their daughters and their children. The experiences garnered from the crisis, then, can also become an occasion that can activate the process of cultural change.

It is therefore important, even while dealing with humanitarian crises, to adopt the "gender lens" in other words, we need to take a gender-equality oriented perspective in analysing the context, and understand people in certain vulnerable circumstances. This will help getting closer to the real needs and potential resources that need to be activated, in order to support the development of individual resilience. This kind of approach is also important for planning activities. It often underestimates the fact that the neutral design does not always have neutral effects.

If we are concerned with addressing the vulnerable people's needs, irrespective of gender differences and in all matters concerning the social norms for each gender, of exposure to various risks, and of the unequal access to resources, then it will be as if we are blind, not only with respect to gender in general, but also to the identity of the person, in addition to the negative effects of neutral programming. In any action taken, starting from the small activities with the children, to the sector Child Protection activities, to the managerial system (e.g. the schedule according to which activities are carried out), we should wear the "gender lens" which will enable us to look carefully at the issues of gender equality in accessing resources and services.



Some examples in which AVSI put on the gender-lens:

- Making distributions to all Syrian populations, taking special care of women by distributing dignity kits for them, according to their specific needs.
- Organising PSS & recreational activities for children (under 5 years) while the mothers are receiving vocational training, is also a gender lens approach, since the mothers have to take care of the children, and if no solution is found for them, mothers will not participate.
- In an agricultural vocational course, taking into consideration the gender criteria while reaching out and trying to include both sexes, was a success. In this same project, taking into consideration the physical differences of men & women in agricultural field activities, was also a sign of respect for existing gender differences. In providing internships for these students, and knowing that the agriculture market prefers males, an effort was made to encourage employees to not discriminate based on gender.

Some opportunities AVSI had to be more gender-equality oriented:

- in the Cash for work project, which is a *short-term intervention used by humanitarian assistance organisations to provide temporary employment in public projects (such as repairing roads, clearing debris or re-building infrastructure)* to the most vulnerable segments of a population, AVSI made some efforts to include women as well as men.
- In Vocational Training, the main courses proposed by AVSI were more directed toward women. Thinking about diversifying the courses offered can also be helpful.
- In all caregivers sessions (GBV awareness sessions, Infant and Young child feeding sessions (IYCF), Health sessions, etc.) making effort in the schedule of these activities and in the message delivered should be done in order to address men and women (not just focusing on women).

4.6.2 Gender equality promotion in Child Protection

To promote gender equality in the activities of PSS, operators should wear the gender lens in every aspect of their work. Moreover, to better understand more the needs, as mentioned earlier, this kind of perspective is important, both to contrast the rigidity of role models, which tends to define gender relations based on inequality, as well as to ensure the protection of children from gender-based violence.



One of AVSI's operators reported a small situation that shows the perception of the gender's role between boys and girls.

He reported that, when distributing bags of snacks to children, the operator was doing it randomly but had, unconsciously, prioritised the girls. A boy approached him saying: "boys must be the priority!" *«نحن الأول! عطينا إلنا بالأول»*

It is a very specific example of the behaviour reported, but it highlights how gender issues must be addressed, albeit very delicately, taking into consideration the socio-cultural background, but also the gender equality rights.

a. Countering the inflexibility of gender role models

Some small tricks that an operator can adopt may have a very important relapse effect on the assigned gender role models, transmission and the attributed value to the person.

In order to avoid transmitting the idea that some activities "are for females" and others "for males", and thus reducing the possibilities of one or the other expressing themselves, it is important that the activities offered are the same, unless we want to respond to a specific need in which the choice responds to defined intention. For instance, it should certainly not exclude girls from sport. Instead their participation should be encourage. Similarly, activities that involve games with a reference to the male and female roles, should not assign the beneficiaries predefined roles (boys pretending to go to work and girls staying home to take care of household chores), but instead give the children the opportunity to choose.

b. Reduce gender-based violence (GBV)

With the aim to reduce the risk factors of gender-based violence and increasing the resources of boys and girls, you can focus on three different aspects:

1. Focus on women / girls

Girls are able to play invisible roles: to counter this invisibility and silence, the activities could try to involve girls in activities that encourage self-expression, decision making and all other Life Skills (see chapter 13).

2. Focus on men / boys

If the aim is to improve gender relations, it is necessary to involve both genders. This is particularly important in preventing GBV. Often, many projects related to GBV only target female victims. A holistic approach to this phenomenon, instead, calls for the inclusion also of men, children and young people in order to promote better egalitarian attitudes, and recognition of the dignity of others. The activities, in this case, could be organised with the aim to counter the aggressive socialisation and communication through violent behaviour, for instance, by promoting activities that help the children to understand that there are other ways to express themselves, in relation to others. Fathers' involvement in aggregation group activities may be a strategy to get closer to them and, once a channel of trust is established a way to make them understand the importance of the girls participating in school activities and games.

3. Focus on the environment

The third dimension area is the environment with the first aim being making it safe and healthy. IASC's Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action (2006) suggests, for instance, that particular attention should be paid to:

- Toilets (Bathrooms should be separate for males and females, located in places that are not isolated or dark)
- Privacy (the lack of privacy, for instance the lack of curtains, increases the risk of being exposed to the adults' sexual activity, or even the risk of being assaulted)
- Lighting (dark corners may increase the risk of being assaulted)

4.7 Resilience and gender equality

Gender inequality affects the world of the person. According to Resilience's model (see Chapters 1 and 2), the opportunity to freely and safely access education, health, etc., have effects on how the person can establish relations with others act and perceive the image he has of himself and, therefore, his ability to meet his needs.

When men and women, boys and girls, do not have equal access to these resources (e.g. education), they tend to have different ways of recognising and identifying the resources to manage their needs, face their situation of vulnerability and develop their resilience through the activation of the sides of the pyramid: "I HAVE" - "I CAN" - "I AM".

Wearing the "gender lens" is important to understand the already available existing needs and resources, and it allows both boys and girls to discover more. For instance, although their needs will be the same, boys and girls may express them differently, because of the prevalent gender norms in their culture. To take a very simple example: the idea that a boy should not cry is quite accepted because "it's a female thing"; however, facing the same need, a girl is able to express it more clearly and directly, through the tears, unlike the boy, who would risk his need not be satisfied if those near him are not careful enough.

Moreover, it is helpful to reiterate that recognising the differences is extremely important, because otherwise we would be denying the gender of each person and, consequently, part of his identity. Looking through different perspectives will enable us to grasp the different forms of communication, through which boys and girls could express their needs, and, at the same time, recognise or discover the resources of each gender. In parallel, having the opportunity to access resources is, as we saw in chapter 2, crucial to coping with their condition of vulnerability. Having limited access to resources due to their gender, creates a situation of inequality in terms of resilience as well. In every society, women of all ages tend to live in situations of greater disadvantage than men of the same social class and generation, and can therefore be in a position of vulnerability that is further accentuated by the fact that they belong to the female gender.

Stereotypes and social norms that tend to place women and girls in a state of subjection, and of having less importance than men (both individually and socially), creates a condition of risk with specific forms of violence, that manifests itself differently from those that children and young people suffer from.

Working to support the gender equality, in order to promote individual resilience, has a positive effect on the communitarian resilience.

The efforts made to achieve greater equality in opportunities between men and women in education, participation in community life, and reduction / elimination of GBV, not only reinforce the individual resilience, but also familiar and communitarian resilience. In fact, both the family and the community can count on a larger basket of skills and competencies which are extremely valuable resources, to face problems and complex challenges that would have otherwise remained invisible, unknown and untapped. Often, the crisis situation may encourage the rediscovery of these community resources.

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Chapter 5

INTERCULTURAL APPROACH



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The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the relations between people from different cultures, emphasising the importance of an intercultural approach in social work, in order to develop both individual and community resilience.

We believe that an intercultural approach is a key element for the social operator, in particular for working in humanitarian emergencies and contexts in which an encounter between different cultures is part of everyday life.

However, it is worth pointing out that the following considerations must not be conceived only as if they refer to relations between operators and beneficiaries. Cultural diversity is multiple and crosses multiple dimensions. It may exist within the staff itself, because each operator refers to his/her ethnic background, gender, generation, years on the force, etc, as well as existing cultural diversity between different groups of beneficiaries. For instance, the work experience of AVSI in Lebanon fits this description precisely. Intercultural dialogue is, indeed, an everyday experience between different teams in the same field of work, between the central office and the branch offices, as staff members belong to different religions and nationalities, as well as beneficiaries and actors involved in the projects.

Upon closer inspection, any encounter between two people is, in fact, a meeting between two different cultures. The relations between different cultures are then inevitable, and hence a part of every day experiences.

5.1 Interculturality and psychosocial work

Since its inception, the human race has distinguished itself with its tendency to move towards meeting its basic needs. Along the evolutionary path, most people in the world tend to settle where they are able to organise a community, according to social and material resources that the environment provides, in order to adequately respond to individual and collective survival needs.

However, human nature never stops moving, although for different reasons: the desire to conquer new lands, commercial purposes, wars and resource depletion, keeping men on the road, placing them in front of different ways of life and different cultures. Nowadays, the processes related to a meeting/clash of cultures are common: on one hand, globalisation leads to interconnection and to an inevitable knowledge due to cultural diversity. This is thanks to the ease of travel and to technological innovation. On the other hand, extreme poverty and the many wars that still exist in the world, have millions of women and men on the run, seeking refuge in other countries. We only need to think that currently (August 11, 2015) 65 different countries are involved in wars, and 654 militias-guerrillas and separatist groups are taking part in them (Wars in the world, 2015). In the Middle East, Syrians escaping the civil war, registered as refugees in neighboring countries, exceed 4 million. Data recently provided by UNHCR (July 7, 2015), refer to 1,805,255 Syrian refugees in Turkey, 249,726 in Iraq, 629,128 in Jordan, 132,375 in Egypt, 1,172,753 in Lebanon and 24,055 in other parts of North Africa. To those numbers, we must add more than 270,000 people who have applied for asylum in Europe, and at least 7.6 million people displaced inside Syria.

Since the beginning of 2015, 1.8 million Iraqis have been forced to flee from armed conflicts in many regions of the country that affected hundreds of thousands of people from all ethnic groups, putting the lives of Kurds, Turkmen, Yazidi, Arabs, Christians, Shiites, and Sunnis at risk. Facing humanitarian emergencies in the "host countries" requires, among many other

skills, being able to read and mediate differences between sometimes conflicting demands, such as the fear of losing one's identity and the propensity for acceptance. Protecting the right to be (I am) for themselves and others, must be grounded in interacting with mutual respect, in order to adequately support the development of individual, family and community resilience.



Lebanon is one of the hosting communities for Syrian refugees. Signs of rejection that the Lebanese people can show towards Syrian refugees should be well understood. The mitigated relation between the two countries over the years and the Syrian presence in Lebanon 2005 is still in Lebanese minds.



AVSI operators should be able to overcome their issues against Syrian people (at the time of the Syrian presence in Lebanon) in order to work with and for them. That is the first key for success in AVSI's work.

The issues we will address here are, as you can guess from this brief introduction, very complex and delicate. They will be treated concisely, and focus on the most basic aspects, in order to provide the operator with the conceptual tools for interpreting others' behaviours and providing their own direction with greater awareness. For this purpose, we will define the concept of culture, and some typical relation dynamics between different cultures. We will also describe the relationship between possible culture models. Among these, the intercultural approach will be indicated as the most suitable for the development of resilience.

5.2 Children's rights and intercultural approach

In the first paragraph of Article two, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifies that all human rights in the Convention are applicable to all children (persons under 18) without any cultural type distinction:

“States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.”

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 2, comma 1)

This article defines a fundamental principle: equality before rights. Equal access to resources (as detailed in Chapter 4, listing gender differences) is a basic element of humanitarian action at all levels. This principle of equality is also called the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPWG 2012), for the assistance must be provided without discrimination (Principle 2) as well as programs intended to strengthen the protective factors for children and develop their resilience. They must include everyone (Principle 6).

In psychosocial work, the operators have the task of experiencing and promoting this principle.

In order to fulfill this task, the operator must gain an awareness of the cultural dynamics that can arise when people from different cultures meet and develop skills (Life Skills), with an intercultural approach.

5.3 Cultural and interethnic dynamics: definitions

5.3.1 What is culture?

Culture is a system of knowledge, values, norms and symbols shared by society, internalised by its members and forwarded from generation to generation. In other words, culture is a phenomenon both collective and individual that, while referring to a tradition, is potentially subject to transformations and changes.



AVSI operators identified many cultural differences between Syrians and Lebanese as:

- Language differences
- Difference in behaviours and customs
- The dominance of the patriarchal mentality
- The Syrians' ability to adapt and live in tents
- The differences in priorities (regarding child education, hygiene issues, vaccination issues...)

More precisely, Bichi (2006) defines culture as "all that owes its creation to conscious and free action of the man, that is, the intellectual and material heritage, relatively stable and shared, owned by the members of a given community and consists of values, norms, definitions, language, symbols, signs, patterns of behaviour, and material objects. "

Therefore the following are part of culture:

- Arts, sciences and techniques;
- Material objects (e.g. artifacts) are a cultural expression;
- Values (affective, cognitive and moral), i.e. the common views on what is believed to be good, right, and desirable. The values underlie the rules, for they allow the expression of an opinion on fairness, adequacy and effectiveness of behaviours.



AVSI operators can easily face challenges regarding wrong beliefs due to Syrian customs. For example, some Syrian refugees believe that they can eliminate lice issues with kerozin, while scientifically, this is not true.

Some mothers believe that giving a baby of two months herbal tea can prevent colic, but scientifically, babies of that age, should not consume anything but milk. The efforts in this kind of context are doubled: fighting the incorrect beliefs, eradicating them since they lead to harmful practices, and trying to instill good habits.

- Rules and norms, which serve to establish conformity and deviance, are a tool to implement values and adjust behaviours. The norms can be prescriptive; they might invite you to follow a certain behaviour, or they can be proscriptive, inviting you to avoid a certain behaviour. The rules may also refer to traditional practices, i.e. customs and rituals; customs, referring to public and private conduct of an individual; the rules may be moral, referring to customary norms very close to values; law, with regard to the legal standards; technical, concerning, for example, productive activities.
- The reference and behaviour models represent a compass for the kind of behaviour to strive for; they might be characters of tradition, religion, but also of entertainment and sports.
- Tradition is based on signs and symbols (most importantly, the language), and then on the communication process. Socialisation, which is the transmission of the culture, makes the individual a member of that particular society. Socialisation can be primary, when people

socialise in society for the first time, like children within their family, or if they move to live in a different culture and have to re-learn the ABC's of common life. During each individual's lifetime, he might later face multiple occasions of secondary socialisation; for example, when entering into working life for the first time, there will be colleagues who will teach the norms, values, languages etc., specific to that cultural-professional reality; like an immigrant, he will start living in a new cultural context.



Even though Lebanese and Syrian talk in Arabic, different words used in specific situations are very common. AVSI's operators had been confronted to this difference and had to do the effort to ask for explanation of common words, unused by Lebanese, to ensure an efficient communication.

From these words, let's list some:

ENGLISH	LEBANESE	SYRIAN
Orange	ليمون	حامض
Watermelon	بطيخ	جبنس
Sandwich	عروس	لفافة/لغة
Take a seat/Sit down	إجاز	إبرك
I can't	لا بقدار	ما يحسن
I want to pee	بدّي بول	حجان أو بدّي أمشّ/سيّر ميّ/طير ميّ
I will call you	أقوم بهاتفك	إتّصل عليك
Chat	تحدّث (التسولف = الحديث)	سويف
Call your brother	نادي أخيك	صيح لأخيك
I hit him	ضربيه	قتلته/ذبحته
Not veiled	غير محجبة	شوشه
Straw	شلمونة	شفّاطة/شرّاقة
Match	كريبة	شحّاطة
Glass	زجاج	بلور
Towel	منشفة	بشّيكير
Pump shoe	«سکرینیه»	كندرة
Slippers	«شحّاطة»	حفّاية
Socks	كلسات	جزّابات
Coat	المطف	«المانتو»
Bra	صدرية	حتمّات
Tent	الخيمة	برّاكية
Fuel station	محطة بنزين	كازانة
Cafeteria	مقهى المدرسة	المقصف
Swing	مرجوحة	جوش حاني
Family name	إسم العائلة	كينة
Father	الأب	والد
Boy	الصبي	الولد
Purple color	اللون الخبازى	نهدي
Turtle	سلحفاة	قرقاعة
Report card	ورقة العلامات	جلاء
Mobile phone charger	«شارجور»	شاحن
Mobile	«سالولار»	جوّال
Memory carz =	«ميمورى»	ذاكرة
Motorcycle	الدراجة النارية	موتور

5.3.2 Ethnicity

The membership of a particular cultural group is defined by the term ethnicity, which includes all the symbolic aspects through which every cultural group defines itself from others. Through them, it defines the border "we" - "you," that is, the in-group (those part of the group) and the out-group (those who do not belong to the group). Some of these traits are clearly visible; for example, the clothes worn are often a very particular, symbolic aspect, able to immediately communicate belonging to a certain cultural group. The veil worn by Muslim women is a clear example of this.

Ethnicity is not static, but constantly evolving since it is connected to historical, social and political factors. The contact and exchanges made with other cultures inevitably contribute to its change. Ethnic identity, that is, self-definition based on a cultural background, is just one of the possible models of identification. In relation to it, in fact, a person can be identified on the basis of their gender, the territory they live in (or were born in), their culinary lifestyle, etc.

The boundaries between ethnic groups therefore have a social nature (Barth 1969), based on the self-definition that the group attributes to itself and to others.

5.3.3 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to put your own culture at the centre of the universe, while others are considered satellites that just revolve around it. It is a pretty common characteristic of every culture. This leads each individual to consider his ethnic background in positive terms, and on this ground, downplay other cultures; a value is assigned to the differences, and the result is normally negative. The belief that the ethnic group a person belongs to is superior compared to the others, leads to asymmetric social relations and differences that turn into inequalities, legitimised by the "lower value" of other groups.

A key element in this mechanism is the increase in prejudices and stereotypes.

5.3.4 Prejudices

Prejudice is a "judgment expressed before a first-hand experience and apart from it, without sufficient data to validate it" (Zanfrini 2004, p.58). In the case of ethnic prejudice, this judgment refers to members of a certain ethnic group; for instance, based on their religious belief or nationality.

Without any personal experience, people tend to keep a distance from some cultural groups, towards which, according to their own prejudices, they feel suspicious.

The origins of social and cognitive prejudice are rooted in the human need to simplify the process of gaining knowledge about other people, through the construction of stereotypes. Facing the complexity of reality, the human being creates different categories that allow him to "encode" the world around him easily and immediately. That way, he knows how to rank his encounters and how to behave. Whenever he again meets similar objects, individuals, or situations, he will try to put them within these categories, or he will create new ones; this is about social learning. Referring to the example on different veils worn by Muslim women, the association of veil-Islam, and then the kind of headscarf used, thereby specifying the membership to a certain group, precisely describes this process of categorisation. This is therefore a very important and essential mechanism (the very one that allows us to recognise dangerous situations).

5.3.5 From prejudices to stereotypes

When this process emphasises the differences and the similarities between one category and the other, associating positive or negative connotations, the risk that leads the categorisation turning to stereotyping is very high. This means that people tend to cognitively represent a certain ethnic group, involving only some of the characteristics and emotions, and thus creating the heart of the prejudice. The problem with this mechanism is a dual one. On one hand, its rigidity, concerning expectations of certain behaviour from that group's members, and on the other hand, its generalisation, when in fact, the prejudice perceives only a partial element. Some stereotype examples are: "Women cannot drive", "Italians love pizza".

In summary, the stereotype leads to failing to consider the variability within the group, and limits the possibility of considering the relationship between the individual and his group (Allport 1954), and the differences that might exist among the members. In terms of the approach proposed here, it can be related to the ability to identify people's needs and resources. To do so properly, the social operator need not be veiled against stereotypes and prejudices that would otherwise limit his ability to see clearly.

Ethnic prejudices are based on these simplifications, and affect attitudes towards the object through three components:

- Cognitive, referring to stereotypes;
- Emotional, related to positive or negative feelings towards the object;
- Active, that is, the willingness to act in favour or against the object. A prejudice may, in fact, be positive, when it addresses an a priori positive component, or a negative one, of a certain category.

In addition, there are two types of prejudices: hot and cold ones.

Hot prejudices are the most explicit, violent and oppressive ones: associated with concepts of purity/impurity, attributions of guilt (scapegoats) and in their most aggressive forms may lead to legitimate barbarism such as "ethnic cleansing" and genocide. Cold prejudices are instead less evident, tend to be implicit and appear in more socially accepted forms, but not harmless. For example, prejudices can lead to the idea that certain groups might not be suitable for certain jobs, or able to carry out certain functions; this limits that group members' possibilities to perform "I CAN". A typical example is that, in many societies, the prejudice against women wishing to take on jobs that are considered "masculine", such as a military career or engineering professions, is widespread.

5.3.6 Race and racism

Traditionally, the term "race" identifies a group of individuals with specific facial features, genetically considered ordinary among people coming from a specific geographical area.

Racism is an ideology that defines the stratification hierarchy of people, using physical and somatic appearance as a criterion, considering some human groups inferior to others for biological-natural reasons. The adoption of this "natural inferiority" leads to justifying discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation and, in extreme cases, genocide. Studies of the human genome have shown this ideology's inconsistency; on earth, there is only one race: the human race.

5.4 Exclusion mechanisms

As previously described in section 4.4, the inequalities and the mechanisms of discrimination and exclusion, refer to the way differences are handled. Distribution (Minimum Standard 26) is perhaps the most obvious example, but this is true for all aspects in which the guarantee of

fundamental rights of the child might be foreclosed and replaced by unequal access to resources, not only between males and females, but also according to religious beliefs or geographical origin or, more generally, to different cultural backgrounds.

Table 5.1 summarises the main exclusion processes, drawing a distinction between the mechanisms that aim to neutralise the differences, those that devalue the differences and those that tend to exploit them.

EXCLUSION MECHANISMS THAT NEUTRALISE THE DIFFERENCES	STEREOTYPE	An image that attaches some physical and/or psychological habits and/or behaviours easily recognisable to a group.
	ETHNOCENTRISM	A point of view that the group to which they belong is the centre of the world, and the role model by which to judge others.
	PREJUDICE	Judgment expressed before first-hand experience, and apart from it.
EXCLUSION MECHANISMS THAT DEVALUE THE DIFFERENCES	XENOPHOBIA	Hostility (terror, fear, distaste, hate, repulsion) towards foreigners (and/or toward what might come from them) perceived as less and/or as a hazard.
	HARASSMENT	Conduct which manifests itself through vexatious or debasing words (jokes, mockery), gestures and actions (thrusts, jerks), repeated against a person or group of persons because of their race, skin color, ethnicity or nationality, language or religion.
EXCLUSION MECHANISMS THAT EXPLOIT THE DIFFERENCES	RACISM	An ideology that defines the stratification hierarchy of people, using physical and somatic appearance as a criterion, considering some human groups as inferior to others for biological-natural reasons.
	DISCRIMINATION	Set of rules and practices which deprive a person or a group of full participation in resources of the society, confining them in a lower status, denying their right to equality. Examples of discrimination criteria: geographical origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, religion, political convictions, language, social status, disability ...

Table 5.1 Main exclusion mechanisms

5.5 Interethnic relationships

As seen in the 5.3.1 paragraph, cultures are composed of several elements. A common set of these aspects represent the “dominant culture” that sums the main characteristics of people who live in the same societal context. Nevertheless, numerous sub-cultures exist, according to factors such as the generation, the political and religious beliefs, the area where people live (i.e. urban/rural)...different combinations of these elements can give birth to several sub-cultures. This term refers to a homogeneous aggregation of knowledge, values, beliefs, life style, and norms, able to distinguish one group from the rest.



AVSI operators have been confronted with sub-cultures in some ITSs where they were intervening. As an example, the Marj el Khokh ITS is divided into three sections, depending on the native village from which the refugees came. Every group of these refugees, even while living in the same camp, have their own sub-culture, though they are all Syrians.

In addition to these internal dynamics, interethnic relationships refer to the relationship between cultures differentiated by ethnic identity. Usually, this happens due to a migration phenomenon (chosen or forced), when a novel relationship takes place between the host's culture and the culture of the immigrants.

Interethnic relationships can be considered in very different ways, following approaches inspired by a higher or lower level of ethnic rights recognition (Cesareo 2000; Colombo 2004). Thus, they can have different consequences on the world of the person (see 5.6).

Three models are generally used to explain the different patterns of relationships between cultures: the assimilationism strategies (also called: acculturation); cultural pluralism; multiculturalism.

In addition to these three, there is the approach that does not admit to the possibility of interethnic coexistence. This is inspired by the idea of exclusion and separation, with the result being the establishment of ghettos, wherein the minorities are restricted.

The other three can be seen as the expression of different levels of the recognition of the right of being “*I AM*”.

Assimilationism expects the acculturation of the newcomers in the dominant culture, totally leaving behind their culture of origin. According to this model, immigrants and refugees should totally assume the values, norms, and behaviour models of the societies wherein they found a refuge, losing their cultural heritage as a result. The implicit idea of this model is the presumption that the host's culture is better and superior to the immigrant's culture.



In any organised intervention, AVSI operators should search for scientific references to argue against any issues, especially early marriage, the right to education for girls, gender-based violence, etc. They should not take the Lebanese culture as a point of reference in respect to Syrian culture, recognising their mutual values and their right to exist.

Cultural pluralism expects the different cultural realities to co-exist in the same social context while keeping the connection with their cultural roots.



In this context the project “Syria on My Mind” came into being, undertaken by the Lebanese NGO Biladi, managed by the Italian international organisation AVSI and financed by UNICEF.

This project started with the fact that many Syrian children sought refuge with their families years ago in Lebanon, by posing the question: what do we have left of our home country? And answering: Most likely fragments of memories in the midst of a traumatic experience.

Reconnecting those children with their homeland became a necessity, and is the heart of this project.

The project consists of a learning program through games concentrating on the Syrian heritage.

The main objective of this project is to facilitate the return of these children to their country, when the time comes, and to give them a sense of pride and belonging to this land that they left in sorrow. But that is not all. "Our biggest hope is that these youngsters, once they are back home, will be motivated to protect this heritage with which they have been acquainted, and which is in great danger", says Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly, president of the NGO Biladi.

In addition to the children, the project is aimed at young university students, refugees themselves, who were trained as instructors. "Unlike the children, those young men and women have known the pre-war Syria", explains Biladi's president. "By asking them to participate in this program as instructors, we have sought to reconnect them with their country, as well as to encourage them to share their experiences and their memories with their younger compatriots".

The perspective of multiculturalism shifts the attention from co-existence to co-living, and manifests itself in different shades, according to the position given (marginal or central) to the recognition of each culture present in that context and to the respect of the human's universal rights.

Within the multiculturalism perspective, the intercultural approach finds a place. This approach underlines the interactive dimensions between cultures: cultural relationships, and relationships between cultural groups in general, is not one-sided (meaning that it considers that the hosting culture is not the only one that can accept/reject/tolerate the new one) but that the relationship is based on processes that are active on both sides, with reciprocal respect and listening (Besozzi, 2001; Zanfrini, 2004).



In the "PEACE" project implemented by AVSI, seven Lebanese agricultural technical schools opened their doors to students, allowing them to participate in an intensive vocational training course in agriculture.

As part of this project, the Lebanese NGO "BILADI" supported the workshops of dialogue on the common agricultural heritage between students of different nationalities and factions.

In fact, the same agricultural heritage is shared by Lebanese and Syrians. The idea of dialogue workshops was then based on "Heritage as a tool for dialogue and peace-building".

These perspectives summarize the main models used to conceive the relationship between cultures. To these perspectives are connected, at macro level, various modalities adopted in the world to manage the complexity of multi-ethnic societies.

But what about the relationships in daily life at micro level? Here too, the attitudes and behaviors can be connected to one of these models affecting the way of work and the relationship creation of the psychosocial operator.

In this frame, the dynamics described have effects on the world of the person and cannot be neglected.

5.6 Consequences on the world of the person

These mechanisms have devastating effects on the world of the person, because they do not allow the person to be recognised or to self-recognise the way he should be capable of doing, to be on par with those who belong to other groups. This concept is reinforced by the consequences of some prejudices: fixity, which leads people to believe that the situation they are living in is an immutable condition. For instance, the refugees' fixity might be the difficulty to realise that people now living as refugees, did not previously live in tents or makeshift facilities, but in proper houses; that children did not always live that way but used to go to school; and that in the future they will be able to have a life once more, different than this one. Fixity, in this case, is assuming that their refugee status is their permanent existential condition.

