International aid workers' experience of support – an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

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We go to them,

but only meet us.

Where did they go?

Acknowledgments

Abstract

This dissertation explores the experience of support by international aid workers deploying to, being in and returning from complex emergencies. Seven participants were interviewed using semi structured interviews focusing on the experience of support, and the material was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - IPA. Three superordinate themes were identified, the first highlighted the ease with which peer support (colleagues and friends around you, family back home et cetera) was often experienced, the second pertained to the difficulty with which formal support (in-organization counselling support, support from management et cetera) was often experienced, and finally the third superordinate theme detailed the experience of being on mission, where the strongest finding centred on difficulties in the returning home process. Existing literature on international aid workers' experience of support was utilised in order to shed light on the results, and existential migrant themes also proved useful in order to clarify the material. The clinical significance of the study included a recommendation for awareness building on the difficulty of coming home from missions, a focus on peer support and also ensuring that counsellors are familiar or have experience of the international aid workers' situation in the field. The choice of IPA as method was deemed a useful one. Its clear guidelines coupled with a solid methodological grounding informed both the quality of the interviews as well as the sensitivity and depth of the analysis. Further qualitative research on neighbouring areas and also quantitative research on this area was called for.

Keywords

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, international aid workers, experience of support, existential migrants.

Statement of authorship

This dissertation is written by Niklas Serning and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Existential Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy. The author reports no conflicts of interest, and is alone responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

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ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross

INGO – International Non Governmental Organization

IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

MSF - Médecins Sans Frontières

NGO – Non Governmental Organization

PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

UN - United Nations

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WVI - World Vision International

Anonymisation and transcript conventions

The following conventions were adopted in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, and also enhance readability:

Transcript notation

…	significant pause
[ ]	material omitted
[living in Amun]	additional material or my summary

Aliases

Mission country	Amun
More volatile mission country	Fulai
Home country	Shire
Employing organization	DevAid
Capital of mission country	Amun City
Capital of more volatile mission country	Fulai City
Volatile outpost in mission country	Amundalai
City in more volatile mission country	Fulaidinia
Capital of home country	Shire City

1 Introduction

This study aims to increase the understanding of international aid workers' experience of support. The topic was chosen due to the scarcity of research in the area, an area that needs attention as international aid agencies endeavour to support their staff, and also returning international aid workers try to make sense of their experiences, both in order to promote international aid workers' well-being.

The study will commence with a survey of the existing literature in the area, detailing viewpoints from both qualitative and quantitative research as well as handbooks and narrative material. It will then move on to a detailed engagement with methodology, moving from epistemology via methodology to method. This engagement is central to the study considering the choice of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – IPA – as the method of analysis, given IPA's commitment to both careful phenomenology and interpretation. As the practical details of how the research was carried out have been clarified in the method section, the most extensive chapter will follow – the results chapter.

The detailed account of the results is of essence in an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in order to allow the reader the opportunity to have a real sense of the material, and also enable the clear exposition of the journey from participant statements to themes to discussion and conclusion. The results chapter is centred on the three emerging superordinate themes and their aggregate themes and subthemes.

The discussion chapter will attempt to look at the results from the previous chapter in the light of the literature review and also additional literature that has been deemed suitable. The discussion then leads into the conclusion, which includes clinical and methodological considerations.

2   Literature review

The area of international development workers' experience of psychological support falls between the well-researched subjects of development studies and psychology, and precious little is written about it. Indeed McCormack, Joseph and Hagger (2009, p109) suggest that "there is a paucity of research concerning the phenomenological experiences of humanitarian aid workers and their long term psychological well-being following missions" which is in a similar vein as Thomas' contention that "there is a corresponding dearth of inquiry regarding humanitarian workers engaged with [populations affected by war]." (Thomas, 2008, p13). There are quantitative research projects on humanitarians and support, and also some qualitative research that touches on the area but I have identified only three qualitative studies on international development workers' experience of support. This state of affairs is not only of concern from an academic viewpoint, but possibly even more so from a counselling psychology viewpoint given that counselling psychologists will encounter and be asked to support this cohort of individuals.

