

## **Shock and Awe**

**The impact of working with highly traumatized groups while conducting field work:  
Utter & Complete Disaster**

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There is little being done to help third parties who are doing work in violent setting with people impacted by personal, organized, or natural violence in debriefing them about what toxic information that they are finding and witnessing, hearing, sitting with survivors, victim of intentional violence, either from torture, or violent conflict. I am developing a process that can be used in pre and post debriefing work to assist in discovering ways of managing and dealing with the extreme work related emotional and feeling wounds of being a professional helper in the field of conflict whose place of employment is a battlefield of post violent conflict work. The violence is not happening in the moment but the impact is felt by all daily. That is one of the reasons post conflict peace building work is so elusive in constructing peace and safety.

Many times this front line work is reserved for those with limited background or experience in working face to face with tortured, traumatized humiliated, shamed and abused human beings. It is often the ones with the least background and experience in truly understanding what it is have lived with conflict one needs to relate to, victims, and clients in such situation; that are situations of complex humanitarian suffering, particularly human rights advocates, and humanitarian aid relief workers, physicians and healthcare workers, therapist, election monitoring, democratization workers along with peace building and violence prevention workers.

Many are doing the work without adequate understanding of the long term impact from being present; with such toxic, shamed and humiliated persons who do not have real power to change their situation, and neither does anyone else. This recognition of being a helper with a band aide is a moment many face in their careers. How to stay with the helping arts professions is

not an easy task in the face of barriers to systemic change in how the world works in respect to violent trauma caused by conflict.

The fact is those of us who could avoid setting of compounded trauma work would rather not be exposed to the front line work where helping hurts. The shock of being in settings or with people impacted by violence has tremendous impact on our psyche and persona. My work will be based on critical moments in managing vicarious visceral feelings what happens in ones body and ones mind. This insight, into our own human needs, of doing violence prevention and disaster response work needs attending. Many times for those who “do” the actual on the ground face to face “helping” can be full of painful memories and narratives of abuse and fear and feelings. Humiliation that feels like defeat in having seen no difference in the lived situation many times of lives of the people we are working for. I will outline insight and reflections on lessons learned and what a process of managing this phenomenon could be like.