Prejudice and ethnocentrism trends may also lead to the idea that they might "deserve" that situation, due to their characteristics and social roles.

Stereotypes and prejudices are part of our way of relating to the world, and therefore it is essential to be aware of them, and try to limit them and to have relationships with others based on an effective mutual understanding instead of pre-judgments. Obviously, that is even more crucial with regard to psychosocial work.

5.7 The intercultural approach and social work

5.7.1 The operator and his attitude

What might help the operator in reducing his prejudices? Definitely, open-mindedness and the willingness to learn about others and getting involved, despite the anxiety and the risk of conflict that the encounter with diversity can bring. According to the Theory of Contact (Allport 1954), when people belonging to different ethnic groups come into direct contact with each other, the fears and social distance decreases; direct experience reduces and balances prior judgments.

Furthermore, the operators need to work on being aware of their own prejudices, on empathy development and communication skills (see Chapter 13 concerning Life Skills). This allows the operators to communicate effectively with others, especially with people who live in a vulnerable situation. In order to appropriately help people, it is necessary to be able to comprehend their needs and resources, looking beyond cultural differences.



Some of AVSI Lebanese operators shared what they learned after working with Syrian refugees. These are their beliefs:

- Showing respect for their culture in all its components and differences.
- Despite the cultural diversity, building on many other common existant issues
- Accepting others as they are and working with them.



When dealing with Syrian refugees, AVSI Lebanese operators should know that the cultural diversity differences between him / her and Syrians will require:

- A respectful dress code, especially for ladies.
- A respectful distance/proximity, especially between male operators and Syrian female children / youths.

In this context, an AVSI operator, in an interview with a beneficiary, should not be confined on his own with him. He / She should find a way to always be within sight of other operators.

Always keeping in mind a respect for distance/proximity, AVSI male operator should avoid sitting right beside a Syrian girl in the bus, or putting a girl on his lap.

Here too, attitudes and behaviours can be traced to one of the models mentioned in 5.5. Consequently, social work can also be affected by this attitude.

While conducting activities for vulnerable children in a refugee camp, operators adopt an assimilationist perspective, giving little attention to the rules and values that characterise the cultural community in which they are operating. On one hand, this will make their actions ineffective, and on the other hand, it will blind them to the possible resources available, that could be used to face this situation of vulnerability. Moreover, simply recognising the different aspects of the “live and let live” perspective has little impact on the achievement of both the project’s objectives and on the promotion of human rights.



One of the challenges that AVSI operators faced in organising PSS activities, was the limitation of touching between girls and boys, or even asking a girl to stay beside a boy.

The testimony of one of the operators on this issue can illustrate this fact best:

The operator asked a young male participant to stay beside Fatima, a young female participant, for the sake of the activity. Her brother, 6 years old, protested, saying that his sister cannot hold the hand of a strange 7 years old boy. He dismissed the ‘stranger’, saying he is the only boy who can stand beside her.



AVSI operators should take into consideration the cultural norms when planning all their activities, in order not to be surprised by them at the time because they were not prepared in advance.

Encountering a different culture can cause people to deeply question themselves, their own values and their lifestyle. However, if we manage to face the fear that can be caused by this self-questioning, the encounter with others can be fruitful, because we are then able to listen to their needs and discover their resources, breaching the wall of cultural diversity. The mutual feeling of acceptance sets the base for a get-together, not so much between cultures, but more between people, and lays the foundation for building a relationship that can actually help the vulnerable child.



AVSI operators, when organising parallel sessions for caregivers and their children, should be able to merge information gathered from both groups in order to have a better idea of cultural norms, and to address messages more efficiently (in PSS activities, awareness sessions,...).



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 11 in the workbook.

5.7.2 The intercultural approach in PSS activities

The intercultural approach can be a turning point, especially in psychosocial support activities as well as educational activities, because in addition to the immediate relationship between caregiver and child, this approach favours the development of peer relationships, while focusing more on mutual respect and acceptance of cultural differences, particularly when the educational processes take place in situations where multi-ethnicity is notably present, as is the case in Lebanon, where classes in school are attended as much by Lebanese children as they are by Syrian refugee children.

Studies carried out in Italian schools have highlighted numerous experiences that developed in their context, with its high density of immigrant families. These experiences aim to overcome the assimilationist logic, enhancing the cultural specificities of each child, and accepting his cultural background in the study programs and in leisure and educational activities; interethnic coexistence has become the norm thanks to the commitment of the educational staff and the involvement of parents, concerning a relational and procedural integration (Besozzi, 2001; Colombo, 2004; Caneva, 2012; Lomazzi, 2013).

The exploitation of different cultures can be done in order to involve children and mothers in adapting with the activities normally proposed, so that they can actively contribute by inserting elements of their own culture, by sharing games or fairy tales. In promoting life-skills (Chapter 13), adopting an intercultural approach can then encourage the development of self-awareness in order to maintain the relationship a person has with his own culture. This can also ease relations with other family members who welcome, respect and value their culture.



On the occasion of Christmas and the end of the year festivities, an event was organised by AVSI, prepared by Syrian and Lebanese children. Before the event, these children met regularly in order to prepare, for the first part, a recital composed by Lebanese, Syrian and Italian national songs as well as Christmas carols. For another part, they prepared for a mini play inspired by a Syrian series. This event was a good opportunity for Lebanese and Syrians, children and parents to get to know each other better and to share a great moment together.



AVSI operators on some occasions, asked children to sing some Syrian songs to build enthusiasm during PSS activities. Having more room for the expression of Syrian cultural elements in songs, plays, tales,... should be part of AVSI's approach with these children.

Talking with women about breastfeeding should always be done with respect for the cultural knowledge of syrian women. Not taking into consideration what they already learned from their mothers and grandmothers (a kind of cultural heritage) will build resistance and be ineffective. One of the resistant words reported by an AVSI operator was: "We raised 8 children. Are you now coming to teach us how to do it?"

Addressing the issue of the numerous family members is a sensitive cultural issue. The message to stop having children should not be because of the precarious situation of the refugee women. AVSI operators should raise awarness on the consequences of a large family by motivating women to start reflecting on the issue.

5.8 Intercultural dilemmas and challenges

Adopting an intercultural approach is neither simple nor immediate, because it requires everybody to be willing to question his convictions, and to make way for the uncertain and the unknown. Colombo (2004) especially defines some aspects of problematic intercultural issues:

1. Interculturality is not a situation defined once and for all, nor is it stable, but is rather a dynamic and evolving process that, as previously mentioned, requires a willingness to develop processes of self-examination.
2. It is a process of dialogue, and it implies openness, empathy, and willingness to meet others halfway. It requires some interpersonal and communication skills, but at the same time, it can activate recursive processes where these skills can be further developed.

3. There are also dilemmas, particularly concerning controversial issues. In addition to those difficulties that may be encountered while facing a multi-ethnic context with an intercultural look, being confronted with diversity can sometimes bring out issues that question which action is fairer to take, and the best way to act. This is especially true when comparing cultures with profoundly different views, even if not completely conflicting, concerning some significant issues.

An example of a controversial situation

A case in point is the early marriage phenomenon (see paragraph 4.5.3). In countries of the Middle East, it is still quite a present phenomenon: in Lebanon 7% of women between 20 and 24 years old were married before the age of 18; Syria 16%, Jordan 11%, Egypt 19%, Palestine 19%, Iraq 20% (UNICEF MENA-2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011D; 2011e; 2011F).

In contexts characterised by an elevated situation of vulnerability, as detailed in Chapter 2, the probability of such cases is higher. Is early marriage a cultural norm? And, if it is a cultural norm that in some cases corresponds with a legal issue, how is it dealt with?

If the intercultural approach is called upon, as stated above, to protect and enhance other cultures, does that mean that even this aspect of the culture should be safeguarded, even if it conflicts with the values of child protection?

In this and in many other similar cases, the operator may be in a bind, driven by conflicting demands. However, there are many solutions in between imposing his culture with an ethnocentric attitude ("I'm right and you're not") and a relativism's laissez faire ("do whatever you want"). The solution must be found by mediating between these two dialectics, especially referring to the international community that endorses the rights of the person, as it is a transnational cultural reference that may guide and help in identifying which path to follow, within the framework of very complex situations. In the above mentioned example of early marriages, the international community (see section 4.5) recognises it as a form of violence.

5.9. Conclusion

During this short chapter, the relationship between cultures has been categorised by referring to two general cultures, a "host" and a "guest". However, reality is much more complex, because within the same society, we can have different cultures living together. The Lebanese case is symbolic in this respect: Lebanon is a multi-confessional society that is being faced today with a complex situation triggered by the arrival of more than a million Syrian refugees, in addition to the number of Palestinian refugees already in Lebanese territory.

The adoption of an intercultural approach thus reveals its reproductive potential, not only because the staff is often multicultural, and deals with beneficiaries belonging to another culture (sometimes heterogeneous itself), but because the relationship dynamics, where the assistance and promotion of human rights and the development of resilience is involved, are part of a socio-cultural scheme that is highly complex and delicate.

As defined herein, people that accrue Life Skills in an intercultural context will retain emotional and cognitive resources in the future to manage possible conflicts in a constructive way. With this perspective, the actions of animators, teachers, psychologists, social workers, as well as that of those who design, monitor and evaluate the projects, will therefore be even more meaningful.

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Chapter 6

THE OPERATOR'S PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH



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Being a psychosocial operator does not mean only having a set of specific skills: the position instead requires the ability to work on developing yourself in order to adapt to the cultural context and environment in which you are operating. Of course, this requires sacrifices and yet is an enriching experience at the same time, because it can strengthen one's self by using your emotions and personal skills in a positive way. The operator finds himself in situations that can force him to change his habits and beliefs, while retaining his identity and competence. Therefore, to work efficiently with the beneficiaries, there should be a meeting between the professional and human capabilities of the operator, and those of the humanitarian organisation itself.



Some of AVSI operators recognise that they changed their way of thinking and behaving after experiencing social work with vulnerable people, Lebanese and Syrian.

These are some of their testimonies:

“I never thought I could enter a refugee tent , sit on the floor with them, and have discussions with them with empathy and seriousness”.

“I learned to be more patient; I thought that change can be made easily, but I learned that change cannot be made instantly, and some things need time to improve”.

“Contentment was absent from my life until I started social work”. After seeing the hard living conditions in the camp, “I think how I personally have everything and yet do not feel satisfied. Month after month, this attitude changed and I started to appreciate every single thing that my family did for me”.

6.1 Attitudes and competencies of the organisation

First of all, it is important that the operator knows exactly the kind of work that needs to be performed, and how to live and work in that kind of project. This means knowing the job profile required of him, and the specifications of the project: location and the geo-political situation of the country, the kinds of beneficiaries, security measures, partners, duration and budget, objectives and activities planned. Furthermore, the operator should know the organisation and its policies, and come into contact with people with expertise in that field, and therefore be able to get answers to any questions that may arise.

The operator, to deal with the difficulties he may encounter (unmet expectations, any professional dissatisfaction and relationships with colleagues and beneficiaries), should have the possibility of periodic *debriefing* with the organisation.

This consists of two phases: a *technical phase*, covering all aspects of the project in progress, and a *psychological support phase*, concerned with the person himself.

➤ Technical phase

Periodically, there should be several meetings with the project's representatives from the organisation, in order to inform different sector managers and the country's representative about the real conditions of the project. It is also an opportunity to present any encountered problems, particularly at the organisational level, as well as proposals for improving the conditions of life within the mission and the quality of the service (see the monitoring and evaluation of the processes in Chapter 9). At the end of each meeting, there should be an

assessment by the Head of Mission (usually written and discussed with the operator), with the aim of highlighting qualities and weaknesses to work on in the future. Furthermore, the organisation is a way to discern the operator's characteristics, and make the most of them in the project development or in future projects.

➤ *Psychological support phase*

Every organisation should have a service able to give psychological support to its operators, especially to those who work in stressful situations. At first, the psychological debriefing was intended as a form of group therapy for operators during humanitarian emergencies. Actually, the debriefing is not psychotherapy and does not follow a standardised model, but it is a process to promote the mobilisation of the considerable ability to overcome difficulties in order to eliminate or relieve psychological stress, thereby avoiding the onset of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

The debriefer is usually a psychologist or a counsellor trained to do so, whose primary aim is not to find out the reason for the experienced sensations (that would be a therapeutic intervention), but only to reconstruct the stages of work in the project in order to find a common thread that can give meaning to the events. This process allows the operator to verbalize any situations experienced in a negative way, describing the facts, thoughts and feelings, and also allows him to notice the presence of problems, and try to get them back into everyday life and avoiding personal and professional distress. During the debriefing, the debriefer and the operator can decide to meet later for a series of other follow-up meetings, like around 5. If at the end of these sessions, it is found that therapy will be necessary, the psychologist will refer the operator to a counsellor.

6.2 Attitudes and competencies of the humanitarian operator

Some approaches are necessary to have an effective and helpful relationship, that can benefit all relationships. Such approaches are enhanced through specific skills, which are developed through a training course. First we will examine the approaches, and then the skills.

6.2.1 Attitudes of the humanitarian operator

Empathy

It is important to know the difference between empathy and sympathy. A person with empathy can correctly perceive the feelings of another person without losing the objectivity of his role. A person with sympathy, on the other hand, experiences the emotions of the person asking for help, without this preventing him from being objective in a helpful relationship, since it will likely involve emotions. The key to an empathetic approach is understanding pain, while remaining in a neutral position. The operator's goal should be to understand what hurts that person, and not to identify with his emotions or problems.

Compassion and understanding help the operator to accurately perceive the sensations and experiences of another person.

Empathy is communicated primarily through nonverbal modes of body language such as, eye contact, the posture, and tone of voice. Empathy allows the receiving person to feel welcomed, and helps to build a relationship of trust.



One of AVSI operators shared his experience on the difference between empathy and pity and emphasizes on how much being emphatic and not showing pity is important for beneficiaries.

Respect

People with this quality would welcome a person in need without judgement, and would try to help him without pretending to solve his problems by removing any responsibility he may have.



A challenging approach used by an AVSI operator was when she had to show respect by accepting people that are in a critical hygienic situation without showing signs of disgust.

Authenticity

The operator is not dishonest in the way he deals with others, and he does not have superiority complex, but rather, he is sincere and honest, with no false image of himself. His intent is not to offend with his words, but to understand the context in which he is dealing and how much the other can understand what is being said.

Other features of this attitude include: being consistent rather than nice one day and aggressive the next; do not try to gain sympathy or win over the other person in order to get positive feedback that would lead to him receiving awards for the project. Authenticity indicates spontaneity; that does not translate to impulsiveness or acting without considering the consequences. Impulsiveness is the failure to consider consequences, losing one's composure and letting pure reactions take control. Spontaneity indicates the consistent and authentic expression of who we are, without attacking each other, and taking into account the socio-cultural needs of the environment in which we live. For example, in a situation such as the one in a refugee camp, the operator may get angry because he is unable to reach a certain goal. Spontaneity in this case, would be to demonstrate regret at not having reached these goals, and asking yourself and others the reasons why, and possibly even wondering how they can be reached.



In this frame, it's a sign of respect to adapt the message of any activity scheduled according to the targeted group. Avoiding technical and complicated speeches that will not be accessible to beneficiaries is very important in order to gain their confidence and their collaboration.

Be open (Self Disclosure)

The operator can share his personal experiences and intuitions that can help the beneficiary in understanding how to face an issue. However, this should not shift attention to the operator, but rather highlights the fact that the aim is to provide guidance to the beneficiary, and help him in finding different strategies besides those already undertaken, without making him feel inferior or incompetent.

Be flexible

By definition, this is a key element of resilience, and one of the primary qualities in emotional regulation and maturity. This attitude requires an individual to be flexible in his thinking and his actions; for example, being able to change his approach if the reasons to do so are explained. For instance, in the case of an operator in a refugee camp, he needs to understand that certain gestures or approaches need to be amended, because they can go against the culture of that population.



One of the attitudes to be taken when working in a context of socio-cultural diversity, is to pay attention when greeting people. A man cannot hold the hand of a veiled woman. Similarly, a woman cannot do so with a practising man.

Being able to make realistic plans and taking action to achieve them

Being able to see what is, rather than what we wish there was, is a part of this approach. This means being proactive and assertive. Proactivity is a relatively stable attitude in which to look for opportunities, to show initiative and persevere in trying to bring a significant change without reacting to events in an impulsive or passive way, but rather in a conscious and responsible manner. Assertiveness is that quality by which a person is able to express his views without misleading or being mislead, and to use the most appropriate communication in each relational context. For example, the ability to say no to drugs.



AVSI operators highlighted the difficulty in accepting the limits for interventions done for Syrian refugees, while knowing the great amount of existing needs. Making the best of the accessible resources, even if they are limited, should guarantee that the actions taken by AVSI operators is optimised.

Being able to take care of themselves

It is an attitude where it is important to enjoy moments of rest in case of fatigue, and to live a healthy life both in terms of nutrition as well as physical health.

Sociability

The relationships that can provide support and care are among the main factors of resilience. Having a number of these relationships, such as garnering of new friends, offers the kind of support that builds resilience.

Being able to find purpose and meaning

Being able to make sense of what is happening and finding meaning in it, is vital, if we want to be able to manage the feelings that are aroused in such critical moments. The spiritual and religious values are often a component of this attitude that allows us to find the strength to overcome difficulties, and to find answers to address these difficult situations. For instance, think about the value of prayer, and how it gives hope to the person that the situation can change, and the value of forgiveness can eliminate the need for revenge, and thus the feelings of aggression.

Concreteness

People with such quality would help in detailing the requirements, and would know how they are related to the needs that are a top priority in a given situation.

Listening and communication capacities

This is a personal quality that allows us to understand the other points of view, thoughts and feelings. It can be improved and modified with the appropriate training, as we will observe in the following chapters.



The Syrians' points of view, thoughts and feelings are very challenging, since they might be vastly different from those of the operators.

Giving the beneficiary the possibility of expressing himself/herself, and respecting his/her opinion even if it is in opposition with what AVSI operators believe, is part of the effective communication promoted by AVSI with all beneficiaries.

Evaluation

This attitude allows the operator to understand and see whether he is actually doing his best for the good of the beneficiary, and not just for personal gratification.

This happens, for example, when they confront other operators and beneficiaries to take into account all the factors that come into play in a situation before deciding how to act, and whether their work matches the objectives. Evaluation also requires the ability to plan, organise and deliberate on possible actions and future interventions. The operator must be able to evaluate the connection between intention, action and result.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 12 in the workbook.

6.2.2 Competencies of the humanitarian operator

Personal attitudes are enhanced through specific competencies and acquired through a training course. These competencies can be acquired through specific training in psychological, social and educational services sectors. In the following chapters, we will delve more deeply into some of the working tools for psychosocial intervention and determine in which intervention level they are located. In this section, we will discuss the general competencies that an operator needs to acquire in order to perform a good job for themselves and for the beneficiaries.

Psychosocial work aimed at developing the resilience of the beneficiary, requires an approach to the person that involves all of the features of that person himself, as well as those of the operators and their different professions. The operator's competencies need to involve, at least indirectly, educational skills, because helping the person to overcome psychological and relational difficulties allows him to discover a new dimension of reality. Through these competencies, the beneficiary is indeed aided in discovering his own resources, and therefore his identity and ability to understand and transform the difficult reality he is experiencing.

An example, is the work of the BILADI association in Lebanon which, supported by AVSI, allows children to rediscover their culture and values, arousing the interest in discovering a thorough look at reality rather than just the times of war.

Psychosocial work able to promote resilience requires multidisciplinary teams or groups, co-operation and participating in teamwork. Furthermore, part of the social and communication competencies of psychosocial operators include the ability to act even in situations where a sense of harmony and agreement with others is not always present (among colleagues, beneficiaries, institutions) on the objectives, means and/or methods.

Let us view the different types of competencies:

Communication competencies

With the varied typology of beneficiaries, the psychosocial operator must have the appropriate communication competencies, that include theoretical, practical and methodological aspects in order to exchange appropriate messages and views with the beneficiaries. Communication must be appropriate to the beneficiaries social level, language and training, especially when addressing difficult topics.

Much of the psychosocial work requires interdisciplinary collaboration and the ability to interact with the authorities, administrators and citizens; for this reason, it is useful to have the appropriate social and communication skills, as well as an adaptation of the terminology used in var-

ious contexts. For instance, using technical terms can make communication with beneficiaries indecipherable.

Finally, the psychosocial operator should be able to advise and guide the families. He must recognise that this role requires him to take charge. Again, it requires strong communication skills and mastery of the use of counselling techniques.



"Do you think we don't know this information? Do you think we don't know anything? We know these things and we experienced them".

When we miss these communication skills and do not know which approach to adopt and what type of message fits which kind of beneficiary, this will be the kind of feedback we will get.

An AVSI operator should be able to adapt his/her message according to the target group he/she is addressing.

Social competencies

Collaboration is a key element in psychosocial work. A constructive partnership, through which conflicts are successfully addressed and resolved, is crucial for the beneficiary's wellbeing, as well as the efficiency and the psychological climate of the operator's working environment. As a result, the operator must possess competencies to rigorously solve, manage and resolve conflicts, based on the knowledge of conflict management methods, collaborative methods, group dynamics and psychology.

These competencies also affect the learning of communication tools that allow the operator to work in a team within his organisation.

Organisational competencies

A relationship of any kind is never in itself the last result for the operator. In fact, every action is designed to promote education, development, culture and autonomy of the person with whom he is working. This requires professional competencies, but also organisational, practical and reflective ones. This means that the psychosocial operator is able - in certain cases, but also in general - to design and implement psychosocial and educational actions and processes that allow him to reach his professional goals through a helpful relationship.

The organisational competencies of the operator must also cover the administration, management and development of services, as well as the organisation and, systematic planning of psycho-socio-educational work. The operator must know how to plan and promote activities and psychosocial and educational processes, as well as how to document and evaluate them in terms of their purposes and psychosocial methods.

For this reason, the operator, whether by himself and in collaboration with others, must be able to:

- Define goals, plan and systematise the set of psychosocial and educational practices within the organisation.
- Set goals, plan, structure, implement, coordinate and evaluate small and large action plans, psychosocial and educational activities, processes, projects and developmental projects, adapting everything to suit both the individual and the group.
- Take responsibility for his actions and decisions, and be able to motivate others, relying on his experience and professionalism.

- Adapt and create consultation session for persons and groups, and know how to provide support and guidance to families, colleagues and other professionals.
- The person and his needs are the “centre” of psychosocial and educational work, and of the operator’s competencies. However, nowadays, the work includes even administrative tasks and participation in meetings.
- Have knowledge of administrative procedures, which are generally used in the psychosocial and educational services. For example: the computerised management of information, documentation and evaluation systems, and the management of meetings with colleagues, families and other professionals.



A very nice testimony was made by one of AVSI operators.

“Every child I meet is an example, and each one counts”. Having once met an out of school child, and when meeting again, seeing the joy on his face at seeing me again, and his hope that he would be schooled, was very gratifying”.

Systemic competencies

The community, the public system, politicians, families and other professional groups, as well as the ethical, moral and professional values of the social operator, are the base of psychosocial work. It's in relation to these conditions/constraints that psychosocial operators can and should carry out their functions, and actions, as well as negotiate and deal with the social tasks entrusted to them.

Systemic skills include the set of skills that, among other things, allow the operator to be able to act in these conditions. The social needs, changes and political transformations with respect to public and private systems, whose work is a part of psychosocial work, affect the complexity of the psychosocial work and sets the framework in which it is introduced. On the one hand, the psychosocial operator must support and guide the beneficiary within the "system" in which he lives; on the other hand, he must manage the expectations and demands that the community has towards these groups/persons.

The psychosocial work and services of a project should not be isolated, or be apart from the social organisational context, but instead they should be included in the institutional welfare systems and be complementary to them.

The operator must be familiar with these services, and be able to relate and act in contexts where these services are included.



Some of AVSI's gateways are in the SDCs part of the MOSA structure, and PHCs, part of the structure of the Ministry of Health. Having formed a partnership with these official establishments helps AVSI operators to enlarge the services and activities they can propose for all beneficiaries encountered in the mobile centers, ITSs or in AVSI's educational centers.

Competencies for professional conduct

In addition to practical and theoretical knowledge about methods, we can say that self-reflection, rules, morals and ethical values in the profession are very important for psychosocial professionalism. This indicates a set of skills that are required for a professional psychosocial approach. Other specialised skills of a psychosocial operator are:

- Mastering the terminology and concepts of the profession and participating in the creation of new ones.

- Being able to internalise the moral and ethical values of the profession.
- Being able to take part in debates, propose and write documents, agreements, etc. on psychosocial and educational interventions and projects.
- To have knowledge of the terminology, concepts and ethical foundations of the most closely related professions, such as psychology, pedagogy and sociology.



Ethically, AVSI operators should be able to guarantee a proper proximity between them and the beneficiaries. This requires a vigilant approach from operators. For example, even if some sessions are done in a beneficiary's house, operators should be able to ensure that it is treated as a session (part of AVSI's activities). It is not to be treated as a conference, social gathering or a friendly visit over coffee. Furthermore, AVSI's operator cannot visit this family after work hours. Keeping a professional relationship is the key to staying professional during the interventions done.



One of the most important ethical values of a social operator is respecting confidentiality. This means that every beneficiary's details should not be displayed and read in public spaces (SDC, PHS, ect.). The beneficiaries' details should not be shared -unless necessary- with all the operators in the office (not belonging to the same team); details should be discussed only during work hours and inside the office or a closed space.

Cultural competencies

The experience of the operator also includes cultural competency, meaning to know and to include the different points of view of different cultures and their cultural values. This competency will be expounded upon in the intercultural approach chapter. The operator must be able to use this cultural competency together with the person in order to discover and better understand the person's values and reasonings, so as to contribute to the development of cultural competences, needed for conducting the psychological work.

The cultural competence of the operators thus takes on different dimensions:

- An efficient relationship with the person depends on whether the psychosocial operator recognises that cultural values help, form, and are the base that allows people to access and relate to others, and thus to provide the mode of interaction with different sectors of the community (Community Resilience).
- The operator must have knowledge of, or have the skills to acquire this knowledge and learn about different cultures and their values.
- The operator must know how to relate to the cultural context in which he operates.



Please refer to chapter 5 in order to read all attention points relevant to these skills.

Creative competencies

The operator should master psychosocial forms of expression and creative, gestural and musical competencies, which are used as an integral part of psychosocial work with people in order to promote meaningful development and social communication. Competencies in expressive techniques (theatre, dance, music), for example, enable groups of people to discover personal skills and to enter into relations with others. The drawing of a child can better express his inner turmoil, and at the same time, begins the process of defining the situation that is the cause of his suffering. Thanks to this activity, he starts to overcome the situation and to develop coping strategies.

Furthermore, the operator must share, with the person, ways that he can acquire and develop his own methods of expression in order to expand his creative horizons in a social and cultural context.

All these competencies should be based on respect for others, their diversity and their willingness to participate. Operators promote equality and respect for all people, and pay particular attention to individual needs. They respect and protect the beneficiaries' right to privacy and independence. This means exposing cases without allowing a precise identification. Respect, care and empathy towards the beneficiaries and their families, solidarity with the vulnerable and fragile groups, and the fight against poverty and for social justice, form the ethical foundations of the psychosocial operators' profession.

Development and learning competencies

More and more projects in critical areas require the ability to skillfully manage psychosocial issues. The operator should be able to:

- Develop and enhance his skills and theoretical base through continuous and additional training that allows him to improve his competencies, planning, etc.
- Know how to constantly find and acquire further knowledge and more skills, and be able to transform them into practice.
- Know how to improve skills in a systematic, strategic and suitable way, and to participate in their planning and improvement.
- Attend formal and informal educational sessions.
- By himself or with the help of others, an operator systematically collects and documents, scrutinises and uses the experience from execution in the development of psychosocial and educational work.
- Be able to critically reflect on and evaluate their own work, alone and/or with others.
- Analyse, develop and use research results for the practice and the development of psychosocial work.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 13 in the workbook.

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PART II

The helping process methodology

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Chapter 7

THE HELPING PROCESS IN PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION



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In this chapter, we will present a detailed description of the steps of the helping process, in order to shed light on its main features, its main actors and its links with resilience. Having the helping process steps clear in mind means, for the operator, having the clarity necessary to perform the intervention in accordance with proven and evaluated methods, and having a path cleared for him in order to implement these methods, with a higher chance of success.

7.1 Definition

The helping process is a specific mode used by the social operator, which is the ability to trigger articulated responses, often using complex pathways in which the beneficiaries play a central role. The professional helping relationship regulates the beneficiary-operator relationship during the entire course of treatment (Bartolomei, Passera, 2005). The professional helping relationship is defined as a relationship in which at least one of the protagonists is intended to support and let the other grow in several areas, including, for instance, psychological development, cognitive maturity, and independence...It is not about equality in human relationships, and not a discriminating factor in determining the personal worth of each individual.