Looking at the literature, I have chosen to include material relating to humanitarians, international aid workers and international development workers. These terms exist on a continuum, and may to some carry different values, yet no real convention exists to differentiate between them, and the terms are used interchangeably both academically and in the field, even within the same article – "no one knows how to define an aid worker. For the purposes of this paper however, an aid worker is one who has completed at least one assignment in relief or development." (Macnair, 1995, p6). Danieli and Mahmoud (2001) also discuss the difficulty of what label to use and indeed what this label signifies, settling for 'international protectors and providers'. I have chosen to follow Macnair's delineation, with the additional clarification that the assignment was in a civilian and not military capacity. This civilian assignment can range from work within an independent NGO (Non Governmental Organization) to working abroad for one's government in some form of development capacity. There is another side to these terms however, a deeper aspect and connotation. Tony Vaux

(2001) brings out the human component in the word 'humanitarian', seeing it as concern for the person in need, and argues that such concern is a truly radical and altruistic act. Aid and development can imply something potentially more hierarchal in that the aid is delivered from the haves to the have-nots (Harrell-Bond, 1999), and development so often implies 'them' developing into 'us' (Galtung, Jacobsen and Brand-Jacobsen, 2000, p144).

2.1 Qualitative research on the experience of support by international aid workers

The only qualitative research that I would consider directly focused on this field is Hearns and Deeny (2007), McCormack, Joseph and Hagger (2009) and Thomas (2008).

Hearns and Deeny (2007) identified a lack of research on the actual experience of support by aid relief workers, and proceeded to interview six participants and then analyse these interviews. I find this analysis quite phenomenological and descriptive in nature, indeed this is how it is portrayed on (p32) "A phenomenological descriptive approach with an inductive reasoning process", despite initially (p31) describing the study as using "an interpretative or hermeneutic approach". It can be argued that a descriptive approach would stay closer to the actual statements of the participants, yet run the potential drawback of not analysing the underlying assumptions or themes that may be the foundation of these statements – "detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the [phenomenon] coming forth" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p35). As such, I found the findings of the study somewhat lacking in depth. Pre-departure preparation was seen as important, with the participants wishing for more training. Management and the employing organization were seen as ineffective and not always supportive. The negative impact on the participants after their missions was one of guilt over not having performed better coupled with a sense of not being valued by the organization; there was no mention of impacts by the stressful or violent environment of the complex emergencies they had lived in. Nor had any of them used the opportunity to access

psychological support post-mission. Communications with home and work could have been better, and there was a wish to identify with one's team yet also strife within the same. Coming home produced guilt for not being able to support their previous colleagues, and also difficulties with relating with those back home.

McCormack, Joseph and Hagger (2009) chose a more interpretative approach in their research, allowing a greater depth to their study. The research is focused on one individual, sometimes relating his own experience and sometimes relating his interpretation of his colleagues' experience, though the quite significant difference between these two viewpoints is not fully explored or clarified. Their participant tries to continually monitor himself in order to function well despite difficulties with stress and difficulties with the world, and resonating with Hearns and Deeny (2007) above often describes being wracked by guilt over his earlier performance on duty. There is a sense that continued mission life gradually erodes the participant, making him or her both dependent on going on ever continuing missions and also finding it difficult to reintegrate back home. Peers on mission gradually become the only ones that can understand the participant, hence making the gap to reintegration back home ever wider, and the participant recommends strengthened procedures for post-mission reintegration in order to bridge this gap. The participant questions and doubts both himself and his organization, continually monitoring himself and ensuring systemic support from his environment. These points I see as quite descriptive, and informative in their own right, yet I found the act of taking it to the next level even more interesting and clarifying as it ties these descriptions together into a concept dubbed 'altruistic identity', representing the participant's continual struggle to accept themselves and seek validation from the place of reintegration – coming home.

