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Empowering Frontline Trauma Responders: Keys to Resilience

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LifeNet



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CISM Social Movement: Read This for News About the ICISF

By: Rick Barton, Chief Executive Officer, ICISF

When you read the last installment of this column, you learned that the ICISF is bursting at the seams, nearly overwhelmed with activity. That remains the reality of our days, requiring us to make strategic decisions about where to place our greatest attention. We recognize that interest in CISM grows daily, as evidenced in social media and website activity. The key is to identify what that means and what should occur in the future to support that interest.

The appeal of helping people who suffer from exposure to critical incidents, the notion of creating programs to respond, treat and address such issues goes beyond merely wanting to help. If you have seen the effects of such incidents, if you know people who suffer, if you have experienced that trauma, then you get the point. This mission gets under your skin, into your blood, and captures your heart. Where the heart goes, the person will follow.

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ICISF – A True Family

By: Tim Brown, Chaplain, First Responder, ICISF Member & Approved Instructor

Five days ago members from the Southeast Georgia Crisis Response Team left Quezon City Metro Manila, Philippines after training 119 First Responders from the Philippine National Police, Bureau of Fire Protection, EMS, Public School Teachers and Pastors in CISM, BLS (Basic Life Saving), CPR, StopBleed and improvised triage. We trained at the police headquarters in Rodriguez, Rizal and at Celebration Baptist Church in Quezon City.

This adventure began a year ago when a pastor, Gleen Lapates, was visiting the United States looking for churches to help partner with his ministry to the less fortunate children who live on “Garbage Mountain” living off the waste of Manila. Pastor Lapates feeds and clothes these children that the world has forgotten. As he visited me at my church we began to talk about his need and I shared the service our church provides for first responders in our community.



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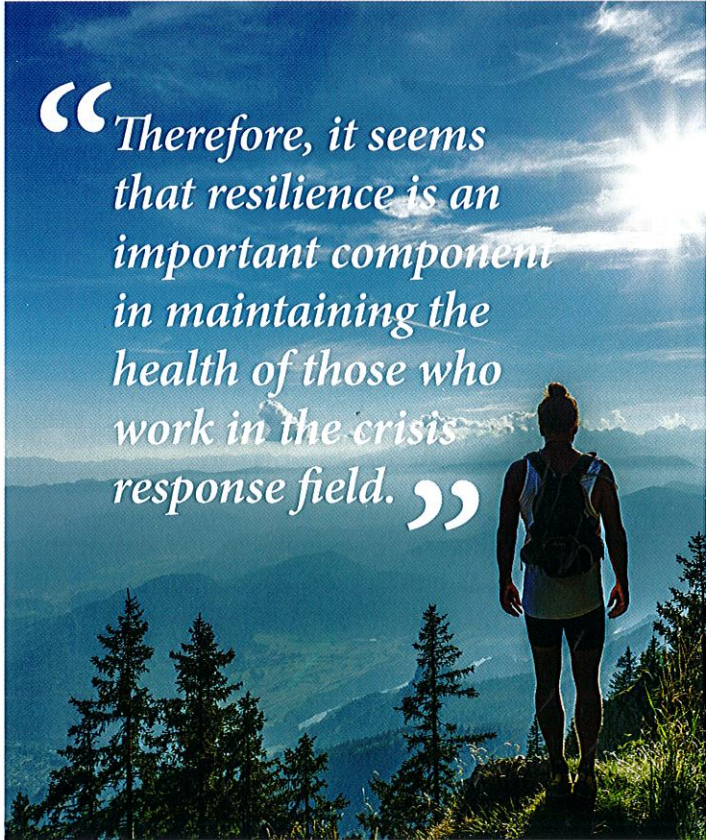
Empowering Frontline Trauma Responders: Keys to Resilience

By: *Rachelle E. Pichot, Harvey J. Burnett, Jr., and Karl G. Bailey, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI*

The majority of people experience some form of trauma or suffer a significant loss in their lives. Frontline trauma responders such as, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) responders and other disaster mental health (DMH) providers, critical care medical professionals, and emergency first responders, find themselves in these situations more often than most. However, it appears that their level of resilience may impact how long they are able to continue crisis intervention deployments, in addition to maintaining the ability to function without experiencing compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress or burnout. In fact, a study by Burnett and Wahl (2015), which was replicated in a later study (Burnett, 2017), found that resilience tends to act like a “buffer” between the detrimental effects of compassion fatigue and burnout in a sample of disaster mental health providers. In other words, CISM and other DMH responders who tend to report lower amounts of compassion fatigue report higher levels of resilience and in turn, resilient responders exhibit lower amounts of burnout. Therefore, it seems that resilience is an important component in maintaining the health of those who work in the crisis response field.

Along these lines, Dr. George Everly, Jr. wrote a practical field guide book that provides direction on building one’s resilience. In this book, Everly (2017) set out a theoretical framework to enhance one’s “immunity” to adverse experiences known as “Psychological Body Armor” (PBA). PBA is considered a distinct aspect of resilience (an individual’s “ability to rebound from stress and adversity”) and is made up of two important pathways: reactive resilience and proactive resilience. Proactive resilience involves being immune or resistant to adverse experiences while reactive resilience has to do with one’s ability to bounce back from hardship. According to Everly (2017), resilient people practice being actively optimistic, decisive, resolute, regularly consult their moral compass, and enjoy interpersonal support. Furthermore, planning for future adversity, believing in yourself, doing your best, believing that you will rebound, seeking formal intervention services if the need arises, and keeping up with your physical health helps to build both proactive and reactive resilience pathways. Additionally, other studies have also noted that the use of laughter, positive emotion, and reaching out to one’s emotional support group are indicators of healthy resilience (Bonanno et al., 2003; Bonanno & Keltner, 1997; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998).