Breaking down the term, we could say that:

The process is the sequence of events that follows each event in a logical-operative line, which are connected with each other based on the achievement of a certain goal.

Of help, i.e. the objective of the whole process.

The actors involved are identified as follows:

1. The person or family in a living environment
2. The social worker and the institution
3. The community/territory

7.2 Purpose and aim

- Promotion of change compared to a problematic situation or one perceived as such by an individual, a family and a community.
- Support of the beneficiary in the search for solutions.
- Implementation of the knowledge of all resources, starting with those of the person and his living environment.
- Creation of psychosocial interventions that help to prevent the recurrence of problematic situations.



AVSI's interventions tackled all purposes of the helping process. For example, we can say that:

1. In the context of promoting change, when compared to a problematic situation, or a situation perceived as such by an individual, a family and a community, AVSI worked in order to raise awareness on gender-based violence, the importance of regular vaccination for children (during the Polio Campaign), the importance of schooling for children (during the Back to school campaign), etc.

2. In the context of supporting a beneficiary in the search for a solution, AVSI placed special attention on case management when vulnerable beneficiaries are identified. They are followed by case managers (in the context of an emergency project) and by social workers (in the frame of the SAD – the distance support project) in order to accompany them and help them find a solution for their problem(s).
3. In the context of implementing the knowledge about all resources, starting with those of the person and his life, AVSI begins this job at a micro level by applying the psychosocial approach in all its activities (implementing the exercise pertaining to searching for the individual's resources, so his protective factors as well as his risk factors). At a macro level, AVSI's operators do their best in order to refer beneficiaries to all available services presented by AVSI, but also by other organisations existing in the area.
4. In the context of creating a psychosocial intervention that helps to prevent the recurrence of problematic situations, AVSI implemented psychosocial activities for children and caregivers, as well as implementing Life Skills sessions for teenagers.

The skills required for a psychosocial operator

As for the operator, the skills required for a good psychosocial intervention that meet the support process' criteria are:

- The ability to establish a relationship with the beneficiary that is significant (i.e. emotionally significant).
- The ability to relate questions concerning resources (or, ask what we can get regarding resources).
- The ability to facilitate the problem solving processes through information, social communication and planning.



In the frame of this ability to relate questions with resources, one of AVSI operators noted the importance of trusting the team's abilities, in order to get a more comprehensive look at all available resources.

AVSI operators should master the skill of team collaboration.

The main components of the helping process are as follows:

- Actors: beneficiaries, operators, organisations
- Content: requests (needs) of the user and the organisation's mission
- Objectives: clear and achievable
- The context: environmental, political, economic, security, availability of services...
- Timing
- Resources
- Principles and ethics

7.3 Steps

The steps that must be carefully followed for the development of psychosocial actions, both globally and in every action undertaken daily, are:

1. Welcoming the request
2. Analysis of the situation (needs assessment)
3. Planning
4. Intervention
5. Evaluation and performance review
6. Conclusion

There are close ties between the helping process and resilience; we could say that the helping process is the main process by which we stimulate resources, and by extension, the resilience of the persons and the community. We could say that the operator is a true guardian of the beneficiaries' resilience.

Let us now delve into each step individually:

1. Welcoming the request

It can take place according to different methods, and below are the most common:

- The beneficiaries come into an organisation's centre
- An educational institution (the ministry or a large organisation) gives a mandate to execute an intervention in a given community
- The operator receives information from other community members
- A group brings attention to a need during a group activity (awareness)
- The community decides, through its representatives, to bring forth a request to the organisation
- During a monitoring or support activity, the operator notes a need



Even if AVSI already identified the beneficiaries' profile in a project, which address all the activities and already contains the donors' agreements to reach the targets, AVSI operators should be aware of the importance of welcoming requests not in line with the activities agreed upon.

In these cases, this is an opportunity to link the donor with other resources, but also to keep the need identified as a possible gap to be tackled by future projects held by AVSI.

On the other hand, when a community delivers a request to the organisation, AVSI operators should give special attention to it, since it already reflects a group's needs and it shows the emerging of a subsidiary group to be strengthened and shows the emergence of a secondary group that should be empowered.

At this stage, it is important to know that the primary objectives are the following:

- Creating a connection through careful listening, and creating an empathetic relationship to establish a helping relationship, which is essential to take charge (and often requires a lot of patience and time).
- Gathering information (it is vital that they are written in the organisation's documents) about the group or the person through detailed history-taking, and listening carefully to each one's life history.
- Understanding how the beneficiary or beneficiaries came to the centres of the organisation (this gives us a chance to understand the kind of impact we have on that territory, and greatly helps us to outline the nature of the demands).
- Highlighting the expectations.
- Determining if the problem is attributable to the service, or if the beneficiary needs to be re-oriented (networking).
- Figuring out whether the request made corresponds with a real need (sometimes beneficiaries are not aware of their true needs) and possibly help with it and address it.



In order not to lose track of any requests from any beneficiary, and to avoid acting on personal level but instead on a professional level, it is very important to be able to keep a written record of all these details (possibly in a standard form). It is also very important to inform and update all the team members about these requests, and to coordinate the follow-up of each request with all team members.

2. Analysis of the situation

It is the process by which we progress to the understanding and assessment of the situation. It is a process that changes with the development of the operator-beneficiary relationship. It is also important to maintain a level of professional judgment, and not slip into personal judgment, related to values or morals. Once made clear to the operator, this evaluation should be shared as widely as possible.

3. Planning

This is the main tool for planning a project, so that it can be effective. It is important to ask ourselves some questions:

- Who (does what)
- What
- Where
- How (with which tools)
- When (timing and phases)

The essential starting point for running a good planning process is the identification of the objectives. It is, in fact, the anticipation and portrayal of improvements and changes that the people involved in the helping process will notice at the end of the process itself. The objectives will have to meet certain criteria:

- They must be consistent with the assessment
- They will have to be shared between operators, and between the operators and the beneficiaries

- They must be specific and verifiable
- They should be realistic in relation to the actual resources

Furthermore, the objectives must respect other important principles:

- Relevance, i.e. the actual importance, established relying on the criteria of pragmatism (specific term coined by William James 1879).
- The eligibility criterion, i.e. if the necessary resources are already largely present in the beneficiary. To uncover it, it is important to learn to break down the benefits provided into simpler and verifiable components. It also helps to identify the exact difficulties.

It is advisable, in the writing phase of the project, to state the existing actions that will cause a change and the situations within which they are expected to produce a change. To do this, it is important to follow, in detail, the indications in the section regarding "The steps of the helping process".

The negotiation of the contract, namely: directly establishing rules with the beneficiary

characterised by four necessary steps:

- Comparison with the beneficiary
- Consensus and cooperation in the project's implementation
- The chance to make changes
- The formalisation of the project in oral or written form



Even if a written contract form is not common in AVSI's interventions, an oral contract should be compulsory, and AVSI operators made aware of the importance of verbalizing, very clearly, the responsibilities that fall to each party: AVSI on one side, and the beneficiary/the group of beneficiaries on the other.

4. The intervention

Overall, the project can cover several areas, the main ones being:

- Psychosocial consultancy (PSS support, education, CP, GBV).
- The social-welfare intervention, including health (nutrition, WASH, sanitation, HAV, disability in general, mental health).
- Filtering needs, orientation and support within the network of services in this context.

5. Evaluation and performance review

The evaluation and performance review, both in the intermediate phase and in the final phase, are a necessary and complex activity. For a good evaluation, it is necessary to consider different dimensions.

- Qualitative, or the kind of result we get if we look at the context in which we acted.
- Quantitative, or the amount of desired results, and how many beneficiaries compared to the target number, achieved them.
- Efficiency, or how we used the resources in relation to the results obtained.
- Effectiveness aspects, such as the analysis of the relationship between the implemented processes and the changes made in target group (Refer to Chapter 9).

6. The conclusion

The conclusion of the process is an important and delicate phase, since closing means separation, and for the beneficiaries, this is an emotionally delicate moment, because it can be associated with past painful experiences (imagine a refugee who has already had to give up his way of life). As a result, it must be prepared and programmed.

At the end of each project, we will deal with different kinds of conclusion; here are some examples:

- Conclusion planned with the person (achievements)
- Conclusion on the initiative of the beneficiary
- Full implementation of the project (even if the goals are partly achieved)
- Conclusion on the change of the operator
- Conclusion on the transfer to another service

7.4 Implementation constraints

The operator has to constructively deal with some constraints, observed in the following categories:

- The kind of project in which he is working
- The kind of service that the organisation provides
- The programs and regulations
- The cultural or religious community features
- The political context
- The economic aspects of the project

7.5 Tools

The available tools for the psychosocial operator will be discussed more in depth in later chapters; here we will present a short overview:

Concerning interventions with the beneficiaries, the tools used are:

- The interview
- The home visit
- The work groups, of all types
- Activities promoting Life Skills
- Games and communicative activities (design, music, singing, sculpting...)

As for the work organisation the necessary tools available for the operator are:

- The team, based on the consideration that every operator in the team is a resource.
- The networking, the use of all resources in a given context, and perhaps, not only those of the organisation.
- A professional documentations (for example, the beneficiary identification form, the reports, home visit form...) which are essential for efficient organisational work.
- The assessment and the monitoring tools.

7.6 Reference values

There are some values, which refer to the implementation of psychosocial interventions, that are vital from an ethical and professional point of view.

- The global nature or the holistic approach
- Self-determination or the fact that every individual is free to determine his own identity in relation to his needs and values
- Planning or the ability to build a project for the future
- Customisation or the awareness of the fact that any individual or community has specific needs, and an intervention should respond to them
- Territoriality or the answer must be in the territory that the community and the individuals choose, without being forced to migrate, and must take into account the actual resources
- Prevention represents true strength: acting before something becomes a problem, and preventing it if possible
- Resilience, the ability to mobilise their own resources and those of the community, with a positive outlook



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 14 in the work-book.

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Chapter 8

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NETWORKING



130 PAGE BLANCHE

This short chapter is intended to introduce the theory and practice of networking to facilitate the operator's ability to analyse and intervene, often while operating in a chaotic context, characterised by groups of people belonging to different ethnic groups, nations, religion denominations and often even different languages. Moreover, briefly analysing networking, we need to propose a stimulus and an incentive to develop partnerships on the field that are often not considered, and that can uncover unexpected and essential resources for the promotion of resilience, as well as supporting a good standard of psychosocial intervention. This system is meant to work out a general method to analyse and use human and material resources that are present in the area of intervention.

8.1 Definition

In order to properly consider this topic, it is useful to first provide a definition. The scholar who started a study on this fascinating subject is Jacob Levi Moreno (1889-1974): he contributed, more than any other, to the study and definition of today's vision of the social network, and its possible applications to the fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology. A social network is defined as any group of individuals connected together via different social ties. For humans, they are ties ranging from a casual acquaintance, work relationships, to family ties. For a comprehensive view, let us also add the definition given by J. Clyde Mitchell (1918-1995). He defined the social network as a specific set of connections among a defined set of people, with an additional property that the characteristics of such bonds can be used to interpret the social behaviour of people with the same bonds. In other words, the analysis of the links between the actors in a given social network can help us in interpreting the system in which we are operating, and to better direct the action needed; basically, a good interpretation of the network can help us understand what resources are available in a given context, and the kind of relationships that exist between the involved people (for example, in an ITS or in a community, we can understand who to contact and what kind of rules govern the activities).



In the ITS of Marj El Khokh and most of the ITS in Marjeyoun, there is a leading figure, called 'shawish'. The name 'shawish' is part of the cultural background of Syrian refugees.

This person is in charge, on behalf of the landlord, and manages all residents in this camp located on a parcel of the land the owner has. This authority figure has a 'professional' relation with all residents. He accepts them coming and staying in these tents, but in return, they must be agricultural workers when work is available.

Social networks are often used as the basis for intercultural studies in various fields (sociology, anthropology, ethology etc...). From Moreno's school of thought, we developed the so-called social network analysis, i.e. the analysis of networks operation that brings together several models, upon which, in order to summarise, we will not dwell on. Being that this is a psychosocial intervention manual, we can say that this ongoing research, conducted using different approaches, has shown that social networks operate on many levels, from families to communities, and above all, that they play a crucial role in determining troubleshooting modes and the organisation's system management, as well as the possibility of individuals achieving their goals. In other words, once again, the development of social networks and networking can become an essential contributor in the development of resilience within the communities in which we operate.

At this point, it is important to define and articulate a key feature of the social network: a metaphor that identifies, highlights, analyses and breaks down all the interdependencies, ties, contacts, and exchanges of social relations between the knots of the network (knots may be people, but also, by expanding our view, they can be groups, institutions, organisations, services, etc). Breaking down the tangle of interdependencies allows us to identify the structure of the network (in this chapter, we will introduce the main tools). To deal adequately with these assumptions, it is necessary to take into account a key feature: fluidity. The social network is, in fact, flowing, fluctuating, and its structure can vary, so it must be analysed at a given time through the analysis of trade links between the knots, while being able to redefine the structure itself if it mutates. It should also be pointed out that the social network has no fixed borders, but instead is made of open channels that allow mutation through exchanges. This is very important, since it gives us the size of the combinatorial opportunities that can be put in place in a supportive action. That means, that when we encounter a beneficiary, we must consider the network's structure (communication, load distribution, roles, conflicts, resources etc...) at that specific time, and if there has been any significant changes since the last analysis.

Let us see how:

First of all, we need to separate the social network that makes up the beneficiary's network of ties into two main categories:

- Primary social networks: the group of people connected by ties of kinship, friendship, and neighborhood.
- Secondary social networks: formal relations, or as dictated by the general rules of co-existence, such as social networks related to economic needs, projects, work standards or interests in general.

It is important to consider, while recalling concepts already mentioned in this manual, that vulnerability, as well as resilience, are supplied through the relationship between risk factors and protection factors (resources), and that the latter include the environment, education, family, health, as well as social networks.

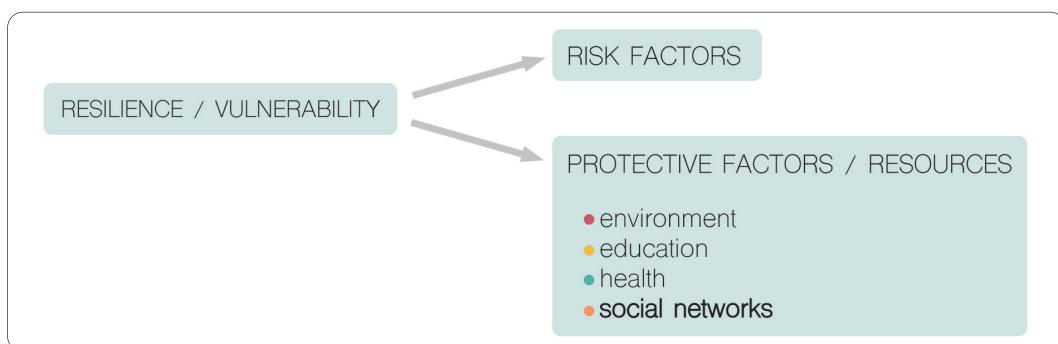


Figure 8.1: Social networks: part of the protective factors / resources of each person



Each camp, ITS, shelter, ect...has its own prevalent social bonds created between residents.

For example, in Nabatieh, there is a strong bond between Syrian refugees in the group shelters as they are between relatives and/or neighbours. Often, when AVSI operators go to reach out in order to propose services to beneficiaries, many families visited will point them to many others (by giving them their address) or send their children to call these relatives/neighbours in order for them to benefit as well from AVSI's services. This highlights the solidarity present between Syrian refugees.

In Saida, refugees living in shelters have this sense of solidarity when services are presented to all of them. When this service is selective, personal interests will prevail.

In Saida, the camp of Zahrani is divided into two parts: one part for gypsies, and the other for Syrian refugees. Unfortunately, there is conflict between the two communities.

In Saida, in the housing units, Syrians have a good relationship with their Lebanese neighbours. They share good moments around cups of coffee.



AVSI operators should pay attention and take some strategic actions according to the prevailing bonds existing in each community.

For example, in order to maintain a faster outreach process, when there are strong bonds identified in the community, AVSI operators should always rely on the network of each beneficiary met. It saves time in locating potential beneficiaries and strengthens the existing bond of solidarity in the community.

This becomes clearer if we highlight the most important functions that the social network can supply for the individual and the community. The social network provides beneficiaries with presence, support, protection, constraints and rules. These dimensions, as explained in the chapter on the theoretical approach, are related to the relational sphere, and focus on the interaction between members of the community according to the knowledge that the resources of the individual can become tools for the improvement of the whole community; to do so, the operator must be able to develop these resources. A working community is based on the principle of participation and mutual support, as well as the creation of shared rules and limits that help in decision making. When talking about constraints, we want to emphasise a mutual commitment to resolving a community's problems.

So, as you can infer, the social network and network intervention can be important tools for actions we take as psychosocial workers. The project, as proposed in this manual, is taken to target social networks in a way that can greatly help to implement the human potential (i.e. the ability of the individual to develop resources and be resilient). This is if we act on the primary network, and the social capital (all the resources available in a given community, that can enrich the individuals belonging to it), if we act on the secondary network in order to mobilise, promote and enhance resources (protection factors), and to offset any imbalance due to risk factors. To be clear, it must be said that the social network analysis is a preparatory planning tool for the work described in this manual; it is an intervention used to evaluate the context in which we operate, and the way in which we can work in the community. The way we work is decided by the use of the tools listed in the following chapters of this manual.

8.2 Stages of network intervention

The methodological process requires two stages:

- Exploration
- Network mobilisation

It is important to note that the two stages do not occur in a diachronic fashion, but are rather synchronic, because exploration often coincides with a network immediately set in motion; it is created by the presence of the operator himself in the network.

In the networks analysis, we will take into account the analysis of the primary network in particular (but not only), since it is where much of the efforts in psychosocial action are generally focused.

8.2.1 Exploration

The operator, while exploring, must consider at least three dimensions:

1. The structure of the networks: he must take into account the existing links and the way they configure the network's structure.
2. Functions: performed by individual members and networks.
3. Relations: existing links between the network's members and the dynamics of the network they configure.

Below, we will report plans related to some tools used for network exploration: the support board and the Rousseau network chart.

The support board (L. Sanicola)

The support board is a tool that allows you to bring out those who can offer help, within a social network (primarily), and determine what each person can offer. Below is an example:

Support Board	Family	relatives	friends	neighbours	Work mates	Free time	other	Satisfaction
Daily material/ domestic help								
Emergency help								
Emotive/affective support								
Normative support								
Suggestions informations								
Hospitality								
Socialisation, Leisure								
Multidimensionality ¹								
Reciprocity ²								

Table 8.1 The support board by L. Sanicola

This table should be read by crossing the dimensions shown in the left column, with the areas in which to evaluate them, found at the top row. The operator should check in which environment a dimension can be found (in the family, the network of friends, the activities...).

In the column on the left, there is a list of the dimensions of support for the person. In the first line, there is a list of the areas where social life develops. The operator is supposed to mark which dimension(s) is/are satisfied by the social network the person lives in.

¹ When the actors involved assume more functions.

² The exchange code in primary networks is reciprocity, and is based on gratitude for what has been given, and on trusting that it will be returned in a time of need.

Regarding the degree of satisfaction, operators can create a five-point-scale (semantic differential) to define each point:

1. Very dissatisfied
2. dissatisfied
3. Ok
4. Satisfied
5. Very satisfied

It is a simple tool that can be used in the assessment of the social aspects of a hypothetical child (recipient) being taken care of by a humanitarian organisation. Practically, if an operator meets a vulnerable child and assumes that an intervention is required, the plan above can easily define which dimensions are fulfilled in the areas that the plan foresees. It will then be sufficient to cross out an option to verify that a dimension (in the left column) is fulfilled.

The Rousseau network chart

With this tool, the operator can have a clear and immediate image of the relationship between the actors in a network, and an understanding of the nature of the relationships, thus identifying and sharing with colleagues the strengths (resources, protection factors) and weaknesses (limitations, risk factors).

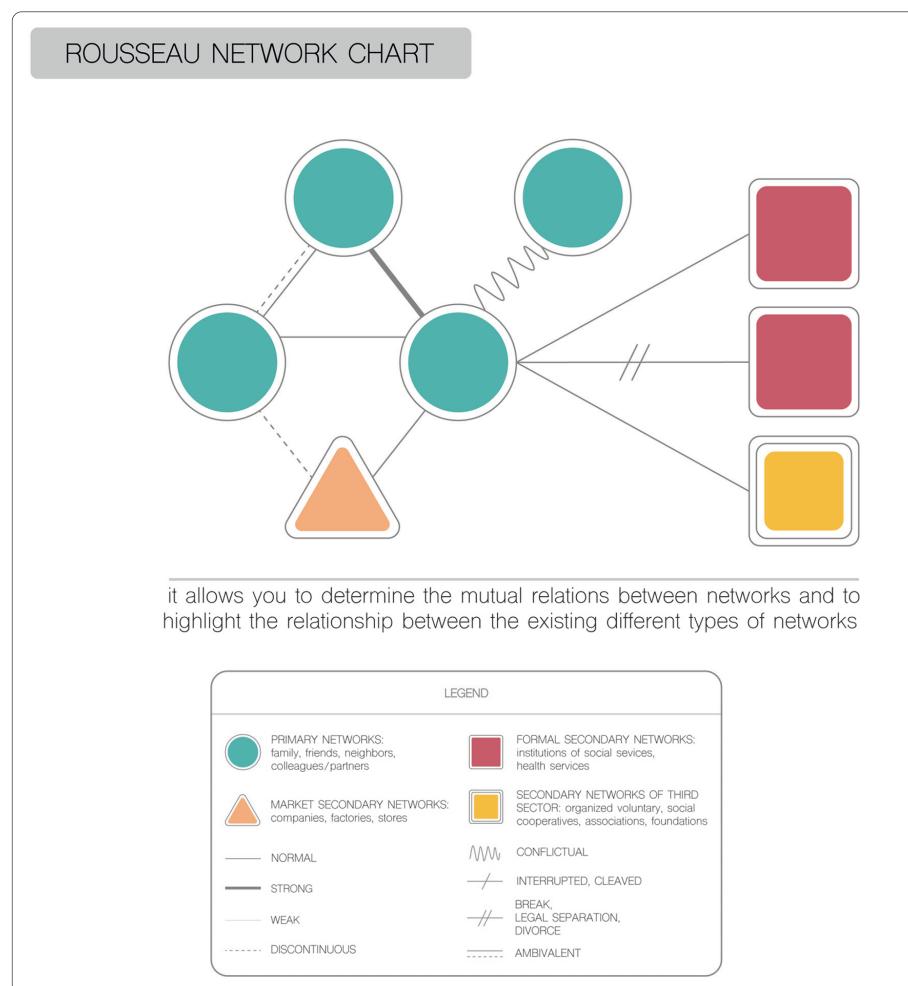


Figure 8.2: Rousseau network chart



Aysha, a little girl of 6 years, met in one of AVSI's educational centers in Nabatieh, attends the Non-Formal Educational Program, and has some asocial behaviours, refusing to be part of some activities.

By exploring her primary network, an AVSI operator discovered that Aysha lived through a traumatic event, since she witnessed the death of both her parents in Syria. AVSI operators also discovered that Aysha does not have a wide primary network of relationships. She was living with her grandmother, who beat her frequently. She has one cousin, who is her only friend.

As for her secondary network, it consists of AVSI operators who she met in the educational centre. Aysha was showing very strong attachment to AVSI's shadow teacher and one of AVSI's operators. In the group, she usually stayed alone, not having any friend with whom to share her time.

By caring for Aysha, the strong bonds AVSI operators built helped her to overcome her feeling of loss and the violent relationship she has with her grandmother.

Referring to the support board of L. Sanicola, Aysha was given emotive/affective support by AVSI operators, normative support as well as support for normative behaviour, informational support and support in socialisation and sharing recreational activities.

The constant efforts made in caring for Aysha and integrating her in all AVSI's activities has really impacted her behaviour. She became self-confident, active and cooperative.



Being part of one team for interventions and meeting the same beneficiaries, AVSI operators should always share the information they receive on every vulnerable beneficiary they meet in order to better address the intervention to be carried out for him.

Beneficiaries must know that everyone in the team will treat the personal information they divulge as confidential.

8.2.2 Mobilisation

During mobilisation, which is also due to the understanding of the relationship between people in the community (Rousseau Network Chart), the primary goal of an action must be to shift the social dynamic from the individual to a collective, through sharing of the problematic point of view, and finding a shared solution, and from dependence to autonomy, always remembering that the psychosocial operator's purpose is not to provide answers, but to help beneficiaries in obtaining a functional response to the problem, using the resources present in the individual and in the community.

There are also, in practical terms, actions that should be implemented to achieve the mobilisation of the network goal.

In primary social networks, the essential actions are as follows:

1. Recognise and value the existing positive resource in two areas specifically: the action and the relationship.
2. Develop empowerment, i.e. the ability of individuals and communities to consider, decide, and act, and see the results of their action.

3. Support through initiatives and aid, and support through work in the field, activities that encourage sharing.
4. Create opportunities to ensure the action's success.
5. Promote a cycle to restore solidarity in the community, wherever it had been interrupted. For instance, encouraging the opportunity to solve a community problem together.
6. When in a community that is having trouble making a decision (on education, healthcare or a GBV problem), apply the instruments in this manual.

When meeting a beneficiary, it is important to be able to identify his resources in terms of his capacity to achieve things (actions in daily life), and form relationships (with counterparts, family, school and society in general). It will then be necessary to figure out if the society he lives in can implement processes concerning decisions, actions and an assessment of its own needs (village, family, ITS). Operators will have to support community decisions through practical equipment (such as toys, fuel, medicine, schoolrooms, teaching material, etc.).

7. The aid worker's job is sometimes a mediating role. He will have to encourage an open discussion. Debate can help in making a decision. The creation of opportunities can be easily obtained through common activities that the PSS intervention model proposes in this manual.
8. One of the main goals is to create a certain level of social solidarity; that is to say that people help one another to overcome their problems. It is a cycle: in helping you, I help myself, since we are both members of the same community.

Concerning secondary social networks, actions that have to be taken in order to implement capital sharing are:

1. Encouraging people to work with others
2. Developing synergies between operators, both in and out of the organisation (for example, between different organisations)
3. Sharing the responsibility of taking charge in different teams, working in the same context
4. Set up a process that involves all levels of the community as much as possible
5. Add actors in the network, but also goals and resources
6. Properly differentiate between primary and secondary network interventions
7. Promote the integration of resources in a complementary way, such that they are different (not overlapping) yet balanced



Hadi is a boy in a wheelchair, met during an outreach activity in Nabatieh's souk. His mother reported the fact that he is not attending school because the school's director refused to register him due to his handicap.

Hadi has a very protective primary network: his parents are very caring and he has a lot of friends with whom to play.

As for his secondary network, school was an unreachable place for him. Since AVSI operators are not allowed to perform any interventions in public schools, Hadi was referred to two other NGOs, which succeeded in getting him registered and attending school. AVSI operators followed the case from a distance by calling the mother regularly until the day of Hadi's registration. AVSI's supportive relationship with the mother aimed to empower her and help her to stay strong for her child.

After the intervention, Hadi's primary network was enlarged; now including classmates. As for his secondary network, he included the school community, AVSI and the two other NGOs that took care of his case.

Also, this is a great example of how networking using other resources in a specific community can make the interventions of AVSI operators a success.

8.3 Network mobilisation effect

Let us take note of, briefly, the main changes that can be observed after an appropriate amount of work on network mobilisation. The changes focus mainly on three very specific and fundamental areas: structural, functional and relational changes. Meaning that these changes can alter the shape of the social network by changing the roles of the actors that were a part of it until the intervention, and therefore altering the relationship modes (perhaps resulting in less conflict).

If we follow the steps mentioned in previous paragraphs, we can, in fact, observe that the community where we operate has reached:

- A network expansion (with the benefit of an increase in available resources)
- A new way to address problems in the community (often with conflict reduction)
- A new way to approach and solve problems
- A new way of taking charge, according to an attitude of sharing responsibility
- An increase in primary and secondary networks autonomy

The psychosocial intervention, as it is designed in this manual, is in perfect harmony with the guidelines in this chapter, because the proposed project as a whole, provides a plan of action in all levels of the community, and therefore involves all areas or activated social networks.

The expected results of an exploration and mobilisation intervention of the networks, are directed towards an exit from loneliness and isolation: the restoration of a dynamic of sharing between people (a fundamental view of the resilient community's development), the reactivation of meaningful relationships through a dynamic of reciprocity and gift-giving, and complementarity between the two network types (primary and secondary) on the basis that the community should be able to communicate independently.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 15 in the workbook.