Finally, Thomas' doctoral dissertation (Thomas, 2008) is focused on the experience of humanitarian workers in close proximity to violence, and includes as well as moves beyond the discourse of

PTSD[1] (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) into the lived worlds of the research participants. It also has a distinct narrative and phenomenological focus. Using mainly grounded theory, Thomas analysed the transcripts of multiple methods of data gathering, including personal interviews with 55 humanitarian workers. Of most use to the subject of my research would probably be her discussion of humanitarianism, PTSD and interpersonal resources. The humanitarian is described as looking for an adrenaline rush, of liking the altruistic badge and of having insurmountable demands on themselves. There is a heroic passion and escapism, which then can lead to a confusion in ideals in the Harrel-Bond ((1986) a book that in many ways de-thrones the saintly view on humanitarians prevalent in the 20th century) vein when the humanitarian realizes his or her lack of power, or indeed lack of altruistic idealism – an identity shock of sorts. The idea was that one should be passionate to the cause, now one is expected to be dutiful to one's organization and write suitable reports.

As to PTSD, Thomas contrasts it with Antonovsky's (1979) sense of coherence, critiquing the broad brush with which traumatization is liberally applied to suffering humanitarians, where indeed more existential issues may be more useful to highlight. "The central discourse in most research on the mental health of humanitarian workers has been characterised by a preoccupation with risks, stress and trauma as it emphasises illness as opposed to health and well-being." (Thomas, 2008, p70). Interpersonal resources are described as crucial to the humanitarian. They are formed on-mission, with similarly minded peers under similar conditions, and give meaning, coherence and companionship. Reconnecting back home is often difficult since both the humanitarian and the family-system at home have changed during the time of the mission.

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[1] PTSD is defined by APA (American Psychiatric Association) in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) (2000) as a disorder applying to a person that has been exposed to a traumatic event, when this event is persistently re-experienced. The disorder also involves avoidance and numbing and hyper-arousal. It lasts for at least a month.

2.2 Quantitative and mixed methodology research on the experience of support by international aid workers

The closest thing to quantitative research on the experience of support would be Ehrenreich and Elliot's research of 2004, focusing on how organizations manage stress levels of their staff. Larson (2006) details the influence of different factors (exercise, diet...) on PTSD in humanitarians.

A quantitative (it can be seen as mixed methodology since the basis for the questionnaire was created through discussions with the stakeholders) study that is useful is Macnair's 1995 report that focuses on recruitment yet still offers some insights into motivations and also the experience of support. The study is based on 200 responses to a questionnaire that was developed through discussions with different relief organization stakeholders. The participants reported that pre-departure preparation lacked in depth, especially with reference to security issues and information about the organization itself. Management in-country was seen to be lacking in interpersonal skills. Interestingly, out of the six main stressful factors that were affecting the participants, four were related to colleagues, the organisation, living and work, whilst only two were in relation to security issues and witnessing suffering. The coping strategies used at home were not as applicable on-mission, leading to further difficulties. Post-mission debriefing was reported to be useful, yet not always available.

Hunt's and Bjerneld et al's studies that follow, focus on health care professionals in a humanitarian setting, both factors indicating an immediacy, a hands-on approach that the international aid worker more commonly sitting at a desk in the capital may not always have. I still feel that their studies can shed light on the experience of support in the more general population of international aid workers however.

Bjerneld, Lindmark, Diskett and Garrett (2004) paint a complex and detailed picture of the experience of Swedish health care professionals in humanitarian settings, acknowledging that the

richness of their report is due to the largely qualitative nature of it (this quoted report was an add-on to the quantitative Bjerneld and Pearson (2001) which despite being more comprehensive in size, failed to pick up on many nuances and indeed core themes of the participants' experience). The report highlights the professional's experience and adequate training as crucial to their success in the field, and also mentions the need for the professional to have a holistic, system-wide view of the situation and their work. Stressful components of the work include the security situation and the lack of clear organizational mandates and procedures. Bjerneld then continues to delineate in Bjerneld, Lindmark, McSpadden and Garrett (2006) the motivations of health care workers set to go on humanitarian assignments as wanting to have clear mandates and procedures, wanting to connect with their peers in the humanitarian community (and worrying about becoming alienated from those left behind at home), wanting recognition for their work, wanting to feel professional and skilled, wanting to develop as a person through new experiences and more satisfying work. There was also a clear sense of altruism and wanting to make things better in the world.

