

## How important are family and friends?



Research is showing us that one of the most important factors that help humanitarian workers stay healthy is what we call **“Social support”**.

**Social support** is your perception of the quality of your relationship networks. If you feel that your relationships are plentiful, helpful, and positive, you have high social support. **It's not so much about the quantity, but the quality of those relationships.**

- Several studies report that separation from family because of work is one of the most significant stressors humanitarian workers experience.<sup>1</sup>
- More than one study reports that high levels of social support “buffer” humanitarian workers against stress and posttraumatic distress.<sup>2</sup>
- When humanitarian workers with low social support were compared to those with medium to high levels of support, they found that the staff with low social support were:
  - 4 times more likely to experience traumatization;
  - 3 times more likely to experience some form of “unwellness”;
  - 2.5 times more likely to experience some form of acute anxiety; and
  - 2.5 times more likely to experience some form of physical illness<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eriksson, C.B., J. Bjorck, and A. Abernethy. 2003. Occupational stress, trauma and adjustment in expatriate humanitarian aid workers. In *Stress and trauma handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments*, ed. J. Fawcett, 68–100. Monrovia, CA: World Vision International

<sup>2</sup> Eriksson, C.B., H. Vande Kemp, R. Gorsuch, S. Hoke, and D.W. Foy. 2001. Trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms in international relief and development personnel. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 14:205–212.

<sup>3</sup> Fawcett, G. 2003. Assessing front-line staff for stress, trauma, and social support: Theory, practice, and implications. In *Stress and trauma handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments*, ed. J. Fawcett, 101–121. Monrovia, CA: World Vision International.