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Chapter 9

ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING



140 PAGE BLANCHE

The evaluation procedures are a key element of social projects. In their different aspects, they allow a design that is more adhering to the identified needs, a more effective implementation, and a measurement of the intervention's effectiveness. For instance, in the context of Child Protection, the importance of monitoring is also well defined in the Minimum Standard 6 (CPWG 2012), to which a reference is made for further study.

Besides ensuring that the beneficiaries have a project that properly meets their need for safety and development, evaluation is important to all actors involved:

- Through it, operators, can understand the effectiveness of their work when achieving certain goals;
- The directors of the project, careful about budgetary issues and the dialectic between costs and benefits;
- The institution, whether involved in the project or not, is concerned with the social relevance of the project and the contiguity between social consequences and their programmatic guidelines;
- Donors, who consider the connection between the intervention carried out and the project that they decided to support financially.



AVSI operators, through the monitoring process, are also able to adjust their approach to some activities based on the beneficiaries' feedback. These feedbacks should be gathered just after the end of any activity but also after a while, letting some time passing after any activity.

Since the monitoring and evaluation process is concerned with qualitative as well as quantitative indicators, this allows some ministries, for example, to have relevant quantitative data on some issues.

As for gaps not covered by AVSI's project, it is expected that donors will take them into consideration when calling for a new proposal.

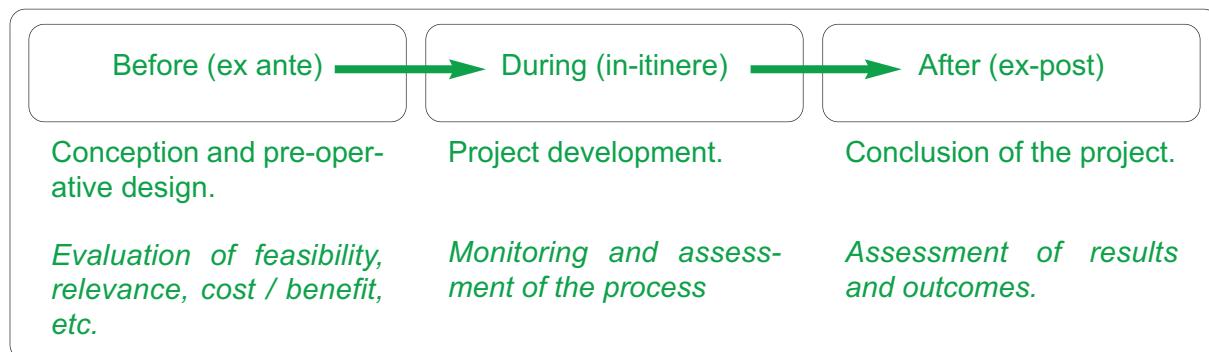
The issue of assessment and monitoring in emergency situations is very complex; it continues to be difficult in developing projects. Here, we offer some views on the phases of the evaluation process, the choice of indicators to observe, and the methods used for collecting information.

The planning, to which a reference is made herein, is a common aspect of drafting a project in general (with a complex program and long-term goals) such as deciding the sub-projects included in them, down to each individual psychosocial activity planned and designed to achieve the goals of the intervention.

Hence, what will be discussed below is considered relevant in all stages of planning.

9.1 Steps of the assessment process

The assessment follows each phase of a project:



9.1.1 Ex-ante assessment

The assessment process begins when the project is still in its embryonic phase. In fact, this happens from the very beginning, during the designing of the project, when the idea itself is being examined: is it a major project? Is it consistent with the organisation's mission? Who is going to achieve it? What feasibility problems might be faced? Does it address a topic of interest and usefulness?

These first questions are considered the first filter; some design ideas will be discarded, until the most suitable one has been found, and then further developed until the process begins rolling out. During the difficult period that is the project's drawing, several elements need to be considered, such as the adequacy and internal consistency of the project, its relevance, the effectiveness of the measures envisioned, and the costs (economic management, human resources, temporal resources...).

9.1.2 In-itinere assessment

The in-intinere assessment includes the purpose of observing the progress of the project regarding some objectives. The evaluation conducted in-itinere is split into two types: the monitoring and assessment of the implemented processes (Leone, Prezza, 2003).

Monitoring is tied to the more formal aspects of the project's implementation (or of a specific activity) and thus is aimed at being attentive and vigilant over certain aspects, such as:

- The achievement of the target, i.e. if the operation is failing to reach beneficiaries and realise the target set;
- The adequacy of the implemented activities in regard to the various forms of constraints, from legislative ones to ones concerned with the consistency of the aims of the project with the vision of the organisation;
- The budget, i.e. check that the planned and actual costs are within the financial means of the project.



- At a micro level of this in-itinere assessment, each activity held with beneficiaries should be evaluated in 3 steps.
- 1- The evaluation should be done with the beneficiaries by gathering their feedback verbally or in written form.
 - 2- It should also be done by the team just after the end of the activity. At that time, all the team is able to remember what happened in detail (in terms of the

group's interaction, the participation level, the climate during the activity, etc.) and can more easily recognise weak points and good practices to replicate.

3- The evaluation also should be done after experiencing the same kind of activities many times. This gives the team an overview of how this kind of activity can be improved.



One example of an in-itinere assessment is when the ministry of education decided to suspend all ongoing activities inside schools. AVSI's informal educational project (composed by Basic Literacy and Numeracy programs, remedial education and catch-up cycles) was already implemented and running in public schools for Syrian refugees unable to attend normal education program.

By that time AVSI had already reached a substantial number of beneficiaries that relied heavily on these informal educational services AVSI provided.

The assessment process allowed AVSI to rapidly adjust its strategy and search for independent centers in order to continue its activities. Within a short period of time, the activities resumed in AVSI's centers. However, the assessment process continued to monitor and assess the situation in each centre to make sure the change in locale did not hinder the learning process for the beneficiaries. For example, the centers were constantly adjusted so as to look similar to a standard classroom setting that the students were used to in public schools, in order to facilitate a learning environment.

The *assessment of the implemented processes*, which often includes monitoring the elements, is more dedicated to the observation of elements that can lead to recognising differences between the conceived project and the implemented one. For instance, the kind of obstacles encountered, how close we are to the set objectives, which contextual and organisational elements help realize the goals, etc. The assessment process is very important, because it allows you to make changes and corrections, both formal and organizational, while the project is still ongoing as well as once the project conceived becomes reality: the unexpected may occur, and difficulties during implementation may emerge that were not planned into the budget, or new resources and ideas may arise that can be integrated in order to make the project more effective.

9.1.3 Ex-post assessment

You can say that until you have performed an assessment of results and outcomes, the project cannot be considered properly concluded. The results can be "measured" through multiple dimensions, among the most important are:

- *The effectiveness*, i.e. whether and how the project has been able to respond to objectives;
- The *impact*, considering the changes induced by the project;
- The *efficiency*, which refers to the ability to achieve the intended objective at the lowest possible costs (economic and social);
- *Transferability and replicability*; in other words, if the achievements and results generated good practices, within the management's organisational models of complex situations, these ad hoc tools can be used in other similar projects to achieve similar results.



In a development project held by AVSI agriculture operators, many tools were used in order to achieve this ex-post assessment. Since it was an agricultural vocational training, the evaluation held took into consideration all the figures involved. A questionnaire was addressed to students in order to evaluate their level of satisfaction. A questionnaire was addressed to teachers to collect their concerns and recommendations. Meetings were organised with the directors of the vocational schools and the Ministry of Agriculture to gather their feedback on this project.

One additional value that an ex-post assessment can bring, is the reorganisation of activities according to the beneficiaries' needs. In this vocational training, the sociocultural activities were done at the end of all sessions. The evaluation showed that these activities had a better impact on group cohesion if done in the beginning of the course. This contributed to the success of the second course.

9.2 Indicators

What do we depend on when evaluating? In very simple terms, we can say that an evaluation consists of a comparison between a goal, an ideal standard to aim for, and reality. This comparison allows us to see how close what is achieved came to the set goal, and based on this, we make judgements. In order to make this comparison, we need some elements (i.e. the indicators) to be observed.

Literally, the indicators are things that unveil and give us information on a certain phenomenon. They are the 'signs that stand for something' (Parra Saiani, 2009). In some cases, they are directly observable characteristics, which can, for example, be counted or measured (i.e. the number of participants in an initiative; the cost of the used materials, and the weight of a child to evaluate his health status, etc.). Very often, though, especially in a context of psychosocial interventions, we are more interested in capturing aspects that are not directly observable, and related to abstract concepts, such as wellbeing, the quality of relationships, attitudes etc.

The definition of indicators, i.e. what to observe in order to "measure" an abstract concept, is a delicate procedure, performed through a process called "operationalization", which means the path which, through a series of logical steps, allows the switching from an abstract concept to an element (or more than one element) that is directly observable.

If you intend to measure the children's participation in a certain activity more accurately, in addition to wanting to measure the numerical participation, you might be interested in the quality of participation. For instance, if children participate spontaneously, forming small groups, if there is a randomness to the relationship between the children, or if they are always the same groups, and whether it is a "forced" or "enthusiastic" participation.

Each of these aspects can be further eliminated until reaching the easily observable elements, through a checklist for example (a list of behaviors described in a simple way, that the viewer selects when they are found in the observed subject).

In any event, the chosen indicators must meet requirements of a different nature (Leoni, Prezza, 2003):

- Conceptual requirements: they must be relevant and significant compared to the characteristics of that which you want to observe. They must also be sufficiently specific and sensitive, i.e. able to differentiate the different levels of intensity of a phenomenon.
- Methodological requirements: must be valid, i.e. measures what is actually intended for measurement (scales must actually measure the weight of an object and not its size) and

reliable, i.e. the measurement must be replicable in different conditions (if a book weighs 800g, when repeating the measurement, it will still weigh 800g).

- Practical requirements: it is necessary to deal with feasibility; to detect indicators, we need appropriate skills, tools and time, i.e. we must have theoretical knowledge concerning the observation of different contexts and social behaviors, and knowledge of the methods of collection and analysis of collected information. This knowledge must also be accompanied by adequate practical experience on the field (for an actual observation and assessment process, which is referred to in this chapter, first-hand experience is mandatory). The identification of appropriate indicators, the collection of information, and the construction of necessary tools (ad hoc built) require time and attention; they cannot be improvised at the planning stage and the time they need must be considered.

9.3 Information collection during the activity

The mode and tools by which information is recorded for evaluation purposes can be numerous. For example:

- Mappings, in particular in the initial phases of the project's activation in the territory, for instance, to identify the services already present, or to locate the community's authority figures, or any emerging phenomena;
- Assessment, i.e. surveys designed to record information useful to the analysis of the case;
- Referral files that can be internal (for instance, directed at dispatching the nutrition sector in case the assessment denotes a case of malnutrition) or external (for referral to other organizations, as in GBV cases);
- Observation grids adopted in PSS activities in order to record participation, or to detect emerging needs;
- Checklists used to monitor behavior or to evaluate an activity's performance.

Taking note of these instruments requires appropriate expertise in development and selection of appropriate indicators, combined with field experience, and thus combining theoretical and practical knowledge.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 16 in the workbook.

9.4 Example of an integrated evaluation system

In the experience of AVSI Lebanon, the tools for information gathering are widely used as a way of recording the activities carried out, and useful for the purpose of monitoring the project, both as tools of observation and necessary for the management of cases, directly carried out by AVSI, or in the case of GBV, by other organizations.

The availability of a system of information gathering that is widespread and multifaceted is undoubtedly an asset, because it allows for the realisation of interventions that increasingly match the real needs identified on the field. On the other hand, the risk involved is the excessive bureaucracy. Depending on the activity or the target, having several different formats can be confusing and burdensome in the operators' work. A good blending of tools, and an appropriate

training on data collection methods and the importance of the information collected, both done systemically, and their impact on their daily activities, may be an excellent strategy for a more effective assessment system. The harmonization of the used tools does not only mean avoiding the duplication of collected information, for instance, or always following the criteria of relevance and importance mentioned in the previous paragraph for each tool used, but also making it consistent in the used language and simple to fill out. It is very helpful to integrate and harmonize the tools with each other, for instance, by ensuring that if communities, families or children are under more than one observation tools, the instruments used should be interconnected. In this way, the data collected with different tools will be integrated and linked to the same beneficiaries; this allows you to have a comprehensive picture, and at the same time, a view of the individual situation, and monitoring it over time. In this way, it is possible to repeat the assessment and evaluate the possible changes that may occur



When welcoming a new help request, checking if a beneficiary or someone from his primary/secondary network already benefited from any of AVSI services/activities is a must. This exercise gives already the operator more information on this beneficiary (recorded by other teams) and helping the beneficiary to realize the professionalism of the work performed. The beneficiary realizes that every person who has come in touch with AVSI operators is traceable because he counts. Also, this will reduce the risk of beneficiaries, exploiting the services in other NGOs.

Often, the files used for the detection of information tend to focus on shortcomings rather than on resources, i.e. on what you see lacking in the beneficiary and not on what is offered by him, while, as we have seen in the introductory chapters of this manual (see chapters 1 and 2), it is essential to adopt a holistic approach. If you want to monitor the condition of vulnerability of a refugee camp, or measure the impact of interventions on the field in terms of increased individual and community resources (and resilience), what is measured will be limited to the elements of risk, but it will not be able to consider the resources (which may have increased over time thanks to PSS interventions). During the project "Emergency responses for vulnerable children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the Syrian crisis in South Lebanon", implemented by AVSI in Lebanon and funded by UNICEF, a shared thought between Resilience Onlus and AVSI has allowed the integration of data collection tools used with the theoretical perspective of resilience and the approach to the person, according to the values that Resilience Onlus and AVSI share. The work was carried out starting from the multiple forms adopted for the PSS assessment (child assessment; family visit assessment; psychologist registration form; PSS activities registration).

As a starting point, we used the child assessment form, to which all other forms are linked. The first part of this form excludes redundant information (for instance, things that are required two or more times) and the requests are more precise. A second part was added to this one, aimed at detecting needs more adequately, as well as the risk factors and the child's resources. In general, the form has been revised to be consistent with the theoretical approach and the values and was the result of a joined effort, in which the role of AVSI Lebanon operators was crucial; based on the operator's field experience, an exact identification of the elements was allowed to be included in the form.

SECTION OF THE ASSESSMENT FORM	REFERENCE TO THE APPROACH OF RESILIENCE
GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE FAMILY	You understand a family situation's framework, and the relationships the child can refer to.
INFORMATION ON THE REFUGEE'S STATUS AND THE PREVIOUS CONDITION	Knowing the previous living environment provides important information to better understand his situation, and may introduce a link with the traumatic event.
INFORMATION RELATED TO HOUSING AND SETTLEMENT	Resources / risks related to the fulfillment of material needs
INFORMATION ON ALL CHILDREN OF THE FAMILY	Collects more information about relational resources (possible relations with brothers/sisters: <i>I have</i>), but also on the possible state of economic vulnerability of the family (considering the total number of its components and the financial resources, i.e. household income).
SET OF VULNERABILITY INDICATORS	Organizing them according to their type (elements related to health or psychosocial discomfort of both the child and the parents) helps the operator not merely to identify the child's vulnerability, but also to recognise that it is part of his experience. Furthermore, the detailed connection allows, at a later stage, for the design of better targeted PSS interventions.
ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS OF THE CHILD	Behaviours are often the tip of the iceberg in a child's unexpressed needs. A list of typical behaviors (destructive, aggressive or passive) were included in order for them to be registered and monitored "I CAN".
POTENTIAL PROTECTIVE RELATIONAL FACTORS	Relationships with peers and with the operators "I HAVE" are crucial in the development of resilience, as they can be protective factors that allow the child to recognise himself "I AM".

Table 9.1 Sections addressed in AVSI's assessment form showing its relation to the approach of resilience

As mentioned earlier, table 9.1 refers to a specific action carried out with the AVSI Lebanon team, and concerns specific aspects related to the goals and needs decided upon as being the basis of the Resilience's theoretical framework (see chapter 1, 2, and 3 of this manual) and the team's experience on the field with specific beneficiaries. Every time an assessment is required, the team needs to re-think and elaborate upon an appropriate instrument according to the specific aim, target and context, theoretically and practically.



Another important component of the monitoring process, other than running activities, is the monitoring of the gateways where AVSI is operating. These gateways can be tents, schools, educational centers, set in a Child-Friendly Space and/or Women-Friendly Space.

Below are the key elements that can be monitored in AVSI gateways:

1. The lighting/ventilation
2. The temperature
3. The space vs. number of individuals ratio
4. The overall condition of the facilities
5. The cleanliness
6. The availability and condition of toilets (gender-segregated, lockable, clean, appropriate for children as opposed to adults, etc.)
7. A hand-washing facility close to the toilet
8. The availability of materials in adequate quantities (i.e. ECD kits, recreational kits, first aid, snacks, lice treatments, micronutrients, etc.)
9. The availability of drinking water
10. The display of children's work (when it's a space for children)
11. The presence of mainstream information (nutrition posters, immunization posters, information about available AVSI services, referral pathways, etc.)

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PART III

Psychosocial tools

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Chapter 10

THE INTERVIEW



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An interview is a psychosocial tool, which helps building a supportive relationship founded on the assumption that in a relational process, communication leads to changes.

When we speak of a helping relationship, we are talking about “the construction of an interaction between two people , the user and the operator, equal in dignity, that work together in order to solve a problem” (Zini, Miodini, 1997). It is a relationship that aims to strengthen the person’s abilities, accenting his resources and building resilience, to help him see the difficulties he is facing from another point of view. It involves the beneficiary as a protagonist in the research of complex solutions, arising from the person himself, from the context he lives in and the reality in which he asked for help. The ultimate goal of a helping relationship is, therefore, the autonomy and empowerment of the person as the leading player in his own life.

For those who experienced emotional and protective shallow relationships, or particularly traumatic situations, having a helping relationship can be a positive life-changing experience. Within this relationship, the operators are obliged to choose which instruments are best suited to work with; among many psychosocial tools available, the interview is an instrument for the selection of the tool to be used.

The interview is characterised by the meeting between two persons, where the operator conducts and holds the leading role, while the person interviewed is free to choose the content. The relational configuration, typical of an interview, is dialogical, asymmetrical from the point of view of the roles, but equal in terms of the value of the people involved.

The aim of an interview is to fully understand and support the person in the process of a transformation: it is not just a conversation in which opinions are exchanged nor a discussion, alternating more or less between phases of offense and defense, nor is it an interrogation, implying a feeling of suspicion, nor simply an operator’s monologue, nor a confession to a moral authority figure.

The interview is characterised by its intended nature, but also by the presence of features, roles, rules and specific techniques; the conduction of a conversation is not, therefore, a natural competence, but instead requires specific skills and knowledge.

Specifically, the leading operator must have:

- a precise goal;
- a working method to stimulate reflection;
- a theoretical model, to support him in the understanding of the situation and the aid project that has to be built in conjunction with the person¹.

A great contribution to the interview was provided by Carl Rogers (1951) who set the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the “non-directive interview”, characterised by the attempt of a deeper understanding of the other. Rogers’ approach in particular, is based on three fundamental achievements: first of all, the shift of attention from the operator as an expert, to the person with the problem, who becomes the leading player. It means that the person is no longer considered as someone to offer pre-established solutions to, but someone who needs to be involved in the helping process, supporting the deployment of his own resources.

¹Besides a basic theoretical psychosocial approach, introduced at the beginning of this manual, it seems advisable to highlight some specific studies, such as the systemic relational theory, which allows for the welcome of the person into his life context, the theories on the pragmatics of communication, and the humanistic approach.



Seeing so many needs that are not satisfied in beneficiaries' life can be very stressful and painful for the operator. However, keeping in mind that the operator cannot have pre-established solutions, but must rely on the beneficiaries resources and pushes them to help themselves in fructifying their resources.

Secondly, the attention given to the operator's human qualities, such as authenticity, consistency, availability, sensitivity, and creativity, allows the helping relationship to become a meeting between real people. Finally, the author considers what happens actually and practically in the helping relationship as the driving force behind the change, and not the psychological theory which inspires it.

From these assumptions, the author developed some techniques that facilitate the person's verbal expression, and the development of a bond of trust that will be discussed later on.

10.1 Goals

The goals of an interview are numerous and they change according to people's needs, despite the fact that they are often unclear even to those who ask the questions. It frequently happens that what is requested is a magical recipe, for which the operator provides all the answers to the problems. Other times, people are only looking for a place to lay their malaise and powerful emotions. Precisely for this reason, using a projecting view, the operator must identify clear goals, such as: providing information by knowing the person, his network and his situation; offering support or guidance.

Kadushin (1980) equates the goals with three different kinds of interviews:

- the information interview: the operator searches and provides information and data;
- the diagnostic interview: the attempt is to fully understand the person's demands, exploring both the expressed and the latent content;
- the therapy interview, which aims to alter the problem.



The information interview has been experienced, for example, by the agriculture team, when meeting some students individually in the agriculture school, in order to explain to them the course objective and share their expectations.

The diagnostic interview has been conducted, for example, by an AVSI teacher in Marj El Khokh camp. She tried to understand the aggressiveness of Ali, a 14-year-old adolescent who was rejecting teachers, although he had the will to study and to succeed. By intervening with him, having discussions with him, and showing him a lot of care and motivating him, this adolescent improved in his relations with his teachers and his mates.

As for the therapeutic interviews, it was conducted, for example, by AVSI's case manager. She tried to convince a boy of 12 years old to take part in educational activities running in AVSI's tent. He was insisting on finding a job in order to financially support his father. Also, he was volatile, creating disturbances in the camp along with other friends he influenced. After a couple of interviews, a bond was created between him and the AVSI team. He waited for the operators, always willing to discuss his life's issue with them. His behaviour improved even though he did not attend AVSI's educational activities.

10.2 Setting

The setting is a frame characterised by precise rules, a definition of space and time, and a use of tools, in which the helping relationship takes shape. It might be a vessel that simultaneously reassures, directs, but also restricts and forces, within which "events, phenomena, behaviour, relationships, events" might occur (Allegri, 1997).

Clarifying the situation helps the operator to understand the boundaries of his role and his opportunity to act; often, because of the complexity of the help requests, the challenging environments in which he operates, the powerful emotions experienced by the people and the emotions arising in those who offer help, the operator moves in a continuum, where the rejection of the beneficiaries' needs and a desperate attempt to "save" the other person are the extremes.

Maintaining a proper setting helps not only to efficiently achieve the goals and set a job sharing system, but also to keep the operator within the boundaries of his role.

Defining the setting occurs firstly in the choice of **space** and **time**.

Spaces that allow expression, respect and the trust that needs to be nurtured: calm, quiet, and intimate places, where we can sit at the same level and meet "face to face", to promote a feeling of equality and cooperation.



In some centers where AVSI operators work, a calm place can be very hard to find. Operators are sometimes obliged to use the centre's kitchen in order to run an activity because no other room is available.

The challenge for an AVSI operator can be:

- to find an available space to ensure a minimum of privacy
- to be calm by himself / herself, able to keep himself / herself distanced from the surrounding noise
- to have body language that shows his/her readiness to listen

All this is needed in order to get in touch with the beneficiary, and to perform a real productive interview with him / her.

The choice of time must be appropriate for the person and for the goal. We need to take the right amount of time to enable the person to perceive an interest in him. It generally takes about one hour.

Defining the timing allows for the introduction of the notion of a limit, so valuable for the work of the relationship: the personal limit, the limit set by the other's subjectivity, but also the limit that requires making directed and realistic actions.

Even if the interview takes place in areas such as CFS (Child Friendly Space, standard 17, Minimum Standards for child protection in humanitarian action) and WSS (Woman Safe Space), trying to abide by these features as much as possible is very important.

When the interview takes place in a tent, or the beneficiaries' house, two tools come together: the interview and the home visit. This means that the operator has to bear in mind which elements of the space must also be observed.

The existence of rules is of fundamental importance; rules must be clear and explicit, evoking a mutual commitment. The key rules are not only the ones defined by the project's intervention practices or by the organisation they belong to, but also by the professional secrecy requirements, and the predisposition towards listening and the absence of judgment. They become the guarantee of a safe space where people feel safe, building confidence and facilitating participation and a willingness to open up.

Finally, it is necessary to introduce the **phases of the interview**:

Initial phase: Hospitality

The goal is to create an environment where people can feel welcome and comfortable. It is useful for the operator to stop mimicking what is perceived as a social and emotional climate.

The introduction of the interview must answer the question "Why are we here?", revealing the grounds and goals of the interview.

Central phase...in the middle of the interview

This phase allows the gathering and exchange of information, and clarification with the aim of seeing the problem from the person's point of view: what is the issue? What has been done to combat it? Why is the person asking for help right now? These questions can be some of the guidelines for investigation. As well as how useful the analysis of the relational system that characterises the person is.

Being in the heart of the interview, does not just mean listening to the content and words, but also being able to listen to what the person is not able to say.

Final phase: conclusion and farewell

It is never easy to end an interview: you have to find ways to end it without the person perceiving disinterest, or feeling that he/she has been quickly discarded. On the other hand, carrying out an interview for too long should be avoided as well, since it results in a feeling of straying from the rules.

Providing a summary of what has been said is fundamental to giving meaning to the interview, as well as verifying that what has been perceived, along with the content and conclusions, is clear, because if not, they might be understood differently by the person and operator, generating misunderstandings that undermine the ability to continue with the helping process.

It is useful to keep an **interview diary**. The *documentation* is a guideline; it helps to keep the memory of the work done with that person, to preserve details told that sometimes may otherwise escape the operator's memory. It is useful to remind the person of what has been agreed on, in case of an omission by the latter that would create disagreement. Small techniques such as quoting the person, which makes him feel that he has been carefully listened to, as well as opening the next interview with what has been said in the previous one, are favored by using the diary. Later on, during the operator's professional career, when similar situations arise, the diary can be a good benchmark.

Generally, it is recommended to fill in the diary at the end of the interview, and not to let the person feel under investigation or hardly listened to. In certain cases, if the person is ambivalent or inconsistent, it is useful to consider filling in the diary during the interview.

The table 10.1 introduces an example of a scheme the operator can use at the end of the interview to self evaluate himself.

SELF EVALUATION OF AN INTERVIEW	
How did I feel?	
Did I make the interview's reasons and goals clear?	
Did I create a welcoming environment?	
Did I create a climate of confidence?	
Was I non-judgmental towards the person?	
Did I listen?	
Did I let all the people speak equally?	
Was I too involved?	
Did I look too unemotional?	
Did I respect all the interview's different phases?	
If not, which one did I miss?	
Did I explore the issue in detail?	
Did I explore the person's network?	
Did I present the existing possibilities to the person?	
Did I support the person in building a shared helping project?	

Table 10.1 Self evaluation table of an interview



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 17 in the workbook.

10.3 The first interview

It is a delicate and meaningful moment, often coinciding with first contact, and defining the beginning of the helping process.

The operator's welcoming ability plays a fundamental role in starting a relationship of trust, as well as the investigative ability to understand the person and define his problem.

Depending on the situation, the goals are:

- **connection:** the beginning of building a relationship of trust, that allows the person to continue with the process;
- **mutual knowledge:** the operator and the person introduce each other;
- **information-gathering:** informations can be either formal (full name, profession ...), related to the person's network (family relations, frequented places visited, and people or groups of reference...), or related to his ideas, his way of thinking, and his values. The "data sheet" or the guide to help the operator (see table 10.2) is always a useful tool;
- Defining the **demand**;
- Defining **the issue, and the solutions** already applied;
- Defining **the contract**: this can be done only after a proper evaluation and some assumptions sharing. The contract is an agreement defining the problem and strategies to solve it. Together, the person and the operator are committed to an evolutionary path of change. The fact that the contract is explained, not only implies recognising the person's competences, but it helps to avoid misunderstandings and a lack of responsibility;
- Defining a **work plan**: once the contract has been defined, it is important to define who does what, it which places and at what times.

The operator cannot always reach all goals in a single interview, and in-depth interviews must sometimes be offered. Most people appreciate this request, perceiving it as attention, but it may happen that someone could perceive it as overly problematic. The person's statement "I must be really clear, then!" means that he needs reassurance, carefully explaining that another interview is only in order to expand some aspects to be able to help more effectively.

Depending on the purpose, it may be more or less useful to fill the chart in the presence of the person involved: for instance, in an outreach activity, where the operator meets many people during the day, it is more advantageous to compile the information directly, which also conveys the idea that the operators belong to a structured organisation.