Finally, Bjerneld continues to explore the motivations of health care workers in humanitarian settings in her meta study of her own qualitative research for her dissertation in 2009, where she further refines her results. A difference in motivation between new and experienced workers emerges as the new ones are filled with altruism and hopes of future fulfilment and excitement whilst the more experienced have a more complex view of the field, tempered by its realities. The sense of self-fulfilment and value of the work is still there, yet there is more frustration and doubt, and an acknowledgment that the professional may gain just as much as those he or she is there to help.

Hunt's (2009) qualitative study of the moral experience of 18 Canadian health care professionals in a humanitarian setting speaks of altruism and the relational nature of the work, indicating that clarity in motivation, in one's capacities and imbalances in power, and a focus on relationships would be supportive to the professionals.

2.3　General descriptions of the experience of international aid workers

There are overall descriptions of international aid workers' experience (though not specifically focused on the experience of support); a good example would be Danieli's (2001) work that gives numerous accounts of humanitarian workers' experience of proximity to violence and humanitarian environments, using a narrative/biographical format, whilst also delineating different organizations' policies and viewpoints on the support of international aid workers. It is an anthology that is quoted in many if not most studies in the field, and being an anthology from many authors and organizations, it can be said to represent a good current-state-of-research marker, despite it being nine years old. Downie's (2001) chapter on peacekeepers under stress speaks almost exclusively of incident related stress and its remedy coming almost exclusively from the organization itself through guidelines, interventions and counsellors. She is followed by Quarterman's (2001) contribution that deepens the personal nature of the work and includes difficulties in returning home and feelings of alienation. Jessen-Petersen (2001) goes on to detail UNHCR's (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) predominantly trauma focused support strategies, which is contrasted by Sherif's (2001) first-person account of difficulties both in the field and upon returning home. The book continues very much in this fashion, contrasting institutional guidelines and commitments with heartfelt first-person perspectives. Looking at themes of psychologically supportive factors emerging from the main participating organizations (ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), UN (United Nations), WVI (World Vision International) and MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières)), the following emerge: Stress management courses, practical information, availability of professional psychological support either on site or remotely, peer-support networks, good communication facilities in order to stay in contact with family, friends and the world of 'home', liberal leave policies, clear mission mandates, days reserved for reporting back, follow ups later, and availability of psychological support.

Adding to these descriptions themes would then be Ager and Loughry's (2004) separate article that focuses on the integration of humanitarian work with psychology, yet speaks of timing with respect to the humanitarian worker – how the first mission is the most difficult, and how many repeated missions can wear you down.

McFarlane's (2004) work on humanitarian disaster psychology focuses on diagnosis and PTSD, and also provides a meta-analysis of emerging themes of experience. His review of the then current research on the difficulties faced by humanitarian aid workers speaks of critical times during deployment, on-mission and return when stress can be higher. Better training, information and organizational efficiency and clarity are also called for. The focus of the stress that is discussed is PTSD, and the statistics provided refer to this disorder. There is an acknowledgement that there is a separation of the expatriate from his or her social world, and that this decreases their resilience. In-mission peers are seen more as a potential source of strife than a substitute for the original social world.

Finally, Norris' (2007) and Bergman's (2003) works should also be mentioned under the heading of descriptions, in that they give highly detailed stories of the experiences of humanitarians, the focus being on proximity to violence, not on the experience of support. There is an element of sensationalism and excitement in both books, making their usefulness for research less than optimal. Van Manen makes a good point (1997, p350) on the possibility of utilising literature if it adds to the understanding of the phenomenon. Quoting Kockelmans (1987) "...poetic language with its use of symbolism is able to refer beyond the realm of what can be said 'clearly and distinctly.'" (in van Manen, 1997, p350), he continues to describe a phenomenological research that goes beyond distinctions of what can be proved. Though a fair point, in the case of Norris (2007) and Bergman (2003) above, they add little except a sense of commitment, bravado and despair, something that already shines through in the other texts referred to in this review.

2.4   Inferring from instructions on how to support international aid workers

There is also research on *how* to support international development workers. Using this body of literature, a picture of how support is seen to be experienced can be inferred. One of the key texts in the area is the Handbook of international disaster psychology (Reyes and Jacobs, 2006), a seminal work which brings many experts on both psychology and humanitarianism together. The most relevant section in this work is Ehrenreich's contributions on (2006, p99 – 112), which is highly focused on classification and the management of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression et cetera. Ehrenreich is also the author of two pamphlets aimed to support those faced with disaster (2001) and those facing the ones facing disaster (2002). The latter of these texts includes details on how to avoid vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue (these concepts are well explained by Rothschild (2006, p12)).