Therefore, in light of Everly’s book and other resilience studies we set out to explore potential elements that may comprise the proactive and reactive resilience pathways



“Therefore, it seems that resilience is an important component in maintaining the health of those who work in the crisis response field.”

in relation to one’s overall resilience. Mechanisms of the proactive pathway included self-acceptance, life purpose, happiness and spirituality, while the reactive pathway consisted of relationships with others, psychological distress, stress, sleep, fitness and nutrition. The hope of our study was to provide CISM teams and responders with key evidence-based practices that they can use to help enhance their PBA throughout the course of their crisis intervention deployments.

The main study collected data from 202 American participants through Amazon’s online survey tool known as Mechanical Turk (MTurk). However, this article is based on an aspect of the main study which examined age (Pichot et al., 2018). Using a specific statistical analysis commonly referred to as a “hierarchical regression,” we examined how one’s age may play a protective role in their overall resilience level, as well as their proactive and reactive resilience pathways. The results revealed that age was not significantly protective of one’s overall resilience, nor did it contribute to either resilience pathway. However, what the study did find of interest were several specific well-being factors from both pathways that contributed in a significant way to forecasting one’s overall immunity to adverse experiences.

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FACTORS IMPACTING THE PROACTIVE RESILIENCE PATHWAY:

Self-Acceptance. This factor focuses on the way individuals feel about themselves (i.e., satisfaction or happiness), self-understanding, and awareness of weaknesses and strengths.

Happiness. This factor centers on the level of satisfaction and contentment individuals experience in their lives.

FACTORS IMPACTING THE REACTIVE RESILIENCE PATHWAY:

Relationships with Others. The social support systems someone has in place that they can depend on if adversity strikes comprises this factor.

Psychological Distress. This factor emphasizes an individual's emotional adjustment ability to unpleasant or negative feelings which can impair one's typical level of functioning.

Fitness. Exercising regularly (i.e., running, walking, cardiovascular exercise, weight training, etc.) several times a week to maintain a healthy lifestyle is the emphasis of this factor.

So what does this all mean for CISM teams and responders, as well as others who work in the field of disaster mental health response? First of all, your age may not play a significant role in enhancing your overall immunity to adversity; including protection from how you react to crises or your ability to bounce back from difficult life experiences.

As a frontline trauma responder, the hard days will still be hard, regardless of how old you are—that is what makes us human after all. More research is needed in this area; however, regardless of your age, you play a vital role in the success of your CISM team's mission. Also, CISM teams can continue to benefit by having a team composition that is diverse in age, thereby reflecting the population that they serve.

What is of importance is understanding that the robustness of your Psychological Body Armor (particularly certain well-being traits) can play a critical role in your resilience levels as you face adverse life events, especially as you continue to work as a CISM responder. Accepting your strengths and weaknesses, allowing yourself room to grow, being open to change, finding satisfaction in what you do professionally and personally, as well as purposely

CISM Quick Reference Cards

Effective January 1, 2018, all new/renewing members receive one package of CISM Quick Reference Cards as part of their membership.



adapting a more optimistic worldview, enjoying the simple things of life, and allowing opportunities for humor, are essential in building immunity to how you react to crisis. In light of this, CISM teams are strongly encouraged to consistently follow through with conducting a Post Action Staff Support (PASS) after each deployment. In addition, CISM team should incorporate a variety of activities in their training meetings that provide opportunities for members to increase growth-directed self-acceptance and encourage contentment-seeking behaviors.

In regards to fortifying your ability to rebound from adversity, it is highly recommended that you direct energy into building, nurturing and diversifying your social support network of family, friends, co-workers, and other important relationships. Numerous studies have supported the fact that the relationships we have with others can play a protective role against such harmful mood states like depression.

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As CISM responders, it is also important to practice what we preach when it comes to acknowledging our own crisis reactions through the work we do, including performing stress-reduction strategies that strengthen our emotional adjustment capacity to positively manage unpleasant feelings. Again, utilizing a PASS after each deployment is a good team practice for this and should be part of a team's operating policy.

Finally, participating in some form of physical exercise increases your ability to bounce back from adversity. Over the years there has amassed a plethora of research that touts the importance of engaging in regular physical fitness which has been found to improve mood, focus, self-esteem, sex drive, sleep and energy levels; control weight; strengthen one's immune system and bones; as well as reduce the risk of heart disease and injury. Based on the type of work that we do within the field of CISM, incorporating steady exercise into your lifestyle is key to enhancing your resilience.

In conclusion, CISM teams and responders play a vital role in helping those who have been affected by traumatic events to successfully manage their stress reactions. Unfortunately, the work that we do can come with a costly price if we are not proactive in enhancing our own overall immunity to adversity. Therefore, it is important that individual CISM responders, along with teams, take time to incorporate an active resilience-based approach which makes use of the well-being traits described above. Such practices more likely can strengthen you and your team's longevity and effectiveness as you continue to work in the critical incident response field.

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