GUIDELINE CHART FOR THE FIRST INTERVIEW								
Project:	Operator:							
Personal data								
Surname: Name:								
Date and place of birth:								
Residency:								
Telephone number:								
Current employment and previous ones:								
Qualifications:								
Composition of the household								
Surname and name	Degree of relationship	Date and place of birth	Current employment	Qualification				
Other significant people or groups:								
Kind of contact? (spontaneous, by invitation...)								
Analysis of the problem								
How long has the problem affected the person?								
Why is it showing right here and right now?								
Who is introducing the problem and how:								
What has been done until today to solve it:								
What are the achievements:								
What expectations does the person have?								
Relevant critical events:								
Definition of the contract and of the work plan:								
Operator's impressions:								

Table 10.2 First interview guideline chart template

10.4 Approaches and techniques

As mentioned in this chapter opening, for good quality and for the success of the interview, the intention is not enough, it's therefore necessary to have an appropriate attitude, a method and particular communication and leading skills.

10.4.1 Empathy

Empathy is the skill to put yourself in someone else's shoes, trying to think and feel as if we are the other person, but maintaining contact with ourselves and with our own emotions, never confusing them with the other's. "Empathy is the overall result of the balance between the ability to recognise the suffering of the other as different from our own, and to welcome them and make them our own" (Bonino, The CoCo, Tani 1998). It is a knowledge and emotional welcoming of the other person, rather than an intellectual one; a deep emotional experience, considered as support for the helping relationship, because it drives the persons to recognise and reappropriate powerful emotions, that they had not been aware of.

The tools that support the empathic skills of the operator are the verbal and non-verbal communication and comprehension skills.

10.4.2 Listening

Together with empathy, listening is the starting point for an effective helping relationship, as it helps to break isolation and loneliness that often characterise a person in distress, encouraging him to share his thoughts, feelings and beliefs; furthermore, being heard increases self-confidence, for it allows the person to recognise himself as worthy.

Finally, when we listen to somebody, we allow them to tell their story: as stated by Bruner (1973), the telling puts distance between ourselves and our history, that helps us to review our actions as spectators; this condition permits reconnection and networking events, setting the role of the protagonists, places and time, weaving a story and creating a whole new way of looking at events that maintains the complexity and helps to further their meaning. The communicated experience becomes a tool of self-training, because it activates metacognitive reflection, which is a transformation in and of itself, as it allows for the understanding of something new in relation to the person and his functionality.

Comprehensive listening requires a high level of attention and the ability to suspend our own judgment, neutralizing our personal conditioning.

10.4.3 Active listening

Active listening is not just about listening carefully, but is more a technique of communication, developed by Thomas Gordon (1975) through his theory of effective communication; it is about listening carefully and responding through neutral reflection on what the beneficiary is saying (thoughts) and feeling (emotions) without judgment.

It allows us to:

- show understanding of people's thoughts, feelings and emotions
- make clear to the person that we are committed to better understanding him
- check if we understood correctly.

The active listening tools are the art of:

- reformulation
- synthesis
- demand
- response

Reformulation: is to express in different words, briefly or more clearly, what the person has just said, to check that we fully understand, in order to allow the other to more deeply explain his problem from a new point of view. Finally, it allows the operator to see if the person is listening and following in turn.

This technique requires confidence in the person's abilities, and seeing him as the most competent concerning his problem, differentiating from the psychoanalytic approach, according to which the person would not be aware of his real problem.

It corresponds to an "echo reply", such as:

"If I understood things correctly...", "So, in your opinion...", "I gather that..." .



In the context of the work of AVSI operators with refugees, and concerning the language differences, even though both Syrians and Lebanese speak Arabic, miscommunication can be a great risk. Knowing the synonyms of common words used by Syrians, that are uncommon for Lebanese operators, can be helpful. The best solution is also to ask for an explanation, or to reformulate the sentence in order to be sure that the message was passed correctly.

Synthesis / Summary: at the end of the interview, it is useful to summarise the key subjects and what has been said. This allows for the revision of what has been said, and a clarification of what has been decided.

Operator's questions: it is always helpful to reduce the number of questions during an interview, because they undermine the horizontal axis of the relationship, making it too direct, overly formal and defining the respective roles rigidly. When we need to use them, it is vital to choose the most appropriate approach, according to the goals of the interview, in order to respect the person's time and be as natural as possible.

J. and R. Sommers-Flanagan (2003) classified the questions used in the interviews as follows:

- *the open ended question:* it is a question that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no", and facilitates communication, helping the person to build the narrative and to give meaning to events. It is often introduced by *process variables*, i.e. who, when, where, what, how, why.

It has the benefit of allowing the person to choose the starting topics and which aspects he/she considers more important to emphasize; the disadvantage is the risk of losing helpful information.

- *the closed ended question:* it can only be answered with a "yes" or a "no", or very specifically. Though it helps to collect information in an orderly manner, quickly and clearly, it does not help to build a helping relationship, since the person is not free to express himself freely and can give false answers.

The table 10.3 presents the pros and cons of open ended and closed ended questions.

- *the swing question:* usually begins with present or conditional participle verbs, as can, would like to ... which can not be answered with "yes" or "no". It helps the person to openly express his thoughts and feelings.
- *the implied question (also known as indirect):* begins with expressions like I wonder, you must feel... you can get information on thoughts and feelings without the person feeling obliged to respond.
- *the projective question:* with this question, we try to promote the expression of conflicts, feelings, and thoughts that the person is not fully aware of, bypassing his defenses. This type of question starts with an "if" and elicits mental images of hypothetical situations that help the person to understand the values, assessment and selection criteria.

OPEN ENDED AND CLOSED ENDED QUESTIONS PROS AND CONS		
	OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS	CLOSED ENDED QUESTIONS
AUTHENTICITY	High The answers are spontaneous	Low They lead the person
RELIABILITY	Low It is difficult to repeat the same answers	High The focus is very specific
ACCURACY	Low The focus is vague	High The focus is very specific
ACCEPTANCE	Variable Some people prefer free expression: others may become suspicious or may feel insecure	Variable Many people love to answer shortly and clearly; others do not like to be limited to closed ended questions.

Table 10.3 Pros and cons of open ended and closed ended questions

Operators' answers: according to Rogers, certain types of responses do not facilitate the person's expression:

- *the evaluation's answer:* it expresses a moral judgment, that implies approval or criticism. This answer causes feelings of inequality and inferiority that, depending on the person's personality, can produce different reactions, such as inhibition, guilt, rebellion, concealment and anguish;
- *the interpretative answer:* the operator emphasises the facts he considers as essential. This can be done in three ways: a partial summary of what has been said, a paraphrasing of what has been expressed, or an explanation based on the operator's impression. The product of this is a distortion of the facts, an incorrect explanation that leaves the person with a feeling of being misunderstood, and feeling like an unknown due to the answer received. These possible reactions might occur: lack of interest in the interview, deep irritation and an emotional block;
- *the supporting answer:* it offers encouragement and consolation. It occurs by sharing common experiences or emphasising a maternal or paternal attitude. The risk is, if this is the only answer given, that it might put the person in a passive, dependent position, in order to maintain the operator's good will, or a refusal to be treated with compassion;
- *the investigative answer:* coincides with asking questions in order to get further information. Asking more detailed questions is a common practice of an operators, dictated by the fear of not investigating thoroughly enough. Among the possible reactions to this are: by being detail-oriented, hostility in response to a curiosity perceived as excessive, or attempting to answer the questions by transmitting the best image of themselves;
- *the solution answer:* the operator provides a solution, giving direct advice or deferring to others, but this is considered a solution only for the operator, and not for the person, who generally feels dissatisfied or obligated to follow what has been suggested, which is an irresponsible and dependent perspective.

The best answer the operator can give is the answer of comprehension, which portrays an accepting attitude of others by refraining from judging the person, and respecting his otherness and uniqueness. This kind of answer is to ascertain that you understand what the person wants to say, and this sincere desire builds the trust that will allow him to open up in the interview. The technique that helps the most in providing this kind of feedback, is active listening.

People often ask the operator direct questions: "Honestly, is my situation so severe?", "What do you think about what my mother said?" Generally, the operator, in addition to feeling uncomfortable, feels he has to answer. Instead, he should consider "Why is this person asking me this question?" Many of these questions can have an underlying meaning and hidden questions; sometimes it is just a need to be reassured, to know that they can count on the operator's help, or that you and they both agree on the perception of the problem. Stopping and digging for the underlying meaning allows you to answer the person's real needs.

10.4.4 The "I" message and the "You" message

A very useful technique when we need to face the difficulties related to the person's behaviour is the one developed by Gordon (1975): the I-message. While the you-messages give judgment on the person and are often responsive to feelings of anger and annoyance, the I-messages show the speaker's real feelings without forcing the other to be on defense. This allows a reference to be made that is limited to the person's behaviour in that specific situation, avoiding the expression of judgment on the value of the person, and avoiding concluding that this behaviour is the person's only feature. Due to not feeling judged, the person is then most able to listen to the operator and reflect upon the consequences of his behaviours and attitudes.

The "I" messages contemplate three steps:

1. description of the behaviour without judgment: "*When you arrive late for the interview*"
2. description of the feelings: "*I am going to get irritated*"
3. reaction and possible effects: "*because I cannot manage my work, other waiting people might take advantage of my delay*"



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 18 in the workbook.

10.4.5 The 12 roadblocks of communication

Gordon (1975) finally identifies verbal attitudes to avoid interrupting and damaging the relationship.

1. Ordering, directing or commanding: e.g. "You must..." "you have to..." "You will..."
2. Warning, admonishing or threatening: e.g. "If you do that ..." "It is better if you...otherwise...!"
3. Exhorting, moralising or preaching: e.g. "You should..." "It would be best..."
4. Advising, giving suggestions or solutions: e.g. "If i were you, I would...", "Why don't you try to...", "let me give you some advices..."
5. Teaching or persuading: e.g. "That's why you're wrong..." "The truth is..."
6. Judging, criticising, disagreeing, blaming: e.g. "You are lazy" "You do not think like a human being..."
7. Praising, agreeing: e.g. "I think you're doing a great job", "You're right..."
8. Name-calling, ridiculing, shaming: e.g. "Crybaby!", "Bravo, smartass!"
9. Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing: e.g. "You're just tired..." "You do not really mean to say this..."
10. Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling, supporting: e.g. "Do not be afraid..." "Come on, be brave..." "You'll see, it will get better..."
11. Probing, questioning, interrogating: e.g. "Why..." "But what did you do..."
12. Withdrawing, distracting, humorizing, diverting: e.g. "Let's talk about pleasant things .." "Why don't you rest a bit..."

These answers may produce negative effects on the person, such as causing him to stop talking, get defensive, talk back, feel guilty, inadequate, misunderstood, misinterpreted, interrogated and excluded from his problem.

10.4.6 The silence

We should pay particular attention to silence. Not everybody is used to it. Silence is often feared; it is perceived as a vacuum that causes anxiety, a waste of time that produces impatience, an omen of impending threats; it can make people feel incompetent and judged. We should then try to fill it with questions or requests.

Silence is powerful, but it is never empty; emotions, thoughts and memories lie in silence. Being together in silence is a profound experience, respecting the other and his emotions, and sharing, not with words, but through reflection and the chance to look within ourselves.

It is fundamental, in fact, that the operator does not break the silence, but empathetically tunes in with the person, questioning himself about the meaning of the silence.

10.4.7 Non-verbal communication

As stated in the first axiom of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin, Jackson, 1967), "One cannot not communicate": even when a person says nothing verbally, he is, nevertheless, telling us something with his behaviour and is giving us a message. For instance, if he finds difficulty in talking or he refuses any help, he may prefer being alone, or is too anxious.

The first information that two people give each other, comes from non-verbal communication, and often contribute to form the other's first impression, which affects exchanges and the nature of the relationship for a long time.

Non-verbal communication includes: looks, gestures, body contact, distance, the position and orientation of the body in space, facial expressions, tone and volume of the voice, the speed and rhythm of the speech; it is here that feelings and the deeper emotions often live, even more than they do in words.

More than other kinds of communication, non-verbal communication is deeply influenced by culture.

It is very important that the operator is able to read the person's non-verbal cues in order to fully understand him, as well as being aware of his own use of non-verbal communication.

When verbally and non-verbally communicated messages do not coincide, what is called a double communication phenomena occurs and creates confusion. Considering that our actions are more powerful than our words, since they are less instinctive and more rationally displayed, it is possible that they are more effective than what is expressed through nonverbal communication.

An example of double communication: an operator who verbally announces "I'm listening to you" while looking at messages on his phone.

The following chart provides an example of how you can, looking at some non-verbal communications, understand the attitude of the person and his openness in a relationship.

INDICATORS	STYLES		
	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
EYE CONTACT	Downwards and elusive	Direct, constant and discreet	Staring at the operator and provocative
FACIAL EXPRESSION	Poor, rigid, not coinciding with verbal communication	Neutral, expressive, coinciding with verbal communication	Exaggerated and inappropriate
TONE OF VOICE	Low, doubtful, trembling opposed to verbal communication	Confident, modulated, coinciding with verbal communication	High, excited, inappropriate verbal communication
POSTURE	Crooked, clumsy	Straight backed with a resolute gait	Intrusive and snappy
GESTURES	Limited and repetitive, not coinciding with non-verbal communication	Open and warm	Exaggerated, large and showy
INTERPERSONAL DISTANCE	Too far away, defends his territory	Easy contact, respect and sympathy	Reduced distance, poor modulation of the social relationship

Table 10.4 Expression of a non-verbal communication according to each person's style

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Chapter 11

THE HOME VISIT



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The home visit is one of the key tools in a helping relationship, as it allows meeting families in their natural life context. The context is perceived, not just as a space, but as a place characterised mainly by the presence of people interacting and relating with each other, and coevolving. The wealth of information that operators can collect through a house visit is crucial.

The home visit enables careful observation, and on that basis, the operator must be properly trained. Although this tool is primarily used by social assistants or healthcare professionals, nowadays other professional figures are also starting to understand the importance of performing home visits. For example, we can refer to the literature on home visiting, and specifically the studies regarding the support of new mothers in a condition of risk. In these situations, the support given through the home visit works as a “secure base” that helps mothers to recognise themselves in their new role and better comprehend the children’s behaviour. It also helps prevent the transmission of dysfunctional attachment models (Stern, 2006) in more difficult situations.

11.1 Phases

The project

Like all psychosocial tools, deciding to carry out a home visit implies a choice that fulfils a purpose within the project for that specific person or family in particular, and may respond to different goals:

- *Introduction*: the aim is getting to know people and their families more extensively; it is carried out especially at the beginning of the intervention and in the evaluation phase
- *Introducing the operator to the family*: particularly important in the child protection support sector
- *When people are unable to reach the centre*, both for physical reasons or personal oppositions
- *Evaluation*: when there are some difficult aspects for the operator to comprehend, and in the follow up phase
- *Emergency*: when the operator needs to immediately evaluate a great risk or disadvantageous situation



AVSI operators often experience family visits that fulfill the goals listed.

For the purpose of introduction, AVSI operators make family visits in order to inform and invite beneficiaries to all the activities organised that are relevant to them.

When AVSI operators recognise signs of neglect, lack of hygiene, violence, or unusual behaviour, they make a family visit in order to better evaluate the family's situation and consider possibilities of intervention.

In some cases, keeping in mind the difficulties in transportation for some Syrian refugees, AVSI operators make an effort to go and find the beneficiaries in their homes in order to facilitate their access to services (MUAC measurements, for example) or to in-kind distributions (supplements...).

In situations where AVSI operators have provided guidance to a child and want to know its impact as viewed and experienced by this child's family, they usually use this tool.

Finally, such emergency family visit was made by one of the team members because the children attending PSS activities were seen begging in the streets.

It is recommended to make a home visit after having built an initial hypothesis of the situation or a representation of the family's daily life, imagining how the home visit could better help in exploring and observing different elements, such as the economic condition or the specific relationships in the family. That is the reason why it is advised not to carry out a home visit after the first interview, but rather after the time necessary to build a hypothesis has passed. At the end of the visit, the operator can compare his initial hypothesis with what he observed during the home visit, so that he is able to determine discrepancies between the hypothesis and reality. This process is not carried out with the aim of understanding if people are coherent or sincere in what they say, but so that, in case the two images do not correspond, the operator can try to understand why the people wished to provide an altered image of themselves.

The home visit should be mutually agreed upon with the person intended for the visit. The most complex aspect of this tool is that the operator is invited into a private and intimate space that must be respected; while choosing the time for the home visit, the operator needs to have already considered the moment of the person's daily life he wishes to observe (e.g. lunch, morning etc...), while respecting his needs and habits.

The availability provided by the person represents the initial data to be collected, and upon which the operator may assign a specific meaning. For example, for the nutrition sector, in some circumstances, it can be useful to observe lunch time; if a family does not accept, what can that mean? Are they ashamed because they do not have enough to eat? Is lunchtime a tense affair? Is it a time when the whole family gets together and is, therefore, valued as a private and intimate encounter?



When a Child Protection team member identified a mother being very violent with her kids, he asked for a family visit at a time when her husband is present. The presence of both parents was a strategic choice he made in order to evaluate the bond existing between them.

People should receive a clear explanation on the developments of the home visit; this will have a key role in determining their emotional disposition and will help reduce their anxiety levels.



In the Informal Tentend Settlements, home visits are often done without prior notice. For example, if AVSI operators are in the ITS and they discover the absence of one of the beneficiaries, they will go to check if he is in the tent. In such a case, AVSI operators should be aware of the unpreparedness of the family to welcome them, and take that into consideration.

The home visit subverts the typical interview setting: the vertical relationship is modified, where the operator moves out of his usual context which naturally defines his role and develops closeness and reciprocity which are often absent in an interview. These are some of the reasons that sometimes lead to the decision to perform a home visit by two operators. In these cases, it is important to properly define individual tasks, clarifying who will lead and who will observe, to avoid triggering multiple simultaneous communications.

When people request a home visit, the operator, must explore the reasons, the expectations and the needs that motivated the request before accepting or refusing.

The route to the house

The route to the house allows the collection of information regarding the social and environmental context in which the person or family lives: urban characteristics, poverty level, presence of other houses, security level, distance from services, local transportations, proximity to public places, first need centre availability, quality of the neighbourhood. These are all useful information for an accurate comprehension and a project draft.



The path towards a tent can be significant as well. Observing where the tent of this specific beneficiary is in relation to all others can give an idea about whether he is integrated in the community or not.

Seeing domesticated animals outside can give the impression that the beneficiary has some resources.

Many elements can be observed on the path towards a tent and should not be neglected by AVIS operators.



In order to be aware of the differences existing between the camp/tent settlements, Focus group discussions have been conducted by AVSI operators in Saida and Marjeyoun districts during the year 2015. Below is the report of their observations regarding some characteristics for different camps.

COMPARAISONS BETWEEN SOME REFUGEE CAMPS			
Marjeyoun ITSs	Saida ITS		
Marj el Khokh / Sarada / Wazzani / Ain Arab It consists around 600 to 650 tents.	Zahrani camp It consists of around 100 tents. An old camp, present for 70 years.	Banana camp It consists of around 25 tents.	Darb el Sim camp It consists of around 20 tents.
A tent made of wood covered in plastic (شوابن). Its roof is weighed down somehow (such as by putting wheels or some extra ties). The bathrooms are communal.	The tents are made of thin steel sheets. The bathrooms are communal		
Tents are provided to families if the family members accept to work in the agricultural fields for the landlord, whenever the "shaweesh" calls.	Rented tents (around 100,000 L.L. to 150,000 L.L. according to its size).	Tents are hired and placed beside the banana plantations.	Tents are free of charge. The little parcel on which this camp is built is owned by the Lebanese government.
Sewage in the camp's floor.	Sewage going into the riverbed.		Sewage on the camp's floor.
Risks encountered: Risk of insects, snakes and mice inside the tents.	Risks encountered: - Floods - The proximity to the electrical plant. - The proximity to the highway (300m away) - Risk of Cholera from infected water		Risks encountered: - The high risk of falling into the river because tents are put up right at the riverside (0.40 to 1.5m away) - Floods
There are WASH facilities, including drinking water. Marj el Khokh and Wazzani are characterised by the availability of a water tap in the tent (installation realized by AVSI).	There are WASH facilities including drinking water	There are WASH facilities including drinking water	There is an identified lack of drinking water.
Electricity is available from a generator or the Lebanese government.		Electricity does not reach this camp; lighting is accessible through a generator.	
There are livestock such as sheep and chickens living near the tents.	There are livestock such as sheep, cows, chicken, and horses.	There are pigeon dens.	
In Marj El Khokh and in Sarada 2, there is mini-market.	Inside there is a mini-maket, a snack shop and a concrete factory.		
	Mixed residents in the camp, made up of Lebanese bedouin and Syrian refugees.		The majority of the residents already experienced living in camps.

The welcoming phase

The meaning of the term welcoming refers to hosting, receiving in different dispositions, approving, accepting and keeping. There is always an inside and an outside, and a line that separates the operator from the people. We welcome someone into something, while accepting that we give meaning to the other person's existence and presence.

If, in psychosocial work, the operator is generally the one who welcomes, in a home visit, the roles are reversed. It is the operator who must be received by the people and who must work toward this possibility.

It is useful to observe the following: who does the welcoming, in what space, how and where the meeting continues, who is present at the moment of the welcoming and who is not, if the person who comes later introduces himself, and the level of formality.

A topic related to the quality of the welcoming phase is the offer of food or drinks by the family; it is an offer that is often used to reduce the level of tension when not knowing what to say, rather than a formal courtesy, a charming attitude or a way to eliminate differences; but it can also be a way for the family members to offer a part of themselves and show an open disposition.



Usually, in the case of Lebanese as well as Syrian families, the operator is warmly welcomed by any family. Hospitality is part of the values ingrained in all Mediterranean people.

The central phase

It is a moment aimed at listening and communicating; it is an interview that requires the operator to be flexible and to use his adaptability skills. At the same time, the operator must be able to consider the environment, the people present the possible contingencies and to observe the context and conduct the conversations.

The conclusion

The operator sums up what has been said, and what was decided when observing elements such as the reception, the quality of the greeting and the exit when leaving.

It is useful for the operator to write down the first emotional impression, related to the perceived family atmosphere, and in the second phase, to fill out a sheet that guides the observation and information collected (Table 10.1).



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 19 in the workbook.

11.2 What to observe

Before starting, it is necessary to emphasise the fact that all the elements listed in this part are not just useful for an observation during a home visit, but can be used in any circumstances that require an operator to observe. Observation is a skill constantly activated in a helping relationship. Also, for example, during an outreach activity that lasts only for a few minutes, if the operator clearly knows which issues are helpful to focus on and has focused his attention, he will be able to capture important aspects of the life of the person or family he is visiting.

Space:

- cleanliness
- order
- safety
- enough space for everybody
- adequate treatment of children, the elderly and the sick ones
- brightness
- temperature
- smell
- noise
- furniture
- presence of photographs and personal objects
- presence of animals

**What to observe in a tent:**

- The floor of the tent (made of concrete or soil)
- The available equipment: the basics are usually carpets, mattresses, something rudimentary for storage, a way to heat the tent, a fan in summer.
Other available equipments can be: TV, fridge, washing machine...
- The personalization of the tent: rudimentary decorations within (such as plastic flowers, curtains for separation, etc.) and flowers and plants outside.

People:

- attendees
- people not attending
- relationships among the attendees
- non-verbal communication among the attendees
- verbal communication among the attendees
- silence
- arrival of neighbours or friends
- special behaviours

How the home visit is received by the people:

It is necessary to pay attention, both while planning and in the observation phase, to the meaning that the home visit can have for that particular person or family. There are several possible reactions that differently influence the development and outcome of the meeting:

- *fear of being invaded*: "How dare he come into my house? How long is he going to stay?"
- *fear of being controlled*: "he is coming to snoop on me"
- *feeling of importance*: "he is coming because I'm not just a number to him, but because I matter"
- *feeling of care and attention*: "he is coming because he is taking care of me"
- *feeling of interest*: "he comes because he's interested to know me and to better understand how he can support me"
- *shame*: "what might he think when he sees where I live?"

Auto-observation of the operator:

- welcome management
- conclusion management
- relationship among operators
- communication style used
- non-verbal communication used
- management of the silence
- time management and punctuality
- clarity in the description of objectives

HOME VISIT SHEET		
DATE:	TIME:	PLACE:
BENEFICIARY NAME:		
OPERATOR NAME :		
OBJECTIVE		
INITIAL EMOTIONAL REACTION AFTER THE HOME VISIT		
OBSERVATION		
ATTENDANCE AND PEOPLE NOT ATTENDING		
ENVIRONMENT		
EMOTIONAL CLIMATE		
HOUSE PLACEMENT COMPARED TO THE SOCIAL CONTEXT		
RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS		
REACTIONS TO THE HOME VISIT		
PERSONAL REMARKS		

Table 11.1 Operator's guiding sheet for the home visit

11.3 A testimony

Nour is a seven-year-old girl, fatherless, who escaped with her mother and two sisters from Syria to Lebanon after the death of her father. Here, her mother got married and left Nour and her sisters with their grandmother. This woman of around 55-60 years old is a widow; she lives with her two sons who work in agriculture in the Marj El Khokh informal settlement.

Nour joined in the activities taking place in the Child Friendly Space (CFS) of AVSI inside the camp. She was a trouble-maker, very aggressive, extremely active and no one from AVSI operators was able to deal with her and her volatile mood.

After observation, AVSI operators referred her to an AVSI psychologist to assess her situation and to provide her with psychosocial support. After observing her during AVSI activities, the psychologist decided to conduct a home visit in order to understand Nour's situation within her family. After the first visit, the psychologist realised that Nour was going through a very tough situation: she was mourning her father's death and the abandonment of her mother. She was expressing her discomfort by being difficult to handle. This was affecting her relationship with her grandmother, who was treating her harshly because of her stubbornness.

AVSI's psychologist started to work with both Nour and her grandmother. Indeed, Nour was suffering due to her situation. As for the grandmother, she expressed her need to learn how to deal with her granddaughter by asking for advice.

The follow-ups with Nour and her grandmother were assured by AVSI psychologist through frequent home visits to their own tent. After each individual session with Nour, the psychologist sat and discussed the granddaughter's situation with the grandmother.

AVSI psychologist was even collaborating with all of AVSI staff that Nour was in touch with (AVSI operators, teachers, organisers) in order to ensure a holistic approach to her case.

The change in Nour and her grandmother was tangible after several sessions. She changed her behaviour and became more cooperative with her family, as well as with AVSI operators and her mates. She became more sociable and integrated in the group. She was smiling again, and waiting for the moment an AVSI activity was scheduled in order for her to participate.

As for her grandmother, with our support, she completely changed the way she was treating Nour. She even gained her love, to the point that Nour was calling her 'mom'. Through the grandmother, AVSI's intervention also reached the uncles. Both of them became aware of Nour's difficulties and behaved accordingly. A positive parenting approach was established in this family.

After a while, when the time arrived to close the intervention, the grandmother confessed the AVSI approach to Nour individually, and their approach to her, had accomplished a great change in the whole family's life. Ensuring support to Nour and her grandmother in their own tent was one of the success factors in this intervention. Having used this psychosocial tool permitted AVSI psychologist to deepen his relationship with both persons, to become aware of their life's conditions, and to work accordingly in order to ensure results.

11.4 Home meanings

Inhabiting refers to several anthropological and existential meanings. The place where people live is not only a physical space, but, as Heidegger explains (1971), inhabiting means "existing". Our first home is the maternal womb. Just like the animals that choose structures such as nests, burrows, and the hollows of trunks, our ancestors, since prehistoric times, looked for caves to live in for protection and easy access. A living space refers to security and stability, protection and care, serenity and belonging. "Being at home", "coming home", "feeling at home" are all expressions that underline this concept.

Over the course of human evolution, men began to fill their caves with rocks and metal tools, drawing signs and designs to commemorate their stories and knowledge of history. The living space is not just a safe shelter but becomes a space of self-expression and narration as well, in which voices and stories are the most significant things and where people can leave a mark.

The home is also a sacred place to celebrate personal rituals. However each home has public spaces and a private spaces in a space to be lived in individually or shared with someone else. The home is often idealised as a haven, a place to come back to in times of trouble; but because of this separation between the inside and the outside, the home can also be a prison where people are held, or from where they try to escape, and is a threshold into which one can enter or be excluded from. The home is, in fact inhabited by people who settle down and relate to each other, so that it becomes a place with emotions and feelings. Each home has its own sounds, melodies, voices, smells, colours and lights, all signs of human presence. Intimacy is dependent on these natural feelings, which allow people to better handle the place where they live.

With all these deep significances, the lack of a place to reside is associated with abandonment, instability, eradication as well as a sense of emptiness that, following Heidegger's thoughts (1971), is associated with the denial of existence which leads, in many cases, to diseases and suffering. Losing a home, into which intense feelings and meanings are invested can be compared to the loss of one's own limbs, which triggers a mourning process and the risk of de-personalisation.