The Antares Guidelines for good practice (Antares Foundation, 2006) is also a highly useful and well researched document intended to guide INGOs (International Non Governmental Organizations) deploying staff in the field, and details pre- during- and post-deployment strategies in order to support the well-being of staff in humanitarian settings. It is clear in its message that stress is not only from the obvious security incidents but also involves burnout and culture-shocks. Equally, support is seen as derived from a plethora of instances, from management, self-help to social support and counselling.

Salama (2010) speaks of the need to have clearer guidelines for the support of relief workers, seeing improved support as coming from psychological briefings and education, keeping couples together and increased organizational vigilance against stress and burnout.

The Centre for Intercultural Learning (2010) sees stressors as largely being related to security risks of self and others, and proceeds to identify best practices for post-mission reintegration. The stress experienced upon coming home is largely seen as derived from the stressful and difficult situations experiences in the field, though difficulty in re-engaging with those at home is mentioned.

2.5   The focus on PTSD in relation to support of international aid workers

There is a significant and powerful discourse linking humanitarian workers with traumatization, a discourse reflected in literature (Ehrenreich, 2006), organisational mandates (Antares Foundation, 2006) as well as the public's understanding of the effects of being on mission in a war torn country. Whilst not denying the possibility of trauma, traumatization and medical disorders, the powerful discourse may obscure more subtle interactions between humanitarian work and humanitarians experience of it. I will give a brief overview of PTSD below, and then move on to more dissenting voices.

A good overview of PTSD would be van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth's anthology of 1996 where the assumption is that, although hard to pin down exactly, PTSD is a biological response connected to one's autonomic nervous system overreacting, thus making the autonomic system's trustworthiness to the individual questionable (van der Kolk and McFarlane, 1996, p13). Another good overview or summary is Regel and Joseph (2010). Rothschild (2000, p71) speaks of the emotional amygdale flooding the time stamping hippocampus, hence making the trauma stand outside of time, ever present in the now. Levine's (1997, p20) analogy is one of the accelerator and the brake of a vehicle being simultaneously applied, creating in his view an evolutionary adaptive response of freezing. Going back to van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth, there are many theories on how to address PTSD, but none definitive (van der Kolk, McFarlane and van der Hart, 1996, p417).

There is a significant focus on PTSD in the existing literature on supporting international aid workers (Barron, 1999, Ehrenreich, 2002, Eriksson, Vande Kemp, Gorsuch, Hoke and Foy 2001), all discussing the various risk factors as well as mitigating factors that influence the onset and resolution of PTSD. Eriksson et al found that when surveying recently returned humanitarians, "Respondents reported high rates of direct and indirect exposure to life-threatening events. Approximately 30% of those surveyed reported significant symptoms of PTSD." (Eriksson, Vande Kemp, Gorsuch, Hoke and Foy, 2001, p205), whilst Ehrenreich (2002, p26) also highlights the risk of vicarious traumatization.

There is research that questions the PTSD discourse (this literature would apply to, but is not limited to international development workers). These studies range from those that to a high degree question the very existence of a mental health issue that can be labelled posttraumatic stress disorder, perhaps the most accessible would be Watters (2010), which in turn is based on research by Young (1995). Watters and Young see the substantially different symptoms of soldiers returning from wars (shell shock being very different from Vietnam war veteran syndromes, which in turn very much differs from descriptions of PTSD) as indicative of PTSD being more a sign of the times, the currently culturally accepted way of expressing dis-ease, as opposed to a diagnosable disease. There are similar positions in Summerfield (2001), and also Almedom and Summerfield (2004), Almedom (2004), along with Pupavac (2004). Society is seen to like medicalization and categorization, politicians are seen to prefer labelling those that come home broken from having seen or even committed atrocities as having a disease as opposed to having an adaptive and sane response to the insane world that the politicians are seen to have orchestrated.

