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EMOTIONAL RESPONSES & BURN OUT AMONGST HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKERS DURING EARTHQUAKE RELIEF WORK IN PAKISTAN

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Background: South Asian earthquake of 8th October 2005 caused massive destruction of healthcare infrastructure in Pakistan. National and international health workers met the increased demand of health care provision. Initial consultation and discussion with professionals working in disaster-affected areas indicated a high level of physical exhaustion and emotional burn out amongst relief workers.

Method: A qualitative consultation study based on semi-structured interviews was conducted during 2005- 2006. The objectives of the study were to identify peoples' motivation and emotional reactions whilst providing services in disaster-affected areas. 30 professionals were consulted in total. All subjects had participated in health provision efforts in disaster-affected areas. Interviews were conducted in Karachi, Islamabad and Rawalpindi. A written record of interviews was kept to allow analysis.

Analysis: The purposive sampling and ongoing thematic analysis of interview data enabled identification and further exploration of qualitative themes.

Results: The emergent qualitative themes are presented in three sections:

1. Sources of Motivation: Shared Experience, Doing Good, Fear and Gratitude, Positive Emotional Experiences.
2. Sources of Distress: Feelings of Guilt and Impotence, Anger and Distrust, Physical Hardship, Poor Law and Order Situation, Conflict with Local Communities, Interpersonal and Inter-agency Conflict.
3. Coping with Emotions: Work Strategies, Escape Activities, Religious Activities, Emotional Avoidance.

Conclusion: Emotional experiences and motivating factors may play an important role in preventing or causing early 'burn out' in relief workers. This study highlights the importance of examining these factors in organization and conduct of disaster relief work.