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Chapter 12

WORKING WITH GROUPS



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The group, as a care and support tool, was introduced in the early twentieth century by Joseph Pratt, an American internist who first introduced this tool with tuberculosis patients at the Boston hospital. The real impetus in terms of research and application, however, came with the work of Kurt Lewin (1943) who was the first, in the 1940s, to give the definition of "Small group dynamics". In Europe, the leading figures in this area were in the same time period, Wilfred Bion and S.H. Foulkes who developed a group tool with psychodynamic orientation to support the traumatized British soldiers of World War II.

Nowadays, we can classify the typology of groups into two categories according to their function:

1. Information support groups, problem-solving oriented: these groups are generally cognitive-oriented. They usually take place in rehabilitation or psychosocial facilities and target people with minor problems.
2. Intervention groups: for processing expressive speech, these may have a specific focus or a more general one. They usually have a dynamic orientation.

In general, the group tool allows to favor identification and report processes that can promote adaptive and coping functions.

The groups may be divided into:

- Open groups: where participants can join at different times which constantly changes the internal structure of the group;
- Closed groups: those groups in which participants do not change and have a set number of sessions.



In Jounieh, AVSI operators reported switching, during Christmas holidays, from the usual closed groups of children in PSS activities to an open one. The number of children welcomed increased from 20 to 25, to 40. This is a reality that every operator faces.



Knowing the context of our intervention and knowing the possibility of welcoming in some events, more children than expected, AVSI operators should be prepared for such an occurrence. They can suspend the sessions during these situations, if feasible, and plan activities for a larger open group. They can plan activities aimed only at the new arrivals as well, while the usual group continues with the planned track.

We can also highlight further classifications aimed at distinguishing groups by the homogeneity/heterogeneity of their members:

- Homogeneous groups: homogeneity may be related to different aspects: topic, age, sex (typical of discussion groups).
- Heterogeneous groups: some of the variables considered in homogeneous groups may be lacking (typical of psychodynamic-oriented groups).

From the psychosocial intervention point of view, the group tool can be used with different connotations. It is very useful in achieving the goals in the context the operators are operating within and it is often the tool of choice for psychosocial action. Working with groups has several advantages, some of which are outlined below:

1. Achieving a high number of participants
2. Promoting relations between the concerned community members
3. Developing community resilience “WE HAVE”
4. Finding common solutions

In this chapter, we will discuss some types of groups, based on the experiences in which Resilience ONLUS and AVSI Foundation have partnered across several countries. In all these occasions, these groups have demonstrated their effectiveness both in terms of positive results for the beneficiaries and in how easily they learned from social operators.

As we proceed, we will talk about:

1. Awareness sessions
2. Group discussions
3. Family time



AVSI operators should realise that the key message they are delivering can be blocked out by the customs and traditions of the beneficiaries. In order to be able to deliver the message properly, AVSI operators should be aware of this possibility and should be prepared to bypass it by providing reasonable, non cultural answers.

12.1 Awareness sessions or sensitisation

Sensitisation is a tool widely used in the humanitarian context, and not only by governmental organisations, to quickly disseminate information relevant to the public. Normally it is used as a tool of primary prevention (cholera epidemic in Haiti, outbreak of Ebola in West Africa), especially concerning health or social health. In this section, we will observe how the same tool is used in a psychosocial perspective.

It must be said that sensitisation is a group effort, but it does not necessarily result in the creation of a new track. In fact, because of its goals, it can be found among the open group activities, involving large sections of the population and focusing their attention on a specific topic. Generally, an awareness intervention focuses on a single topic, so it is considered as a single and focused action. As we will specify later on, sometimes it is necessary to provide short tracks to allow participants a more accurate understanding of an issue (two meetings); in that case, we are talking about an awareness campaign. To clarify the concept, we can say that, for example, in some areas or communities, repeating an intervention on the same target may ensure a more thorough understanding of the message. We should not forget that, for the operating organisation, the awareness session is a good opportunity to assess the community's needs or the needs of specific subgroups.



AVSI experienced these awareness sessions in many forms, such as the “Back to school” campaign, the Polio campaign, Child Rights, and the 16 days of activism against gender violence.

12.1.1 General objective

The general objective of an awareness intervention is to stimulate reflection within the community on a specific issue.

12.1.2 Specific objectives

- Perform a primary and secondary preventive intervention
- Provide general information about the problem
- Direct the population towards reference persons
- Introduce the operators and the organisation
- Gather information that would help in the development of psychosocial actions
- Collect information about the community's true needs
- Establish an initial contact with the community

12.1.3 Basic features: space, time and participants

SPACE: It is important that the chosen space is as friendly as possible, safe (especially in situations of poor general safety), and free of disturbing elements (e.g. noise, people doing other activities etc...). If the meetings designed are more than one, try to keep the same space if possible.



In any type of group, while implementing sensitisation, discussions or family time, AVSI operators should be aware of the fact that some beneficiaries (especially adolescent girls and women) might see themselves as forbidden from accessing any public space (the centre, AVSI's tent, etc.) for cultural reasons. If, in some activities, AVSI operators choose to relocate the activity into these beneficiaries' tents, they should keep in mind that convincing the beneficiaries and/or the person who forbids them from going out, might grant them the only opportunity to get out of their tent or house: This is a valuable opportunity for AVSI to fight exclusion. Efforts should be made, when possible, to ensure the beneficiaries' participation in AVSI's gateways.

TIME: Each awareness session should last between an hour and a half, and two hours. It is possible to organise "mini tracks" made up of two or three awareness meetings.

PARTICIPANTS: The number of participants is theoretically unlimited, therefore sensitisation is a mass tool that should reach as many people as possible from different age groups within the community (IASC level 2).

12.1.4 How to organise a good awareness session

Let us take a look at the necessary requirements for organising a successful awareness session:

1. **Plan the meeting:** Each psychosocial action must be included within a framework, and must be prepared to reduce the number of contingencies (that will show up in any case).
2. **Have a clear title:** it is important to find an appealing title, easy to understand for the population.
3. **One or two very clear purposes** for the team; what results do we want to achieve?.
4. **Advertising** is extremely important to enable all channels to promote the event in the community using the most commonly used means, without exceptions.
5. **Two hosts:** the conductors should be a pair, preferably a male and a female as they represent both genders and encourage the identification process.
6. **Prepare all the required materials in advance:** papers, material for the practical part and any visual aids.
7. **Offer something at the end of the meeting:** it is very useful to let participants leave with something they can take home. This simple gesture bolsters the bond and leaves a tangible impression.

12.1.5 The meeting

Every meeting is characterised by seven steps:

1. **Introduction of the operators and the initiative:** to clarify who the operators are and why they are gathered today, and to introduce the organisation, if it is the first meeting.
2. **Introduction:** introducing the topic is very helpful in raising the group's interest, and in approaching the topic.
3. **Content:** the content development and the motivation operators would like to provide require that the two operators know the subject well and are aware of the specific impacts it may have on the community.
4. **Confrontation:** participants are brought into the discussion as the operators encourage free expression. It is very important to lead the discussion well and carefully manage the communication by modulating and promoting interventions, and trying to involve as many people as possible.
5. **Practical work or games:** reinforcing the content conveyed theoretically through tools that can give examples related to the participants' reality, is very helpful. The operators can decide to organise a representation before the meeting, using team members or beneficiaries who may have participated in previous activities as "actors".
6. **Summary:** at the end of the session, the operators should remember to provide a summary that will simplify the content and help the participants to get a clear idea of the thoughts developed during the meeting.
7. **Farewells:** greeting and properly concluding the meeting has two benefits: in case the operators plan to have a subsequent meeting, it predisposes people to desire to meet again; and if not, it is well known that people tend to remember their final impression more profoundly, and so a proper greeting will promote a positive note and thus the retention of information.

12.1.6 Suggestions and activities

Suggestions for the operators:

- Do not talk too much
- Do not be too theoretical
- Give everybody enough space
- Promote a good environment
- Pay attention to introductions and greetings
- Be ready for contingencies (an interloper, a heated discussion, a silent audience etc...)
- Pay close attention to the audience's level of attention (every audience and each person has a different level of attention)

NOTE: These characteristics actually reflect the qualities that a good host of a group should generally have, regardless of which tool is used.

Activities to be used:

Among the activities that can be used and should be mentioned are games, discussions, simulations, and all activities that facilitate cooperation and knowledge. As previously described it is preferable to use activities recognised in the beneficiaries' culture, as that will make the message easier to identify and understand, and will help the beneficiaries in absorbing the message to be conveyed (see chapter 5 on the intercultural approach). Any activity the host decides to run is acceptable, if it recognised by the beneficiaries as a quality aspect of their lives (dances, songs, folk games etc...).



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 20 in the workbook.

12.2 Group discussion

The group discussion is another important tool used in the group's involvement in psychosocial and protective interventions. With this tool, we advance further between levels two and three of the IASC pyramid. It is also an awareness tool widely used by organizations to reach groups within a population. It is a tool that facilitates emotional expression and is therefore more targeted toward sharing the psycho-emotional aspects.

12.2.1 General objective

The general objective of a group discussion is to promote the exchange of ideas, emotions and experiences, whether theoretical or practical, in connection with a problem or a significant theme for that specific group of participants and the community. Sometimes, the group discussion may be intended for people who share the same vulnerable situation.



AVSI operators experienced group discussion on many issues, such as gender-based violence and Child Protection issues for adolescent girls and women. For Pregnant and Lactating Women, the group discussion tackled the issue of Infant and Young Child Feeding.

12.2.2 Specific objectives

1. Promote mutual enrichment through the exchange of mutual experiences and knowledge
2. Provide a focused and driven space for expression
3. Learning about different ways of facing problems through the experiences of others
4. Primary and secondary prevention
5. Create relationships between participants
6. Promote information exchange
7. Increase knowledge, thanks to the host's theoretical contributions

12.2.3 Basic features: space, time and participants

SPACE: Apply the rules of awareness concerning security, tranquility and hospitality. It is specially important in group discussions to create the right emotional environment and a space that is the right size (not too large and too small) and which remains always the same. The space is, in this case, very important as it signifies safety and intimacy between participants consequently allowing those present to recognise in this space a quality that promotes openness and emotional exchange among the participants. It is therefore necessary that this process occurs when conducting group discussions.



AVSI operators should be aware that the preparation of the space can put the beneficiaries in a good or bad disposition.

If a child enters the room and sees everything ready, for example, with a game ready at the centre of the table and all chairs organized waiting for him, he will most probably think: "They are waiting for me".

If a child enters a room with no sign of any activity already in place, and he has no place to sit, he will probably think: "I'm not so welcome. They didn't prepare a space in order to include me".

Every beneficiary develops this feeling of being welcomed or not. AVSI operators should take the opportunity to show each beneficiary that he/she is welcome by preparing a space for him/her.

TIME: a good track should last between a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 15 meetings. Each meeting, depending on the number of participants, should last between an hour and a half and two hours. It is better to plan the entire track's number of meetings during the planning phase if no new needs arise. Where possible, this can be done in conjunction with the participants.



In paths tracks done with women, for example, it is very important to organise the activity in a time during which they feel comfortable attending. Even if housewives are usually targeted, AVSI operators should not take for granted that these women can be available at all times.

PARTICIPANTS: the ideal number of participants is between 6 and 15. It is recommended to use this type of group for participants older than 14; younger participants would not have an adequate level of expression, and this tool is based only on words.

12.2.4 How to organise a good group discussion

1. Plan the meeting in advance
2. Have one or two clear goals
3. Publicise the activities within the community (as is done for all services)
4. There should be two hosts, preferably, to help each other in running the meeting (though one leads, and the other observes)
5. According to human rights of gender equality, the trainers should be, preferably, a male and a female, except in cases where it may be wise to have two trainers of the same sex.
6. Prepare any material in advance
7. Check the evaluation of each meeting
8. Schedule the next meeting after a careful verification



In the Syrian refugees context, when talking about reproductive health, gender-based violence or other sensitive issues for women, it may not be suitable to have operators from both sex. Since the women are not used to talking with men other than their husbands and close relatives, they might be very inhibited, and may not feel comfortable at all.



AVSI operators should check, not just the availability of the materials, but also if they are suitable and sufficient.

12.2.5 The meeting

Each meeting is characterised, as is the case in all kinds of group work, by three stages, reported in the table below:

	OBJECTIVE	ACTIONS
INITIAL STAGE	Creation of the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project introduction • First introduction of participants • Collection of expectations • Choice of topic • First approach to the chosen topic
INTERMEDIATE STAGE	Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion's activation and conductionⁱ
CONCLUSIVE STAGE	Lead the group to conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the group to summarise the discussion • Evaluate the experience • Make new work hypothesis

Table 12.1 The three stages of each meeting during a group discussion

ⁱ The same topic may take more than a meeting; in that case the proposal for a new topic will be put on notice for subsequent meetings.



In the intermediate stage, if the beneficiaries' feedback shows that the information shared on any issue (best breastfeeding practices, early marriage risks, etc.) was not acquired properly, AVSI operators should expand the activities without repeating the same way the past session was given. Operators should recognise that all beneficiaries can absorb the message, but may need different kinds of activities to do so.

Let us now clarify, the three stages of each meeting session into subdivisions, in order to investigate each instance accurately:

1. Welcoming and introductions
2. Resumption of a previous session (except in the case of a first meeting)
3. The content (sometimes it can be explained through a game, various kinds of visual aids or a play)
4. The comparison
5. The summary
6. The tasks or instructions for the next meeting, which are very important...(except in the last meeting)
7. The farewells, which are very important...



In this phase, AVSI operators shoud always gather feedback from participants about the ongoing session. Their input is important in order to apply modifications at any level (space, time, content, etc.) for the upcoming session.

NOTE: to verify the meeting's quality, it may be very effective for operators to compose a small evaluation table as seen in table 12.2, and fill it in at the end of each meeting to take note, and keep on planning. We take this opportunity to remind you once again that the steps followed in psychosocial interventions are the same for every work conducted using a scientific method:

1. Observation
2. Evaluation
3. Planning
4. Intervention
5. Evaluation

EVALUATION TABLE	
CONTENT	
TRAINER'S EMOTIONAL STATE	
PARTICIPANTS' EMOTIONAL STATE	
CRITICAL MOMENTS	
LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT (KNOWLEDGE, ATTENTION, PARTICIPATION)	
CONTINGENCIES	
GROUP'S OR PARTICIPANTS' WEAKNESSES	
GROUP'S OR PARTICIPANTS' STRENGTHS	
SESSION STRENGTHS	
IDEAS FOR THE NEXT MEETING	

Table 12.2 Evaluation elements of group meetings

12.2.6 Between a meeting and an other

The continuity between meetings is an essential factor for the whole operation to be successful. Since this is a closed group, in which participants pursue a goal that requires a common track of growth and change to be achieved, it is important to build a solid bond that continues beyond the time of the meeting. To do so, the operator must take extra care in some aspects:

- Giving a warm welcome during the first meeting and, even before then, during the calling stage, encouraging the participants' engagement and decreasing the percentage of dropouts.
- The beginning of each meeting shall briefly outline the previous session's content. Ask the participants if they had any thoughts about it, or if they had any emotional or practical experiences related to the topic.
- The conclusion is also very important for building a link between one meeting and the other. Give small tasks (do some exercises, keep a diary etc...) or food for thought to stimulate reflection that can be shared during the next meeting.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 21 in the workbook.

12.3 Family time

Family time are spaces equipped for meeting parents and children while being monitored by operators. Used in different contexts, from Africa to Haiti, this tool has repeatedly shown its effectiveness in promoting relational spaces in the communities that are otherwise, excluded from everyday life, thus creating absences and deficiencies that carry many psychological and social diseases or problems.



Family time was not used by AVSI operators as described below within a track. The operators had, however, organised family events in which they proposed collectively making fruit salads and soap. The positive point was seeing mothers performing these tasks with their children, something that neither of them are used to. The negative point was the adolescent boys' refusal to join in this moment, probably due to the gender norms they are convinced of.

12.3.1 Theory

This tool was designed and built especially thanks to the work of Françoise Dolto (1908-1986), a famous French psychoanalyst and pediatrician, and to his experience in the Maison Verte project's implementation, in France.

12.3.2 General objective

The overall objective is to produce resilience through structured meetings between the constituents of the beneficiary primary network (focused on the relationship between parents and children); using this tool, we can work in detail on issues concerning the world of the person, according to Resilience Onlus' holistic approach. This happens because, in these sessions, the following is developed:

I HAVE: relationships between the constituents of the beneficiaries' primary network

I CAN: you can discover new skills through practical activities

I AM: you can discover and build (especially, but not only, in children) your own personal and emotional features

12.3.3 Specific objectives

1. Rebuild the parent/child relationship, often put to the test in certain contexts with daily difficulties
2. Create a parent network
3. Provide meeting spaces for the community, related to the nucleus of the community itself: the family
4. Develop the children's skills both practically and socially
5. Enhance individual and community resources
6. Circulate experiences, especially the ones related to parenting
7. Actually understand and prevent (at the primary and secondary levels) family and community discomfort



In AVSI experience with Syrian refugees, having a positive form of parental discipline is not seen often. Violence in the relationship between parents and children prevails. In this frame, this psychosocial tool can be very useful if implemented properly by operators skilled in parenting.

12.3.4 Basic features: space, time and participants

SPACE: For this tool, it is important to pay a lot of attention to the preparation of the space: a safe space free of risks, so that children can safely proceed in exploring it. This tool, with the presence of children, requires a very careful effort in space building (a house, a tent, an enclosed and equipped open space...). This space, in addition to being safe and healthy, will also be equipped with all the necessary tools for the planned activities.

For instance, you could use C.F.S. (Child Friendly Space, standard 17 Minimum Standards for child protection in humanitarian action) and W.S.S. (Woman Safe Space), already designed for the reception of children and mothers.

TIME: The duration of each meeting should be between an hour and a half, and two hours. We provide at least one meeting a week, but two meetings are strongly recommended. In this case as well, the track should be planned before the beginning of the meetings, and possibly modified as they progress. It can cover the entire project period (months).

PARTICIPANTS: the “actors” involved are:

- Children
- Parents
- Operators

The number of involved children may start from a minimum of 4, and reach the recommended maximum number of 12. It is useful to divide the children according to the age group, taking into account the cognitive and motor development, as well as relational skills:

- Ages 3 to 18 months,
- Ages 18 months to 3 years,
- Ages 3 to 5 years.

NOTE: Regarding the different targets in different contexts, we can also build a group of older children, taking into account that the maximum age limit to be considered is 10 to 11 years. Generally, the constituent group requires a certain homogeneity within it.

As for the presence of parents, the ideal scenario would be the presence of both parental figures, but if this is not possible (as it rarely is), one parent is sufficient. A person who deals with the daily education of the child can also be sufficient, such as an aunt, grandmother, or anyone who is in contact with him.

At this point, it is useful to dwell for a moment on the parent's role; the technical term used to define the role of the parent in this context is "scaffolding" (Lev Vygotsky 1896-1934) as it is a helping relationship. This kind of relationship requires the presence of a person who is more capable (parent / caregiver), who helps a less capable person (the child) in carrying out a task, solving a problem or achieving a goal. Here, the adult provides support in the child's learning process without taking over from him.

The aim of the presence of the operators is stimulating, organising and proposing activities and supervising the execution, which is also helping the parents to improve the experience. The presence of two operators is necessary, in order to be able to control the group, and to be able to separate the activities (see below).

NOTE: A good operator who can effectively manage the time allotted for families should have certain characteristics and be able to exploit them; he should:

- Have skills related to parenting, child development and relationships with adults.
- Should be able to conduct group activities.
- Should never be a substitute for the parents, but instead support them in their relationship with their children as a reinforcement figure (scaffolding).
- Basically, he should play the director's role.
- The operator should also pay a lot of attention to the time of separation, when children remain with him while parents take their seats in the "space of reflection."
- It is very important that operators reserve a time for themselves before each meeting to have the objectives clear, and at the end of the meeting to evaluate all difficulties, the time management, and the space.

12.3.5 How to organise a good family time

To plan a session focused on a good time for the family, you need to be aware of a few things

The conduction of the meeting may be carried out in two different ways:

- **"free":** the meeting is run as a single event, during which parents and children interact under the observation of the operators, without any organised, specific activities.
- **structured:** the meeting is actively managed by the operators, offering activities aimed towards an intervention project.

In any case, it is always one of the operators who organises a meeting with the parents, while the children continue their games under the observation of the other operator.

At the end of the meeting, as always, the operators convene for a self-evaluation session.

In any case, every meeting should be organised following these stages:

1. Welcome
2. Activities proposal
3. Implementation
4. Meeting with the parents to get their impressions
5. Greeting

NOTE: Before the first meeting, it may be useful to call the involved parents, and briefly explain the activity, the methods of implementation and the objectives.

It may also be important to create a small logo that characterises the activity within the community.

The track

As mentioned previously, you can design a track that can last for several months, so it is important to follow the clear steps below:

- PROMOTION to raise the community's awareness of the activities, through the channels already in use.
- PRELIMINARY MEETING WITH PARENTS to explain the purpose and methods of the track.
- BEGINNING THE ACTIVITIES: once most or all of the participants arrive, the operator explains the day's activities.
- ACTIVITY CONDUCTION: this stage requires some deliberation, because it can sometimes happen that some parents will refuse to participate. It becomes very important then that the operator is able to, gently, entertain the parents or call them to take part in some other activities, even informally, giving them time to adapt (it may require more than one meeting).
- END OF THE TRACK: it is important to organise an event or a meeting that extends to all family members, to show what has been achieved and share it (it is often an opportunity to engage reluctant fathers) through a small celebration, an activity photo exhibition, drawings, representations... This activity must be decided in conjunction with the participants and must involve everyone.
- EVALUATION: it is important that the team meets at the end of the track, and make a report on it.

The main activities

Typically, the main activities can be among the followings:

- Group games, especially with children from 5 years and up
- Material handling and object building activities
- Painting activities
- Small plays
- Structured games
- Inventing stories

The table 12.3 shows examples of activity to be organised during sessions for a family time project; it helps to understand how activities that promote senses development, can have a symbolic influence in the parent-child relationship and should be shared during the reflection time with parents.

STIMULATED SENSE	ACTIVITY	SYMBOLIC MEANING IN THE RELATIONSHIP
TASTE	Cook together	An experience in nutrition
HEARING	Invent a story	Listening skills
SIGHT	Build magnifying lenses	Power of observation
TOUCH	Material handling and contact games	The value of contact
SMELL	Make bags with different scents and then smell them, trying to recognise them	The memory of smells in our house and those related to the experience in nutrition

Table 12.3 Example activities of family time sessions



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 22 in the workbook.

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Chapter 13

LIFE SKILLS PROMOTION ACTIVITIES



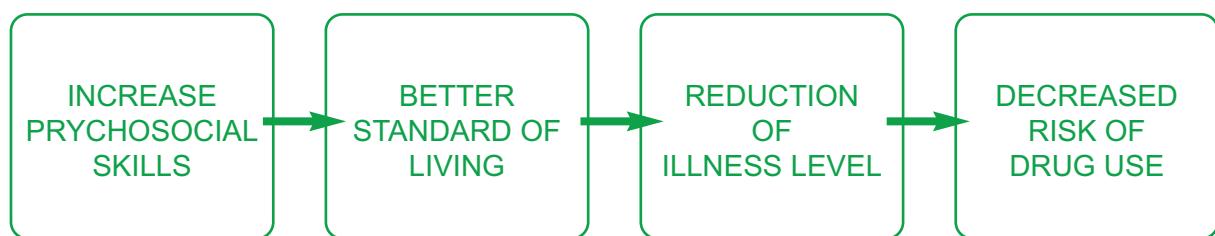
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13.1 The origin of Life Skills

In the late 1980s, because of the failure of the fight against drugs, based until then on careful and detailed information managed with technological and traditional methods, the WHO decided to change its strategy. According to many nations, it began a **prevention** activity implemented through training starting from the primary educational levels, and within learning environments such as the family, associations or other aggregation contexts.

In this perspective, the new WHO strategy aim was to reduce the use and abuse of substances among young people through the prevention of the reasons and causes that lead to it.

In WHO strategy, prevention consist in developing those psychosocial skills that allow to deal with tasks and challenges of everyday life by promoting physical, mental and social wellbeing.



The WHO, in the 1993 document "Life Skills education for children and adolescents in schools", describes the direct promotion of psychosocial skills through teaching Life Skills from early childhood and adolescence.

Life Skills are defined as those skills you need to learn, in order to relate to others and to face problems, pressures and stresses of everyday life.

They are social and relational skills, enabling people to effectively face various situations; having self-esteem, being confident in relation to others and towards the entire community (family, school, groups of friends and acquaintances, the society you belong to, etc.). The lack of such skills may cause, especially in children and young people, the onset of negative and risky behaviour in response to stress, creating non-adaptive coping methods.

The document, while underlining the fact that Life Skills are neither a panacea, nor the only factor that influences behaviour, shows that Life Skills promotion appears in many educational programs, with widely demonstrated effectiveness, linked to specific problems such as substance abuse, bullying, etc.

13.2 Which skills are Life Skills

Over the years, several programs aimed at promoting Life Skills have been developed, identifying different skills. Despite being so numerous, the **core Life Skills**, characterised by cross cultural features, are made up according to the WHO document previously described of the skills listed as:

- **Decision making:** it is a skill that helps in taking decisions in a constructive way, considering the different possibilities and consequences of each possible choice.
- **Problem solving:** it allows us to search for the solutions to different problems encountered in life.
- **Creative thinking:** this skill is closely linked to the previous ones. It permits exploring alternatives and the consequences of the chosen actions. It may help in adaptively and flexibly confronting various situations of everyday life.
- **Critical thinking:** the ability to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. It helps in recognising and evaluating factors that influence attitudes and behaviours.
- **Effective communication:** it is the ability to express ourselves verbally and nonverbally in an appropriate manner, towards different cultures and situations. It means being able to express opinions and desires, needs and fears, and to ask for help or advice in times of need.
- **Interpersonal relationship skills:** it helps to relate to others in a positive way, to create durable relationships of friendship, which can have a positive effect on mental and social wellbeing.
- **Self-awareness:** it is the ability to know ourselves, our character, strengths and vulnerabilities, desires and what we do not love about ourselves, our values and beliefs, communications and behaviours. Developing self-awareness can help us recognise when we are stressed or under pressure. It is an essential prerequisite for effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills and empathy.
- **Empathy:** the ability to put ourself in the other's shoes, trying to think and feel "as if" we were the other, but maintaining contact with ourself and with our own emotions, never confusing them with the other's emotions. It is generated by the positive acceptance of others and their diversity.
- **Coping with emotions:** it implies the recognition of our own personal emotions and those of other people, the awareness of how emotions influence behaviour and the ability to respond to those emotions in an appropriate way.
- **Coping with stress:** the ability to recognise the origins of stress in daily life, and to understand how to handle different levels of stress.

13.3 The connection between Life Skills and resilience

According to the person's world approach, all these skills are just some of the psychosocial skills developed in the world of the person, and therefore they contribute to creating resilience, improving his ability to perceive himself, relate and act.

I AM	I HAVE	I CAN
Self-awareness	Empathy	Problem solving
Critical thinking	Effective communication	Decision making
Coping with emotions	Interpersonal relationship skills	Creative thinking
Coping with stress		

As shown, each one of these skills can refer to a specific dimension of the person's world, but it is also important to remember that they can be included in other dimensions.

That said, we can say that by strengthening and developing Life Skills, we will help increase individual resilience.

Even within other resilience theories, explicit references to Life Skills can be found. Making references, for instance, to the seven elements forming resilience, according to Steven and Sybil Wolin's theories, we can find awareness, relationships and creativity¹.

13.4 Life Skills promotion activities

13.4.1 Use of the activities

The activities listed in the next sections must be considered as psychosocial activities, so they must be applied in the manner of a project.

For this reason, some activities may be proposed in a full track, which aims to enhance all Life Skills, or they can be used within other tools such as interviews or group activities.

Furthermore, we can evaluate project discussion groups or sensitisation sessions of a specific skill.

These activities can be eventually used, not only with children and adolescents at a primary prevention level, but also with different groups of beneficiaries if, after careful observation, we decided to help one person in developing a life skill rather than another.



AVSI experienced Life Skills through 3 different ways:

1. Through PSS activities, one or more of these skills were tackled with children.
2. Through the Life Skills track, based on AVSI's Life Skills Manual. The track done with adolescents of 14 years and above was intensive for some and spread over time for others. It tackled the 10 Life Skills.
3. Through agricultural vocational training proposed to adolescents. Some life skills were to be tackled within the entire vocational course.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 23 in the work-book.

