The effects of stress

Baseline, cumulative and **acute stress** are the most frequent form of stress encountered in field work. **Critical incident stress** is a response to less frequent, but more powerful life experiences.

The effects of stress on our physical and mental health, as well as our relationships at home and work should not be underestimated. Although stress is, to a large extent, inherent infield work, staff must ensure that it remains within reasonable limits, taking into account the prevailing circumstances.

It is important to realize that feelings of distress in yourself and others are legitimate and not signs of personal weakness or lack of professionalism. Take the responsibility for noticing the signs and symptoms showing that your coping mechanisms are overloaded and ensure that you get support, not only to deal with the signs and symptoms of stress that are emerging within you, but also to identify and tackle the cause of the stress.

The **most common signs of stress** include:

- Overtiredness
- Stomach discomfort: diarrhea, constipation
- Headaches and muscle aches: abdominal and back pains
- Sleeping disturbance
- Appetite and eating changes

Physical reactions

- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Guilt
- Mood swings
- Undue pessimism or optimism
- Irritability
- Crying spells
- Nightmares
- Apathy
- Depression

Emotional reactions

- Forgetfulness
- Poor concentration
- Poor job performance
- Loss of creativity and motivation
- Negative self-talk
- Paranoid thoughts

Mental/Cognitive reactions

- Feeling isolated
- Resentful or intolerant of others
- Loneliness
- Marriage problems
- Social withdrawal
- Anti-social behaviour

Interpersonal/Relational reactions

- Increased alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use
- Change sexual behaviour
- Increase in risky behaviour
- Hyperactivity
- Avoidance of situations
- Cynical attitudes

Behavioral reactions

- Feeling of emptiness
- Doubt in religious beliefs
- Loss of purpose of life
- Needing to prove self-worth
- Cynicism about life

Collapse of belief systems