

# Psycho-social strategy

## Current Situation

The experience after the first two weeks is that the majority of the affected individuals in Leh district seem to cope quite well with the consequences of the disaster and have started to re-organize their lives. Fortunately, most people have a support system that follows for a common sense way of adopting to the trauma; e.g. sharing emotional experiences with families and getting their moral support. In fact, talking about the event allows a person to “get a handle on it”. In most of the villages the population has started to organize themselves in groups and work together on cleaning and reconstructing the irrigation pipe lines. Moreover, people find their support in their religion, rituals and the visits to their religious leaders. Most of the affected people still have strong emotions such as fear, despair, sleeping disorders, lack of trust into their future, sometimes even feelings of panic during recent rains, strong wind and thunder / lightning. These reactions are typical symptoms after a natural calamity and going through extreme experiences. Especially after the first few days after the cloudburst, many affected people left the relief camps, tents or houses at night to be in safer places at the upper reaches.

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The torrential rains and floods could result in anxiety and even post traumatic stress disorders for those involved firsthand. These people are in need of extra psychological support, especially those who have lost family members. They might want to talk to counselors and/or doctors and treatment is available for them. The needy can benefit from a more western intervention combined with the traditional system

Establishment of tents and camps is an additional stress factor. The survivors in tents are with three families with almost no space and temperatures have started to drop. The people have fears of infections, coldness particular among women with their children and babies with poor sanitary conditions. The Government is working on this aspect and possibly re-shifting to new areas will take place

Possible intervention options of organizations should involve the skills and knowledge of the local actors such as Ministry of Health, traditional healers / medicine (Amchi) and religious leaders. Religious leaders seem to be an important actor for most of the people in Ladakh.

Strategies:

1. Interventions need to be adapted to the local culture. Support and stimulate the natural coping strategies vis –a- vis individual counseling sessions
2. Special attention should be paid by the organizations to include the most vulnerable and excluded people in the society. Special focus need to be on those patients who already suffered from psychiatric disorders prior to floods
3. Organizations should spell out clearly the kind of intention / intervention strategy such as :
  - Acute emergency phase
  - Short term
  - Long term
4. Local volunteers will be trained for the trauma counseling. With this clarity organizations can make their exit strategy plan and handover patients or activities or

supervision of volunteers, for the continuity of started activities. This needs to be coordinated by the Sphere sector working group

**Recommendation to the Government:**

The modern mental health service in Ladakh is ill equipped and understaffed. There is only one trained doctor in the District hospital. Before the disaster it seemed there was not a huge need for such psychiatric care. It has been observed that in the previous disasters that the 25% of the people develop more severe mental health problems or disorders after a 3 or even 6 month time period.

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The capacity of the mental health services can be enhanced with the inclusion of trained volunteers. A suggestion can be made to hire the presently trained volunteers. They can further undergo more extensive training at specialized clinics such as Nimhans in Bangalore

Seeking appropriate support for severe post traumatic disorders from Ministry of Health would definitely help

**Organizations working on Phsyco – Social Support are MSF, Emanuel Health Hospital and Art of Living**