This chapter proposes, for each skill, the description of two activities to develop the life skill in question, and a brief theoretical explanation for the operator's use.

Some activities are developed on a rational level, while others require sharing personal experiences, and so, a greater emotional involvement. These games allow personal introspection, and it is therefore important that the operator is able to figure out if they are suitable for the beneficiaries he is working with or if they are not, but he must also be able to gently handle what people express. Furthermore, when these activities are used in a group, the group itself must be already established and characterised by a respectful atmosphere.



During Life Skills sessions given as a track to adolescents, the expression of very difficult experiences lived by the participants was heard. This was a sign of mutual respect and of an atmosphere of confidence created among all participants.

¹For a more detailed explanation, see chapter 1 of this manual.

13.4.2 Decision making

Theory

A decision is a judgment about whether or not to implement an action. People make decisions daily, of high or little importance.

According to Janis and Mann (1977), who developed the "conflict model of decision-making" theory, decision-making is a very complex task, because the person is driven by the desire to find and choose the best alternative, while being aware that this requires a certain amount of risk of an error. This is the reason why it is necessary to realise that, before making a choice, it is important to spend some time in the research phase for alternatives, although in many situations, this is not possible, which results in further stress. Yet another element that complicates the process of making a choice is whether the choice itself is reversible or not.

The decision making skill is influenced by some **personal characteristics**, such as the ability to tolerate stress and time-related pressure, but also the tendency for pessimism or optimism, and the subjective disposition towards risk.

The authors classify **four decision-making styles** that characterise the way of dealing with people's choices, although we can use different styles in different life situations:

- *Procrastination*: stay trying any way to delay decisions;
- *Defensive avoidance*: assign someone else the responsibility of making the decision;
- *Hyper-vigilance*: the unrestrained pursuit of details, and then going back to the first choice. This leads to a high level of stress and an excessive emotional involvement;
- *Vigilance*: taking goals into account, making a careful examination, looking for information and examining the consequences of each imagined choice.

Sometimes, the person is not alone in making a decision, but makes it together with other people or in a group; mediation between his own needs and those of the others is required. Generally, the most commonly used methods for making decisions in groups are:

- *The vote*: despite this being considered democratic, the risk is discounting the minority that opposed the decision taken by the majority of the group, in terms of both the emotional atmosphere, and the implementation of the decision taken;
- *The negotiation*: the decision comes from a collaborative process that focuses on the best solution for the entire group.



During the decision-making session, Hasan recognised all steps he had gone through while taking one of the hardest decision of his life. Here is his story:

Hasan, a boy of 14 years, was asked by his father to go onto the roof to inspect the water's reservoir. While accomplishing the task, he saw a military plane approaching, preparing to bomb his building.

In these few seconds, Hasan considered the two solutions he had available to him:

- Jumping down from the roof to the balcony and risking breaking his legs
- Going back to his apartment using the stairs, knowing that this option is more risky because it will take longer.

His decision was finally to jump from the roof, landing in his father's arms. Hasan did not sustain any injuries, and had taken the safest decision on this hard day of his life.

S.O.S.

 TARGET GROUP: from 12 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Promote the expression of personal beliefs
- Facilitate decision-making in a group conflict situation
- Experience the difficulty in making decisions

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Participants are divided into groups of 5, and then the operator reads the scenario and asks each person quietly to choose an object to bring along to the island. Each group therefore has a maximum of 20 minutes to decide among the group's chosen objects, only one of which will be brought to the island. Finally, in the plenary session, each group will describe the manner in which they made the choice and the difficulties they faced.



You are on a damaged ship. You cannot launch a S.O.S. because the radio is damaged as well. You have to jump off the ship and you are close to an unknown island. The lifeboat is small, and each person can only bring one of the following objects:

- blanket
- medicines
- alcohol
- weapons
- food
- life vest
- camping stove
- the mascot dog of the group
- the radio, hoping to be able to fix it
- toolbox

What is your decision?

Upon boarding the lifeboat, you find that there is not enough room for all objects, so you have to choose one for the lifeboat.

Which object is the group's choice?

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

This game allows participants to experience the difficulty of making final decisions, to agree as a group, and to feel what it is like to have a limited time to make a choice.

LEARN TO SAY “NO”



TARGET: from 16 years and up.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Help people to identify conflict situations that may create discomfort
- Learn to deny



ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

People are divided in groups of 4 to 5. Each group will have 30 minutes to list, in a brainstorming session, different situations where it is difficult to refuse. Then, each group chooses a situation and plays it in the plenary session.

The other groups have to observe the person's ability to deny, and the ability to accept a rejection from others.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It is very important to bring out the emotions experienced by people during the performance, and how difficult it is to issue a denial by describing their needs and the point of view that motivates that choice. The operator can also show how difficult it is to accept a rejection, especially if it is perceived as a personal rejection and not as a rejection of the expressed proposal.

13.4.3 Problem solving

Theory

The problem-solving skill has been expanded between the 1940s and the 1960s, mainly by Gestalt's cognitivist psychology. These studies led to the theorisation of a methodology that helps to analyse problems, and propose potentially suitable solutions, thus developing learning.

Honing the problem-solving methodology, is a combination of skills that allows for looking at problems from different points of view, in order to find solutions that can be straight forward yet difficult to think of.

The methodology involves **six stages**:

- *Problem-finding*: the phase where the problem is recognised, and therefore the condition in which we are acting, where our habits and acquired knowledge are insufficient to achieve our goals. Although this step may seem obvious, if we do not realise we are facing a hard time, it will be impossible to solve the problem; it is, therefore, necessary to reduce the level of risk or the possibility of more serious problems;
- *Problem-setting*: the problem is defined and described, identifying all the involved and connected features, such as people, objects, places, but also consequences;
- *Problem analysis*: the problem is broken down into smaller and more manageable problems;
- *Problem-solving*: research into the causes of the problem, in order to try to face them and eliminate them; if the causes are unavoidable, search for a more approachable and less discomforting way to face them;
- *Decision-making*: decision-making is the planning of a realistic intervention;
- *Decision-taking*: the action phase.

Some authors also add an evaluation phase of what has been done to fix the problem.

There are two types of problem-solving:

Re-productive: analyse an already experienced situation and reuse the experience;

Productive: when facing a new problem, try to solve it by using creativity.

Many studies highlight the importance of planning a psychoeducational empowerment activity of problem solving with children struggling with auto-regulation and an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

THE ORANGE

 TARGET: from 8 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Improve problem-solving skills
- Gain awareness of our own world and other people's, in order to solve problems
- Explore alternatives for facing problems

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

In the plenary session, the operator reads the scenario, and then asks the participants to comment on it.

Another way to use it, is to present only the problem, i.e. two children fighting over a single orange, and ask people how they would act.

The Story



Two little brothers are fighting over an orange. "I want it! No, it's mine!" Screams, shouts, and blows ensue. The mother comes and cuts the orange in two with a knife: "Not halves!" The screams become moans.

The grandmother comes in, and asks them why they wanted that orange so badly. One of the children answers in tears: "I'm so thirsty and I wanted the orange juice; half of it is not enough". The other one: "I'm baking a cake, and I needed the skin in the mixture".

(R. Fisher, W. Ury, 1981)

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

In this story, the traditional form for solving problems and conflicts is well described, and operator can start a group discussion. While children represent a system based on strength and power, in which a personal position becomes a position of conflict, the mother represents the system of the law, based on the division of resources. The grandmother's intervention represents, on the other hand, a system based on benefits, which is the reason behind the deep conflicts that often remain unexpressed, showing how a conflict that seems unsolvable by force and through the law, can, however, be solved by sharing the benefits, opening the door to the possibility of negotiation.

Another level of problem-solving is related to creativity, and it could therefore be interesting to ask participants what other solutions they would invent.

GUIDED MEMORY



TARGET: from 16 years and up.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Increase the ability to analyse and solve problems
- Increase awareness of our behaviours and emotions when trying to solve a problem
- Experience the opportunity to meet with others while we deal with a problem



ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The operator calls on each person to remember a situation where he had to face a problem. Then he asks people to think about how they handled the problem, and what was the most difficult step to manage.

People are then paired up and in 40 minutes, one tells the other his memory of the event while the other listens, and then he asks the other if he has any suggestions regarding the problem and possible alternative solutions. Eventually, people exchange roles: the operator decides if roles should be exchanged at half time or if he should let the participants decide the timing.

Finally, he asks all participants to share what they learned from this experience.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

Ensuring an atmosphere of respect, and listening to the personal story of each person is very important. We can point out what helped in the problem solving and what made it more laborious.

13.4.4 Creative thinking

Theory

We often think of creativity as a few people's talent, expressed in the form of art or science. Actually, we should think of creativity as a form of creative thinking, which is a particular way of thinking that involves originality and fluency, breaking traditional role models by introducing a new and different way of thinking.

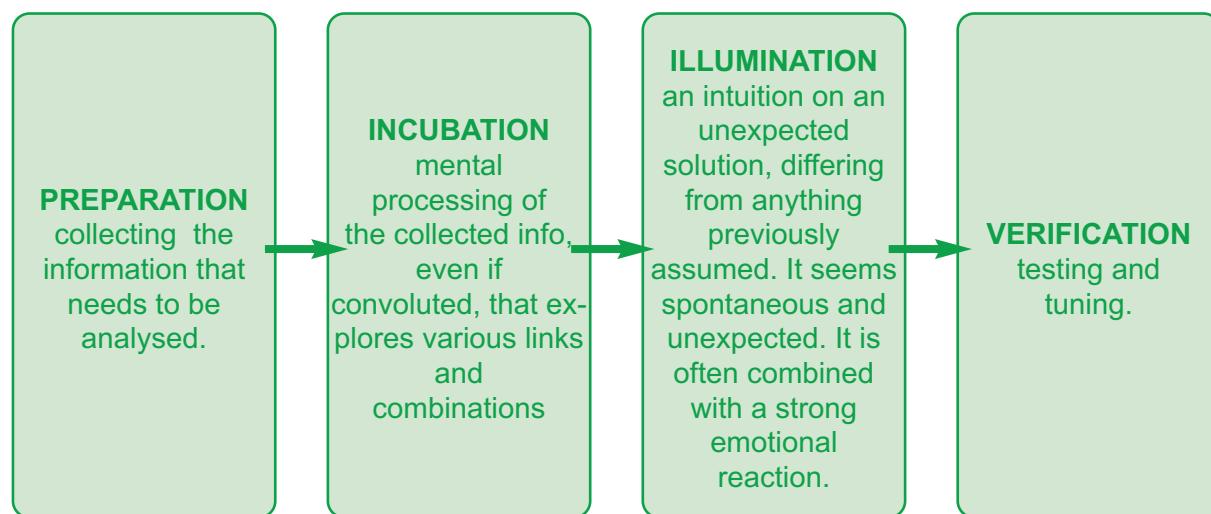
Guildford (1967), defines creativity as:

- freedom to be ourself in the world
- ability to express an original thought
- ability to produce new ideas

For the author, creativity is expressed through divergent thinking, a kind of unconventional thinking, that comes up with unusual and original solutions, characterised by:

- Fluency (ability to produce many ideas)
- Flexibility (ability to change settings)
- Originality (ability to conceive unusual ideas)
- Elaboration (ability to provide complex answers for simple elements)
- Evaluation (ability to select the best ideas, and those most relevant to the purpose in question)

The most famous description of the creative process is in the four stages outlined below of creativity, described by psychologist educator Wallas (1926):



The author also identifies a sub-stage, called intimation, i.e. the feeling of being on the right track, accompanied by a growing excitement, which sometimes precedes the stage of illumination, when there is insight.

“Those whom cannot create, wish to destroy”, says E. Fromm. Among the most important **blocks** to creativity, we identified:

1- perceptual blocks :

- inability to question beyond what is evident;
- inability to distinguish between cause and effect;
- difficulty in breaking down a problem into treatable elements;
- inability to use all the senses that put us in contact with our surroundings;
- difficulty in perceiving unusual relationships between ideas and objects.

2- emotional blocks:

- fear of making a mistake or passing for an outsider;
- fear of being in a minority;
- deciding prematurely on the first solution;
- fear and mistrust of others, especially if they play a major role;
- inability to relax;
- sense of ridiculousness;
- absence of the necessary motivation to pursue an idea, project or activity.

3- cultural blocks:

- desire to conform to role models (such as the idea that dreaming is a waste of time);
- tendency to want “all or nothing”, or to give opposition;
- faith in statistics and in past experiences;
- belief that both dreaming and imagining are childish behaviours.

Creative thinking is encouraged since childhood, by contexts of growth that encourage exploration, expression, personal initiative and autonomous decision-making, within relationships characterised by warmth and emotional support, but also by a “right far away” or rather the “right near”. When an adult is unable to stimulate an adaptive and progressive separation process, he will risk, for instance, substituting the child when being too “close”; on the contrary, if he is very “far”, he risks not supporting him in his creativity and not being a positive model.



AVSI operators in Nabatieh highlighted the importance of creative thinking skills for Syrian refugee children in enhancing imagination. After some activities tackling this skill, AVSI operators noticed an improvement in these children in imaginary drawings, drawings related to their beloved country in the future and drawings of themselves in the future.

A GROUP STORY

TARGET: from 5 years and up.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Experience creative thinking in a group
- Bring out each participant's contributions

ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Participants are arranged side by side, and each one receives a picture previously chosen by the operator; the first one, inspired by the picture he has received, begins to tell a story, then stops and the second one has to continue the story and so on, until the last member of the group has spoken.

The operator, meanwhile, writes the story on a board.

After re-reading the whole story, the operator will launch a discussion in a plenary session by asking:

- How did it go?
- Did you experience any difficulties?
- What impressed you?
- What did you learn?
- Do you like the final story?

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

The choice of images must reflect the group's characteristics, and the objective of the activity. This tool can often be used at the end of specific tracks as the final product of the group, which symbolically relates the knowledge and emotions experienced.

RANGE OF USES OF AN OBJECT

 TARGET: from 8 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- promote the expression of divergent and creative thinking
- understand the value of creative thinking in everyday life

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Participants are divided into two groups. Each group chooses and recovers 5 objects within the used space that hide the other group.

Alternatively, each group proposes an object to the other group, and they have 2 minutes to propose all possible uses, even unconventional ones.

The operator writes down all proposed uses on a board, and a jury of 3 people will assess their feasibility.

The winner is the team with the highest successful number of uses.

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

The game allows for highlighting the use of creativity in everyday life, as it helps in creating alternative solutions.

13.4.5 Critical thinking

Theory

Critical thinking is a skill that develops from childhood, and that becomes a fundamental requirement in adulthood. It does not mean, as it is often falsely thought of, giving bad reviews, but being able to analyse situations with an eye free of inside or outside influences and restrictions.

It is expressed in three ways:

- *Shared criticism*: using assessments deemed valid by most people;
- *Personal criticism*: based on personal values, characteristics, ideas and experiences;
- *Self-criticism*: person's ability to evaluate his own behaviour, thoughts and feelings.



AVSI operators had an experience with a group of teenagers who had developed their critical thinking, among other Life Skills as well.

These Lebanese teenagers were mixed with Syrian teenagers through a Life Skills track. In the first day of this intensive track, hostilities were very obvious between the two groups, ending with a violent fight between two teenage boys, one Syrian and one Lebanese. After the incident, group segregation according to nationality was found to be the best solution in order to continue with the activity.

During the following sessions, AVSI operators focused in both groups on conflict resolution and on how to be assertive while accepting the other's culture.

In the last day of the Life Skills track, "George", a Lebanese male participant (age 18) went to apologise on behalf of his friends to the Syrian group. The Syrian participants felt very 'secure' following this action.

Then the whole Lebanese group discussed among themselves how wrong they were during the past days, and how they were feeling ashamed due to their previous actions. They decided to go together and apologise to all the Syrian group. At the end of the Life Skills track, a graduation event was organised. It included both the Lebanese and Syrians and it went smoothly, with no bad gestures, and instead some nice comments and communication were exchanged.

In order to implement critical thinking, we must take 5 steps:

- choose the topic
- ask questions about the topic
- gather information to find answers to our questions
- double-check the information
- make a choice.

Supporting people, especially young ones, in the development of their critical thinking, can counteract and overcome the use of stereotypes and prejudices, that are simplistic and often far from reality and helps each person to look at the reality by developing a personal opinion, as the result of an in-depth analysis.

Stereotypes are a set of beliefs about the typical characteristics of a group of people and consist of superficial judgments. In particular, the following groups elicit stereotypes: emerging groups (envy), weak groups (compassion), or those who are marginalised (disgust).

According to Allport (1954), stereotypes are taught in childhood and are useful and economic because they can bring some order, give meaning and predict reality. At the same time, however, they do not allow seeing the person for who he is, because they put project on the person a rigid and schematic image of the group to which he belongs.

Prejudices, also involve the emotional dimension, as they associate a negative or positive judgment to a stereotype. This may lead to discriminatory and racist attitudes.

As for stereotypes and prejudices in children, it should be emphasised that they adopt rigid categorisations very early on (e.g. 2-3 years, typically), and continue to use the differences between them in peer relationship management (e.g. "You do not play because you have curly hair"). They live friendships, and they make fun of physical aspects. But it would be misleading to think that this will lead to prejudices and racist behaviour in adulthood. It is merely a way to comprehend reality and to manage relationships.



In one of the sessions on Life Skills with Syrian adolescent girls aged between 13 and 15, the discussion became about the negative perception that Syrian girls have of Lebanese girls.

Syrian girls were somehow convinced that Lebanese girls do not have any ethics, especially those who do not wear a veil. They also criticised their provocative clothes.

When AVSI operators tried to make them think about societies where the niqab prevails and how women from that society might see Syrians girls as unethical, even if they wore a veil, they understood the prejudices they themselves had.

They understood the importance of getting in touch with others rather than judging them based only on their appearance and looks.

BRAINSTORMING

 TARGET: from 8 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- exploring new points of view

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The operator or the participants, choose a topic of particular interest to them (e.g.: for teenagers: friendship, early marriage, physical development...). The operator asks people to write all that comes to mind on a poster in reference to the proposed theme. Then, in a plenary session, the operator starts a comparison, by asking people to explain to others what is written.

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It is important that the operator helps the participants explain what was written in detail, try to explore the motivations and associations to it. He must promote a welcoming and non-judgmental environment.

MALES AND FEMALES

 TARGET: from 12 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Comprehend the different points of view of males and females
- Determine the presence of stereotypes or prejudices

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The participants are divided into a group of males and a group of females. Each group draws the silhouette of a male and a female on a board, and then is given half an hour to complete the figures with their respective characteristics.

Then, these steps follow:

- Males describe the female silhouette;
- Females listen to them, express subsequent objections and ask questions;
- Females describe the male silhouette;
- Males listen to them, express subsequent objections and ask questions.

The participants are then divided once more into two groups of mixed males and females, and each group is given half an hour to build two silhouettes of a male and a female trying to confront each other, and to resolve their different points of view.

After the discussion, the operator asks about the differences that emerged in the silhouettes made by the separate groups, asks for the method used in creating them, and asks whether this method can also be useful in other situations.

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It is a very useful game to play with pre-adolescents and adolescents, and it can highlight any stereotypes and prejudices, even socio-cultural ones.

13.4.6 Effective communication²



AVSI operators noted that effective communication is a very important skill to work on with Syrian refugees. Indeed, having frequently seen the aggression and violence in which adults deal with children, and in children, being good observers, when dealing with each other, may justify why this is a relevant skill for these beneficiaries.



Alia, a Syrian girl of 18 years we met in Marej el Khokh ITS, has been able to develop her resilience after the Life Skills sessions.

In fact, after talking about the world of the person and doing the exercise on the relationship map each person has, she became aware of her conflictual relationship with her brother.

Mohamad, her brother, an adolescent of 13 years is always aggressive when relating to her.

When these siblings communicate with each other, they are always fighting and screaming at each other.

The track made her realise the part she is responsible for in this conflictual relationship. She began to talk to him in a calm manner and has decided to continue to do so until he changes.

YOU CANNOT NOT COMMUNICATE



TARGET: from 8 years and up.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- awareness of the first axiom of communication
- learn to comprehend behaviours



ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

A participant is invited to be at the centre of a group forming a full circle, and he is asked to remain silent. The group should look at the person and guess what he is thinking.

After sharing various hypotheses, the operator declares that they can not communicate.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

The game allows highlighting the mechanism of attribution, i.e. the process we embrace, often unconsciously, when we attribute meaning to others' behaviours based on personality traits, and social and cultural influences, rather than on the mechanism of projection, i.e. the involuntary transfer of our emotions to others.

We should note that children communicate mainly through behaviour, and not through words. This game may therefore be a good exercise for operators who work with them.

²For further information, see chapter 6 and 10 of this manual.

THE OBSTACLES TO COMMUNICATION

 TARGET: from 12 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- Take note of communication errors in order to avoid them

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The operator asks each participant to recall a situation where he needed to be heard, and to identify which behaviours led to him feeling unheard, giving everybody 15 minutes to write them down.

In subgroups, for about 30 minutes, the participants retell the situations and write all the communication errors on a board.

The work is shown to everybody, and the operator adds to and expands on the different errors.

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

The operator can refer to the 12 roadblocks to communication by T. Gordon³.

13.4.7 Ability to have interpersonal relationships⁴

TWO-HAND PAINTING

 TARGET: from 5 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Empower others' awareness and attention
- Be aware that coordination with others may be difficult

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Participants are divided into pairs and each receives a paper and a pencil. Both members of the pair hold the same pencil and one of them starts to draw, while the other must keep hanging on to the pencil and drawing along with his partner. After five minutes, they exchange roles.

Then, the couples are asked to share their experience and what they learned in a plenary session.

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

The operator may highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships, but also the difficulty to understand each other and to develop harmony.

³ See chapter 10 of this manual.

⁴ For a theoretical look, see the first chapter of this manual where "I have" is explained, one of the dimensions of the world of the person.

ACCORDION OF POSITIVISM

 TARGET: from 8 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Learn to empower personal resources
- Learn to take into account the other's reaction

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The group is arranged in a full circle. Each person writes down his name, and then passes the paper to the person on his right, who has to write at the bottom of the paper a positive quality of the person who first wrote on the paper. He then folds the paper and passes it to the person on his right, with the name of the person who wrote on it first visible at the top. The round continues until the paper reaches the person just before the paper's owner.

The operator asks everybody to silently read the list of qualities written by the other participants about them, and then asks them:

How do you feel about this?

What do you think about this?

What did you learn from this?

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

This is a game meant for groups where people know each other, and where there is an atmosphere of welcome and respect. The operator can observe the mirror function exercised by others, supporting the development of a self-conscious identity.

13.4.8 Self-awareness

Theory

Self-awareness is a key objective in the achievement of personal maturity.

It starts in the child's first moments of life, in his profound relationship with his caregivers. Every-time the caregivers recognise the child's needs, welcome and respond to them, or correctly interpret his feelings, they allow the baby to see himself as a distinct person, recognised for his own individuality. The more adults are able to tune into what a child really feels, the more the chances of the child have they harmonious development, in which he is able to get in touch with himself.

According to Goleman (1995), self-awareness is the first component of **emotional intelligence**.

There are multiple ways to help a person develop self-awareness:

- Through self-assessment;
- Listening to other people's opinions;
- Through perceptual techniques, which help initially in focusing on the external stimulus, which you later shrink in order to regain awareness of your own dimension; for instance, listen to your breath, rather than background noises;
- Trying to express to others what we feel. This expression distances us from the experienced situation, and allows us to examine what we are going through as if we are just spectators.

Talking about self-awareness, we can see the connection with the theme of **self-esteem**, i.e. the person's evaluation of himself, his qualities and his own limits, built from childhood on the confirmation and the disconfirming that he receives from the outside. It concerns various aspects of the life of the person: social, occupational, academic, family and body. Some authors point out that self-esteem may be the difference between the *perceived self* (self-image) and the *ideal self* (the image of the person we would like to be).

In systems characterised by authoritarian educational styles, the tendency is to emphasise people's limitations and flaws, and to place little importance on the person acquiring awareness concerning his quality and resources. That said it is essential for the person to know his limits in order to accept them and find other solutions, especially when he has a hyper-critical attitude, and a strong discrepancy between his self-image and his ideal-self which may lead to self-esteem issues.

Instead, having a good level of self-confidence, means that the person has even more confidence in himself and in his own abilities, and that makes him better at facing challenges and difficulties.

As previously pointed out, building self-esteem starts from childhood, both thanks to what the children receive from the significant adults who take care of them, and what they experiment in protected environments.

Children who experience a sense of internal insecurity, and therefore have a more **fragile self-esteem**, can express this discomfort in different ways:

- *the invisible child*: we can pinpoint him in a group, because that is the context in which his defensive reactions are most provoked, in an attempt to disappear from the others' sight. He is a quiet child, but not totally silent; with other children he does not appear at first glance to present any kind of problem; he is always physically included in the more quiet group of children, does not fight, does not require help to resolve conflicts and, generally, accepts decisions made by others. He does not seek confirmations of any kind from adults but answers, if called upon.
- *the very active child*: he is lively, always on the move; cannot stand not being the centre of attention, for better or for worse; it is better to be scolded rather than forgotten. He usually has a lot of friends, which he drags along on his ventures, and when he is with them, he looks strong and bold, transgressing norms and rules. It is difficult to notice his insecurities when he is not left alone; when he is, he seems almost lost, as if he does not know what to do.
- *the elusive child*: he escapes any contact, both physical and verbal. Unlike the invisible child, who always appears calm and quiet, he immediately brings attention to himself because he expresses discomfort. When he tries to get close to others, he acts clumsy and spiteful, but he is not aware of this being a provocation, so he often gets excluded, while to him, it feels like he is suffering from wrongs and injustices, so he isolates himself and refuses any relationships. The adult finds managing this kind of child very difficult; the adult is often forced to scold him, because this child always instigates fights with others, but if the adult tries to speak with him or to understand him, the child is evasive;
- *the adultified child*: it is very difficult to notice his low self-esteem because, although sometimes he appears a little shy, he always seems mature, responsible, and conscientious. At school, he reminds everyone of the rules, plays in an orderly and fair manner, and gets seriously absorbed in his studies. At home, he helps parents, takes care of younger siblings, and he is reliable when he is given a task. Everybody is happy with him, so it can be hard for his difficulties to be perceived: often he cannot play, cannot lash out; he must always check that everything is in the right place, and has an immense fear of failure and of disappointing others in their expectations of him.



This is the story of a young girl of 14 years who has incredible courage. While attending the Life Skills sessions track, she felt self-confident enough to share her story. Indeed, Hiba is a special participant, having a story written in her face: severe burns cover her entire face and hands (the only parts visible as she was wearing the hijab).

Life Skills sessions passed week after week, until the day that participants watched a short movie on two vulnerable girls who succeeded in becoming resilient.

Hiba confessed her story:

While sitting with two of her cousins in a room, a fire surrounded them suddenly, caused by a gas leak. There was only one way to exit the room; the girls had to pass through the fire in order to reach the door. While Hiba and one of her older cousins succeeded in reaching the door, the third and youngest cousin remained trapped inside, too scared to go out through the fire.

When Hiba realised that her youngest cousin remained inside, she went back into the fire to rescue her. She succeeded in protecting her from the fire with her own skin. Once she was out again, Hiba used water from the street to put herself out. She was then transferred to the nearest hospital with severe burns that can never be hidden.

After telling her story, Hiba expressed, in front of the other participants, the difficult time she went through after this incident. She confessed that she did not know if she was strong enough to get through it, but that now she is happy and content with her destiny.

After Hiba finished telling her story, with plenty of courage and love, all participants showed how much faith her story had given them. Some participants mentioned her during the “Decision-Making” session as their idol and hero. Her story created an atmosphere of empathy, resilience and faith during this track. Everybody was impressed by the self-awareness and self-esteem of this young girl.

THE ANIMALS



TARGET: from 5 years and up.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- ➔ Recognise some personal characteristics
- ➔ Develop autonarrative ability



ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The operator asks the participants to think about an animal they can see themselves in, draw it on a sheet, and write its qualities and skills.

Then, in a plenary session, every participant shows his design and explains it to others.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

This game plays on the symbolic representative plan that helps us talk about ourselves through a mediating object, i.e. the animal drawing, without feeling too exposed.

MY QUALITIES

 TARGET: from 8 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Think about our qualities
- Bolster our self-esteem

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The operator asks participants to draw on a card with an artful frame, qualities they think they have, giving 30 minutes of time.

Everyone is then invited to show his work to others.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

Drawing freely promotes the expression of the participants' creativity.