Accepting the existence of PTSD yet broadening the area to allow for positive and formative aspects of such blows, Joseph and Linley (2008) as well as Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) highlight the potentially positive aspects of trauma – post traumatic growth. McCormack, Hagger and Joseph also recently published (2010) connected research on growth following vicarious trauma. It is in this middle road between medicalized PTSD and more radical post-modern questioning (Bracken, Giller, Summerfield 1997) of the entity, that also Macnair (1995) and Ros (2008) seem to place themselves - "PTSD is now an accepted clinical entity, although some psychiatrists find it an unhelpful label" (Macnair, 1995, p50), and "I saw in client after client, a type of existential angst discourse which neither fitted neatly into the stress discourse and nor indeed into the trauma and PTSD discourse. " (Thomas, 2008, p10). Allan, quoted in (Gregor, 2004, p2) "There is a need for universities [to] go beyond the focus on trauma. Surprisingly, very little research is done [on the] training of aid workers and the phenomenon of post-deployment adjustment...".

2.6   Overview of the concept of support, with a focus on social support

The experience of support has been detailed above from a humanitarian perspective. The experience of support on a more general level (not restricted to the humanitarians) has been far more comprehensively studied – indeed Taylor (2007) claims that there are 1100 research articles published on social support each year! The discussion below focuses on Western experiences of social support, acknowledging that the Western comparatively individualistic mind-set affects how support is experienced, and that a more communal non-Western culture may be either more focused on group support, or indeed less likely to want to disrupt the group with requests of support (Hsieh, 2000).

The concept of support is difficult to pin down. The etymology of the word is to 'carry from below', and as such it can be seen as everything that holds, builds up, and nourishes. Moving on to support as it is manifested to the individual, it is seen as coming from the person him or herself in the form of personal motivations or assumptions, and also from the outside in three forms of social support – emotional, instrumental and informational (Schwarzer, Knoll and Rickman, 2004). These areas are all covered by existing research on international aid workers, with for example McCormack, Joseph and Hagger (2009) speaking of the supportive function of a personal motivation when an 'altruistic identity' is supportive, to all mentioned qualitative research papers discussing the emotionally supportive aspect of peer support, to differing aspects of organizational interventions like leave policies (instrumental) and security trainings (informational) recommended to support humanitarian staff. The bulk of research on support for humanitarians could be classified as being in the areas of informational and instrumental social support, though the emotional holding and supportive function is off course present in for example counselling.

It is important to note that support is measured based on the experience of the receiver as opposed to the amount of support offered by the supporting entity. The offered helping hand is only

supportive if grasped by the one being supported. Accordingly, when discussing support, the ability

or propensity of the receivers to avail themselves of this support is an important consideration

(Cohen, Sherrod and Clark, 1986). This area of psychology can be illuminated from a wide array of

viewpoints, with for example attachment theory proposing that secure individuals would be more

apt at profiting from a given support than say an avoidant one (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2008),

cognitive aspects of assumptions and learnt patterns of accessing support (Foster and Caplan, 1994),

or indeed psychoanalytic ideas of support resonating back to images and internalizations of early

caregivers (Zerbe, 1994). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully engage with the internal

dynamics of international aid workers' experience of support, indeed potentially beyond the scope

of the methodology to engage with theorizing as to what could lie behind the experiences of

support.

Research on social support has indicated that the mere existence of support can be supportive, the

knowledge that it is there has a significant impact even though the support may indeed never be

utilised (Schwartzer & Knoll, 2007). There is even research that highlights that moving from the

useful awareness of support to actually utilizing it can be a negative experience. The negative

experiences of support include experiences of it being overbearing or interfering, even unskilled

(Schuster, Kessler and Aseltine, 1990).

The way that differing forms of social support are experienced can also depend on the settings in

which and from whom the support is delivered. The emotional caring aspect of social support is

more easily received from family and friends, whilst informational and instrumental social support is

more preferred from experts and professionals. Research indicates that the wrong kind of social

support from the wrong group fails to have the same positive effect (Peiró and Meliá, 2003).