13.4.9 Empathy⁵

CHARADES

 TARGET: from 5 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- facilitate comprehension of the other, by reading nonverbal cues
- become aware of our expression style and our non-verbal expressions
- improve our non-verbal expression and creation ability

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The participants are divided into two teams, and each one must choose a spokesperson who will communicate the team's answers. Once the team that should start first is decided, the team chooses what to mime (everybody should take part in miming), which must be guessed by the opposing team. They can choose between a maximum amount of time, or a maximum number of attempts. The spokesperson has to tell the other team the theme to be mimed before the miming begins (movie, song...).

The team that guesses the most number of mimes wins.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It may be helpful to choose themes that the group is working on.

⁵ For further information see chapter 6 and 10 of this manual.

IDENTIFICATION STORY

 TARGET: from 15 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- Let the participants be in other people's shoes.

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

The operator reads a fabricated story that relates to a complex and emotionally significant situation for that group.

They lay on the floor during the reading of the scenes of that story. Participants are invited to listen carefully, and at the end, to explain the phrase that affected them the most, explaining the reason why. They can also say something about the characters in the story: "I felt this way, too...", "I would like to tell you that...", "I would recommend...", "It also happened to me..."

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It is very important that the story is well-suited to the participants.

A variation of this game is that people are invited to intervene while reading the story; this requires a great capacity for tuning in and listening by both the operator and the participants, in order to understand when to intervene, how, and when to stop reading and start answering. It is an emotional and very addictive stimulation, and also helps in reflecting on experiences with emotional entanglements.

13.4.10 Coping with emotions

Theory

When it comes to emotions, it is difficult to provide a clear definition, as even experts struggle to define the exact outline, because emotion is so tied to feelings that become too complex to explain with reasons or with words.

Furthermore, emotion involves different dimensions and levels: body, face, feelings, behaviour. What is clear, is that emotions are intense sentimental reactions that result in short-term changes on a somatic, vegetative and psychological level. They are activated in response to an event or a stimulus, and aim to reorganise later actions, guiding thoughts, choices and behaviours.

Emotions have **several functions**:

- Show how we are: our reaction in response to what is going on;
- Motivate and guide: for instance, we will do everything to find what could result in happiness or we will do anything to avoid something feared;
- Give meaning to an event, etching it into our memory as positive or negative;
- Communicate something about ourselves, like how we are, what we like or what makes us sad;
- Provide depth to relationships.

The emotional world of people is extremely rich and diverse, so that the same stimulus produces different emotions and different intensity, depending on the person.

Ekman (1994) distinguished six **fundamental emotions** that would be recognisable in every

culture: happiness, fear, anger, sadness, surprise and disgust, which can be combined to become different emotional phenomena.

They are often distinguished as **positive or negative** emotions: this may be true when referring to the struggle when experiencing emotions such as anger or an intense sadness; however, it is not true from a functional point of view. Consider, for instance, how fear can motivate us to protect ourselves, survive, avoid dangerous situations and respect our limits.

What is complicated, when talking about emotions, is the **ability to manage and regulate them**, while clearly distinguishing doing so from the act of inhibiting and controlling them. The ability to have emotional self-regulation is a complex skill, whose development begins in early interactions with caregivers who must be able to project a calm and regulated emotional state to their kids, as well as calming and assuring them⁶.

According to Goleman (1995), "emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise our own emotions and those of others, have good motivation, and manage our emotions in a positive way both inwardly and in social relations". This ability needs self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

For nearly 15 years, in the United States of America, the training of "emotional literacy" (Gordon, 1995) has been developed according to this theory, with the aim to help children and adolescents to:

- identify and correctly name emotions;
- evaluate their intensity;
- express them in an appropriate manner;
- increase stress resistance;
- recognise the difference between emotions and actions.

The following includes some useful practical suggestions for operators who aim to help people in emotional management and regulation:

- *Do not be afraid of emotions*: they are not a disease, but a component of the human being, and learning to manage them is part of the natural path to growth.
- *Ask ourselves valid questions*: "Why did that person behave that way?", "which need motivates this emotion?"
- *Name the emotion felt, and tell the person what is happening within him*: "I understand you are angry because you could not..."
- *Help manage the emotion intensity*
- *Be role models*: the operators feel many emotions too, both in the helping relationship, and in personal ones, and the other person can feel that.

⁶For further information see: Tronick, E., Als, H., Adamson, L., Wise, S., & Brazelton, T. B. (1978). Infants' response to entrapment between contradictory messages in face-to-face interaction. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 17, 1-13; Sroufe, L. A. (1989). Relationship, Self, and Individual adaptation. In A. J. Sameroff & R. N. Emde (Eds.), *Relationship disturbances in early childhood: A developmental approach* (pp. 70-94). New York: Basic Books.

EMOTIONS' MEMORY

 TARGET: from 5 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- Talk about emotions and learn how to express them.

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Some pairs of cards, depicting different emotions, are turned over on a table. The group is divided into two teams, and each team must turn over two cards, and when they find a matching pair, they have to relate a situation where they lived that emotion. The game continues until all the pairs are matched, and the team with the most pairs, wins.



 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It is very important to remember, while preparing the deck of cards, to look for images that may be easy to understand and recognise.

We also need a welcoming and attentive environment, as people need to express their personal experiences.

DRAW AN EMOTION

 TARGET: from 5 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- develop the ability to talk about emotions.

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

They can do the activity on their own or in groups. The operator provides the creative materials which people can have free access to (boards, magazines, glue, tempera, markers, clay...), and asks them to represent three chosen emotions.

Then, everyone presents his work in a plenary session, and the operator asks the following questions:

Which emotions did you choose?

Why did you choose these in particular?

What did you learn from this activity?

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

If the group is very close, we can ask the person if he remembers a situation in which he experienced one of the represented emotions; this helps in connecting with the emotion's instigating events.

13.4.11 Coping with stress⁷

STRESS PUZZLE

 TARGET: from 12 years and up.

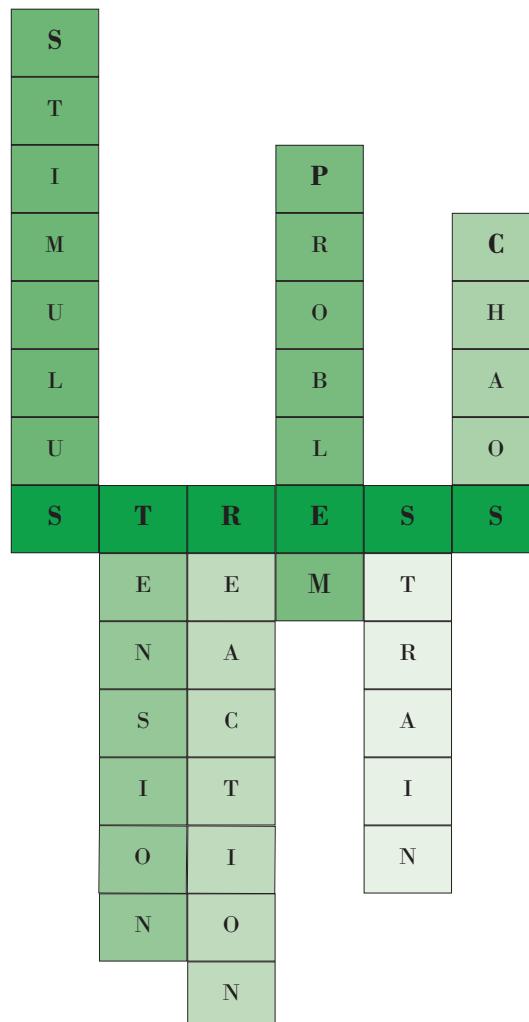
 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- Think about different meanings of stress.

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Each participant receives a sheet with the word STRESS in the middle of it. The person, using each letter of the word “stress”, will have to find six words related to it. The letters may be in various parts of the words found.

The operator writes all the words found on a board, and then starts the discussion.



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

In the discussion, the operator can highlight common words.

⁷ For a further look see chapters 2 and 3 of this manual.

STRESSOMETER

 TARGET: from 15 years and up.

 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

- Become aware of which personal environments are sources of stress, and to what level.

 ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

Each person receives a card, in which the columns represent a life context. They have to fill the column by coloring it, identifying the level of stress that that area causes them.

Everybody shows theirs cards.

PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP									BROTHERS AND SISTERS
	FAMILY	HEALTH		PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	SCHOOL	WORK	SPARE TIME		

 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OPERATOR

It is necessary to carry out this activity in a welcoming and attentive environment, because it involves very personal issues.



Before you proceed in the reading, take a moment to reflect on your personal knowledge concerning the subject and try to complete exercise # 24 in the work-book.

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Chapter 14

THE GAME



220 PAGE BLANCHE

Leisure and recreational activities are very important tools in psychosocial activities, for they allow the operator to enter more easily into the child's world. Through the act of playing and expressive activities, the child cannot only express himself, but also grow and develop his resilience. In the case of children, the motivation to play is linked with the pleasure of discovering and achieving. It is a way for the child to experience himself (SB), others and the world around him. To play, the child must have two basic mental skills: exploration and symbolic skills. Through the act of (SB) playing, these very skills are further developed.

In addition, the observation of the games allows the operator to evaluate the development of the child and recognise any signs of illness. But, first and foremost, the game is a right.



Generally, AVSI operators work with families who live in a very difficult financial situation. Buying toys for their children can be an unaffordable luxury.

But the desire to play prevails. AVSI's operators highlighted a meeting with children outside the house playing with handmade toys, or even playing imaginary games. During activities, this passion for playing is visible on the children's faces.

A touching feedback received from a woman after the distribution of gifts and food in the ITS of Marj El Khokh, Sarada and Wazzani was: "We won't starve, but offering toys was very important for our kids. It makes them happy and makes us see the smile on their faces".

When performing the same toy distribution, AVSI operators even noticed some women crying because they weren't able to buy toys for their children as they used to do in Syria.

14.1 The right to play

ONU Convention on the Rights of the Child, approved by the UN General Assembly on November 20th, 1989 recognizes games as a right.

As we know, the Convention consists of 54 articles, of which the first 41 are dedicated to (SB) different children's rights. These rights are not in order of importance, but interact with each other to form an integrated set of rights with three main themes:

- Right of survival, including the right to life, referring to the basic needs of life, such as nutrition, shelter, adequate living standards and access to medical care.
- Right of protection, which protects the child from all forms of abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including special care for refugee children; protection in justice systems; the protection of children at work; the protection and rehabilitation of children who have suffered exploitation or abuse of any kind.
- Right of participation, which refers to the freedom of children to express their opinions, to rule their own lives, to join associations and gather peacefully. When their skills develop, children should have the opportunity to participate in the activities of the community, to be prepared for adulthood.

In this scenario, Article 31 mentions the right to play.

1. *States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in the cultural life and arts.*

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in the cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 31)

In this article, we find that AVSI, that proposed “Do you want to play with me? Didactic games for children’s wellbeing” (Castelli et al. 2010), defines the game as “an experience of life that forms part of an individual’s education. Playing generates enthusiasm and offers a marvelous occasion to donate the best of oneself, simply for pleasure”.



In the ITSs in the south, AVSI operators identify some games that Syrian children appreciate a lot, such as:

- Playing with balls and marbles for boys;
- Playing with skip ropes and dolls for girls.

Usually, these children like to ride bicycles very much; in one camp, one or two bicycles can be found, but all the children search for them to borrow them.

Also in the ITS, we can see children pushing each other while riding wheelbarrows.

When AVSI operators arrive, children ask them to play these games with them. They prefer them to any other activity.

14.2 Playing as a tool for child development

Many authors studied the importance of playing for children as Freud, Piaget, Vygotskji, Bruner, Winnicott, Tamis Le Monda... just to name a few. Focusing on the role of playing as a useful tool for the child’s growth, it is possible to recognise two main functions: the first one is related to learning and development, and the second one to the expression and processing of emotions.

14.2.1 Learning and development

Through playing, the cognitive, affective, social, emotional, linguistic, motor and perceptual development of a child is supported.

a. *Cognitive development play helps the development of:*

- memory
- attention
- concentration
- ability to solve small problems
- exploring possibilities and taking risks
- ability to compare objects
- the use of objects
- becoming familiar with physical distances, the motor patterns (over/under) and the organization of time (before and after, duration...)



One of the games that all children of all ages attending AVSI’s activities like the most in Marjeyoun, is the memory cards set. This game is present in the ECD kit distributed by UNICEF. This kit is a package containing early-learning, games, and psychosocial materials that address the developmental progress of children from birth to age six.

b. Affective development

- independence
- development of skills, limits and resources
- development of creativity
- learning to choose
- development of self-esteem



The development of creativity was one of the concerns. As an example, in Nabatieh, Syrian children were lacking in this skill: when they had all types of materials available to draw freely, many had some difficulties doing so. They were not used to imagining things, even related to their life; some were waiting for the operator's ideas or they were looking at their friends, searching for ideas.

c. Social development

- learning to handle conflicts
- learning to lose
- building collaboration within a group
- building relationships
- learning rules
- building friendships
- learning typical patterns of behavior of our social context
- learning social roles
- putting ourselves in the other's shoes



AVSI operators noted that many Syrian children in Marjeyoun ITS had problems in handling conflict. Usually, children were unable to handle conflict without resorting to aggression and violence. Dialogue and communication were severely lacking among them.

In Nabatieh, AVSI operators also worked on teaching the children how to accept defeat. While in the beginning, losing in a game was a real issue for the participants, after many sessions, the children had assimilated the fact that losing and winning are part of normal life.

Social development through play is divided into three steps:

1. Solitary games, typical of children in their early months of life: there is no social interaction;
2. Parallel games, which appear between the first and third years of life. At this stage, you start to notice mutual help, even if it appears in individual play activities;
3. Social games, usually manifest around 4-5 years of life, at the beginning of school activities, which increase the opportunities for interaction with peers.

d. Emotional development

Through playing games, the child can get more in touch with his emotions and learn to manage them. In this case, the game has three functions:

- Liberating function: the child can work off his anxieties, tensions, fears, insecurities and aggression, achieving relaxation and a greater mastery of the environment;
- Function for controlling internal emotions: he can actively transform what he feels, not passively live his emotions, and at the same time, learn to channel internal stress through his body, and learn to control his movements, fine-tuning them;
- Function for controlling frustration and surprise.

e. *Language development*

- Vocabulary skills
- Phonetic skills
- Narrative skills
- Literature skills
- Learning the language of the native culture
- Learning idioms and literal forms



AVSI operators experienced the enhancement of children's narrative skills through storytelling, accompanied by puppet play. This activity was really appreciated by the children.

f. *Motor development*

- Improvement of the range of motion
- Agility
- Coordination
- Balance
- Flexibility
- Strength



For motor development, AVSI operators highlighted the high motivation of children in motor games, which allows them to be physically active.

g. *Perceptual development*

- Physical property of objects
- Visual information
- Auditory information
- Olfactory information
- Tactile information
- Information related to taste
- Shapes
- Colors
- Perspective



The lack of knowledge about colors and shapes was identified in young children from the age of 3 to 6.

The shape-sorter included in the ECD kit was a great help for AVSI operators, in order to help children acquire these skills.

14.2.2 Emotional expression or “let off emotions”

Children, especially early in life, have not yet fully developed the ability to transform their emotional experiences into words and abstract thoughts. The game allows them to unconsciously express emotions in an indirect way. Sometimes, the effort to express emotions is not only related to the fact that the child is still in development; extremely powerful emotions as a result of painful or traumatic events, can also find a channel for expression in the game. Not only does the dimension of pleasure in the game lighten up these powerful emotions, but the use of an intermediate tool, since it is not a re-enactment or a direct account, allows the children to create an emotional distance from the painful memory (for example, playact an escape and chase each other is a game that can open up those who had to flee). Psychosocial operators who work with children who have lived or are living difficult or painful events, use the right to play to help children express and rework the emotions involved in such events.



One activity held by AVSI operators on this issue was ‘My book against anger’ which allows children to learn different appropriate behaviours and control their aggressiveness.

After distributing a booklet of 5 pages to each child, the activity consisted on asking children to write:

- On the first paper, actions carried out when they feel mad.
- On the next three papers, all things that can make them mad.
- On the last paper, comments from another participant about the positive qualities of other participants.

This activity helped children in:

- Identifying present and past sources of anger
- Being conscious of their bad response to annoying events, such as breaking things, sleeping till morning, beating younger children, etc.
- Being able to identify, with the AVSI operator’s help, some healthy ways to face their anger.

In this manual, we have repeatedly talked about the importance of being able to express emotions, so that they do not remain an untapped wealth, limiting the potential for development. Since the game is a fundamental dimension in the expressive life of the child, it is a privileged channel that helps the child communicate his own emotional world. We also have to consider that the children, especially the smaller ones, do not have adequate language skills to express exactly what they are living, or the cognitive components that enable them to recognise their emotions and be aware of them. Through objects and toys, but also with the children themselves as interpreters, the child can playact emotionally powerful events; the fact that they are not real, but are represented in a game, not current but displaced in time, and the fact that the child is putting them on stage and is controlling them, makes the related emotions more easy to cope with (for example, when they playact the arrival of a sibling, or the teacher who gives the notes).

Children usually involve the adult (or other children) in topics they consider manageable, through the formula of "let's pretend to...". The operator can propose this formula, but it is necessary that he has special training and is aware that he is venturing into an area that could be painful for the child, as it may evoke a trauma. The risk is causing the child to be frightened, and with a wealth of pain that he is not yet able to manage, and that he has to deal with alone once the operator has left. The operator must also be able to accept the emotions expressed by the child, reassure him and help him process them.

14.3 Playing as an evaluation tool

When observing the child while playing, you can draw an outline of the development of some of his certain mental abilities, functions, social models, social skills and his affective emotional development. The observation is important especially because it allows the operator to get to know the child better, finding out what he likes, his interests, and discovering many aspects of his life. The operator, who must specifically design a game for a particular child, as well as for a specific group of children, may dedicate time observing a free or structured game, using many techniques (check lists, notes, and report forms built ad-hoc by the operator according to his specific objectives) in order to detect needs, resources and interests.

Several elements can be observed; for example: the activities played more frequently (this gives information on the level of cognitive development); if symbolic activities are implemented; the duration of the games and how the child is able to keep his focus on the activity. In addition, it may be important to observe the relational aspect, both among peers (i.e. noting whom he plays with, what role he has in the play group) and with the adult, if the child turns to look at the adult to seek approval; if there are conflicts, how the child solves them; if he tends to isolate himself; if he follows the rules of the game or creates new ones; if he is able to tolerate frustration. Finally, through the observation of the game, you can capture other aspects, which may be important from the point of view of resilience, such as: creativity and imagination, curiosity, respect of rules, cooperation skills and conflict resolution.

Hence, multiple elements may be subjects of the observation. We can refer to all the aspects described above in relation to the areas of development through playing. It therefore seems simplistic to propose observation grids here, because by using them, we can incur the risk of: forgetting to adapt them according to the specific targets and objectives of the observation, the age of the child (or the group of children), the context in which we are working (structured or not, with games or without, free play indoors or outdoors, recreational activities at school or specific proposals), the time available for observation and how many operators are dedicated to this task.

We believe that this kind of observation is a basic tool for those working with children, but we are equally convinced that the working tools must be carefully built by each work team.



AVSI operators used to observe all Syrian children participating in activities. Many times, they reported some children to the case managers and to the psychologists because they had identified some indicators of risk factors.

AVSI psychologists and case managers both use the game as an evaluation tool.

14.4 Playing adequacy

14.4.1 Playing according to the different stages of development

a. Up to one year old: functional play - The game is just for pleasure

Playing consists primarily of sensory-motor handling, and is mainly when children discover their bodies and the objects around them. It is perceptive-exploratory play; often, children of this age tend to put every object in their mouth because they have to "explore" the objects.

The child begins to play again even before toys are given to him. The child EXPLORES, first his body, for example by tapping his foot, and repeating this several times because it causes him pleasure to produce a certain result and producing it again, while already in the crib, at three to four months.

At 6 months, the child discovers the effects of his actions on the world outside of himself as well (brings objects to his mouth and eyes, beats them and feels them, discovering how they are made and what he can do with them).

At the beginning, the game is simple and only repeats gestures, then starts to combine them without purpose, like building a tower and then destroying it without connecting the two actions, before this aspect starts to get introduced.

Repeating the activity becomes a game, and at the same time, the child learns: he acquires skills on material, forms, physical properties of the objects and develops motor skills. This is very important throughout the first year of life, and the kids introduce continuous variations to the game.

b. Between 1 year to 6 years old: symbolic play or performance play – He begins to pretend

At this stage of life, the child begins to be able to relate abstract concepts to concrete objects (symbols). In symbolic play, the child imitates the activities of adults, or pretends to be a character, thus stimulating his ability of mental representation. From the third year of life, the symbolic game becomes increasingly complex and is engaged for longer durations. Both Piaget (1962) as Vygotskji (1978) recognised symbolic play as an important stage in the child's cognitive development.

At one year and a half, representative plays manifests, which is a prelude to symbolic play and the ability to symbolise: objects can become others; for example, with a circle, he makes a bracelet. This stimulates fantasy, imagination, representation and therefore, creativity.

At the age of 2 years old symbolic play appears; it helps in mastering their life problems in order to better deal with reality (e.g. the birth of a little brother and playing with dolls, a hospital visit and the game of pretend doctors, the villain against the hero, characters such as knights and pirates, or those advertised by the media such as Superman and Spiderman, playacting a war), but also to understand the world (e.g. I go to work like dad...play the part of mom) and experience many activities related to the future, having some ideas more clear for his own future as well.

In cases such as emergency situations and war, symbolic play where children playact possible adult roles, such as parenting or working, assumes a very important role, as it allows them to imagine the future and revive hope: as explained in the trauma chapter, this becomes very difficult for those who lost their past and have an uncertain present, and therefore doing this through play is essential.

Finally, through games, the child builds a bridge between the world of fantasy and reality, adapting the first and enriching the second.

c. Over 6 years old: games with rules - The game prepares for life with others

At 6-7 years old, the child starts playing games with rules, and more social ones, which imply more people that are antagonists (hide and seek, cards, goose...). Rules do not vary and the children do not grasp the nuances, and only later on will they understand that the game's rules are the result of an agreement between actors, and if there is a common agreement, it can be changed.

This type of game prepares children for a social life made of rules and roles, and also helps them to be tolerant towards others.

The lesson that even if you lose, the world does not end is very important; losing is not a proof of inferiority. The ability to face defeat depends on how much self-confidence the child feels in that moment, and if he feels that he can balance the setback with other skills. For example, if you find that some children in the group are struggling to recognise their qualities and resources, then they need to improve their self-esteem; in games involving the removal of a player as a result of an error on his part, make sure that the children tell the discarded child a positive quality of his.

Sometimes they do not want to lose, so they cheat, because they have not adequately mastered the game, and are not yet able to distinguish defeat in the game from defeat in real life, e.g. being hit by the ball is a true act of aggression against them. At other times, they get angry at a game if they are losing, and it is important to help them to regain their emotional control.

14.4.2 Playing based on the specific needs of the child

Planning fun activities **by age** is certainly a good criterion to be adopted, which can meet the operator's need to manage large groups of children.

For example, if we are working with a group made up of children who are 4 or 5 years old, we must propose short games (limited attention spans), characterised by a small number of rules and with a strong component of physical activity.

However, it is important to recognise that, if the game is not just a time killer, but a proper psychosocial activity, it must meet some requirements, including the operator's specific intention: the answer to a **specific need** that has been identified.

In fact, we know that a characteristic of a PSS activity is the presence of a **specific intention**; in other words, there is a clear aim responding to a specific need of every child or group of children.

For example, in the case of overly agitated children, the specific need is to express emotions in a structured way (to express and to be lovely limited), so proposing activities that exacerbates his state of mental agitation is not the best option, although using the criterion of distinction for more evolved ages may appear to be so.

Another important criterion is **scheduling**, referring to a specific project and the different timings of session's activities.

For example, to start the activity session, we must use very simple and short games which are able to stimulate and promote a good mood and familiarity between the participants.

14.4 Operator's role

Even in fun activities, the interaction with adults (parents and professionals) promotes the child's development. Playing with someone with more expertise helps increase the performance level in the game because the less experienced participant, i.e. the child, feels bolstered in his exploration and has a role model to refer to. The difference between what the child would do spontaneously, and what he would do when playing with an adult, is defined by Vygotskji (1978) as a zone of proximal development.

This supporting role taken by the adult can also be defined by the metaphor of scaffolding (Bruner, 1983): the operator can offer support for cognitive, emotional, and motor development, until the child has acquired those skills that allow him to be independent.

During game activities, the operator can support the child's overall development and his resources in different ways:

- Carrying out the scaffolding function.
- Becoming a director: organizing the space and timing of the game, clearly explaining the rules and ensuring that every child understood them;
- Offering himself as an example in a learning situation
- Giving real objects to be discovered and some toys, not so many at once, different from each other, and that can also be changed.
- By accepting the possibility that the child may break the toys by trying their consistency in his "exploration" of the objects.
- Helping to discover other qualities that had not been observed.
- Experiencing pleasure when he makes discoveries or even participates in the game; this way, he feels gratified, considering himself the source of the adult's pleasure, and he is then encouraged to repeat the game.
- Trying to teach him a technique, after allowing him to explore.
- Helping his imagination and representation.
- Respecting his game and giving him an area of freedom: i.e. a free space to play in, freedom to act, not just with the body but also with the mind, where he can experience things and ideas.
- If the operator is able, he can take part in a "voluntary regression" (going back to childhood). An adult who has this capability is psychologically richer. Actually, all parents, even though they recognise the importance of the game, can participate in and enjoy such activities, or they will when the game becomes more mature, with more rigid rules and patterns; but for the child, reciprocity and ability to tune into the gaming experience are important.



When AVSI operator plans a game that requires some materials, he/she should ensure that these materials are prepared in advance and in a proper manner.



When AVSI operator plans any type of game, he/she should be aware of the issue of gender norms and not propose any instruction defying any of these norms.



One of AVSI operators reported how many children liked him; he explained that because of his ability to perform a voluntary regression when playing with them, "the children were really amazed by how much I enjoyed the game", he said.

The game is, therefore, not only an activity to pass the time, but must be a conscious action, planned according to the child's needs, both in relation to his development phase and his specific needs.

While interacting with the child, the operator must place himself at the same level, even physically, crouching to speak with him at eye-level.

14.5 Playing to develop resilience

During the training led in 2014 by Resilience Onlus within the AVSI Lebanon project, funded by UNICEF, "Emergency response for vulnerable children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the Syrian crisis in South Lebanon", operators defined the game as an extremely important tool for developing resilience, particularly in the case of vulnerable children. Figure 14.1 summarizes the words used to describe how the game can be useful in promoting the wellbeing of the child and his resilience.

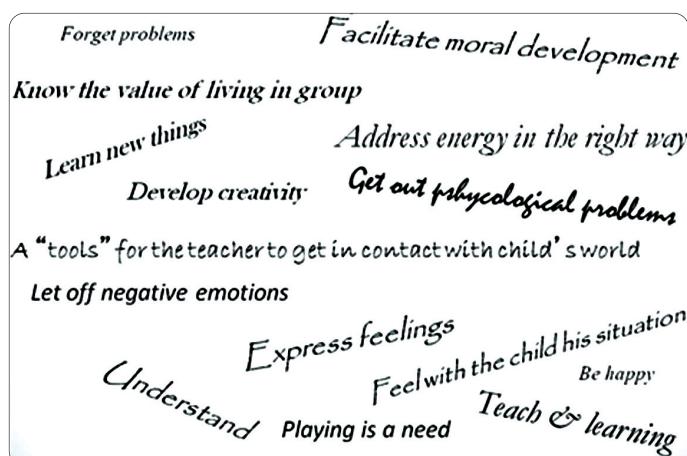


Figure 14.1 Operators' words about playing contribution to the promotion of resilience

Know the value of living in a group, unveil psychological problems, a "tool" for operators to get in touch with the child's world, express negative emotions, feel with the child as if in his situation, teaching and learning.

The importance of playing, recognised by AVSI operators, clearly refers to at least three aspects of the game that can support the development of resilience.

1. Playing provides the child with opportunities and tools to solve conflicts and learn to overcome difficulties (psycho-educational approach); it helps him develop different skills, like dexterity, and also allows him to find out what he likes to do, for example through a symbolic game "I CAN".
2. Playing allows the child to express emotions and feelings in a creative way that can be hard to put into words (and thus allows us to know and discover the deepest needs of the child, his emotional resources, etc.). Furthermore, through playing, the child can release his tension and frustrations (playful-expressive approach), and when he feels that he is good at a game because "he does it well," his self-esteem improves. This particularly affects the "I AM".
3. In a game with a peer group, and through interaction with operators, the child can establish positive relationships in which a positive image of himself is reflected back at him "I AM" and can therefore expands his relationships "I HAVE".

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