Counselling is an important and effective part of support, and has been repeatedly shown to help

relieve both anxiety and stress. There has been much debate as to which version of counselling or

psychotherapy is the most effective one; the advantages of one over the other are still not conclusively proven (Cooper, 2008). Perhaps useful with reference to the humanitarian group is research on minority counselling, summarized in a meta study by Atkinson in 1983. Furthermore, worries about counselling softening defences have been identified by Strupp and Hadley in 1979.

The broad and comprehensive nature of research into social support detailed above, in contrast with the comparatively meagre amount of research on how international aid workers experience support, indicates a need for an in depth analysis of their experience of support. Given the restriction on quantitative studies in that their scope is limited by the questions that the researcher asks (questions that will then have to be based on the incomplete research corpus on humanitarians' support), I feel that a more qualitative and open study would be in order. Furthermore, there is also a discrepancy in the existing research on international aid workers' experience of support, a difference between the pictures that have emerged from the qualitative and the quantitative studies. This difference will be explored in the following section.

2.7 Summary of current research on the experience of support by international aid workers

The exploration of lived experience and experience of support is hard to capture using quantitative measures, hence I have chosen to focus on the qualitative or mixed methodology research that will touch on or inform the understanding of international development workers' experience of support, in order to get richer and more participant focused material.

I see some themes emerging from the own words of participants in the three qualitative studies detailed above. The international aid worker seems to have high energy and a strong commitment to doing good, a commitment that runs the risk of being tainted when the harsh realities of one's mandate and organisation become obvious. There is hence a mixture of high demands and also intense doubt – even guilt – in oneself as an international aid worker. One's organization is also

often doubted, both its values and also the degree of support that it offers the international aid worker are questioned. It is hard to relate with those back home and far easier to engage with mission colleagues, and this can lead to either alienation back home or a continued string of missions in order to keep the camaraderie and adrenaline going.

Studies using mixed methodologies came to similar conclusions, further supporting the image of the international aid worker as someone with strong motivation and capacity, with altruistic motives and wishes for growth, that on occasion gets jaded and disappointed as the realities of the field eventually dawn on him or her. Confused mandates of the organisation and also the security situation create difficulties, and the support comes from peers on the mission. Again, alienation from those at home is a key finding, and there is often an awareness of how time and experience affects coping and attitudes.

Moving on to descriptions of how international aid workers should be supported according to experts and humanitarian organization, I see a slightly different picture emerging. Though existential worries of identity and goals are largely absent, issues such as burnout and difficulties with management are still highlighted. Most notably however, security incidents and pressures come to the foreground as the main stressors. Correspondingly, though peer support and organizational clarity is mentioned, the main areas of support discussed are counselling support, organizational briefings and policies and also the availability of communications with one's home. This change in discourse, moving away from the support of peers and the existential angst of lost ideals, culminates in the substantial body of research into PTSD, research that focuses on risk factors and also supportive factors relating to the onset of this debated disorder.

3 Methodology and method

"[Methodology] includes the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge, and the sense of what it means to be human..." (van Manen, 1990, p27).

3.1 Methodology

The documented scarcity of adequate qualitative research on international development workers supports the relevance and timeliness of an in depth study on the experience of support by international development workers. In order to find out which method (the practical ways and means in which to ask questions, analyse answers and then present them) to use, I have to enquire into methodology, the philosophy behind the method. In order to ascertain a solid standing on methodology, an in depth view into epistemology (what we can know about the world, or the philosophy of knowledge) and possibly even ontology (what is the world, or being in the world, like) is required. Ergo, I will first detail my own pluralistic views on epistemology below, and then arrive at the choice of a hermeneutic phenomenological position for this study (Laverty, 2003).

3.1.1 Paradox and my own epistemology

Before I explain the epistemology that underpins the methodology and method of this study, I wish to delineate my own position on ontology, epistemology and methodology. As I have engaged with these areas over the years, I've noticed an inclination to want to arrive at a coherent and strong position, one that can be defended and clearly understood. I have also noticed how this propensity easily could lend itself to intellectual posturing and also neglecting the areas of the world that wouldn't fit within the frame of my current ideological view of the world (Bazzano, 2006). It may be possible to integrate paradoxical viewpoints or viewpoints that fail to conform to one's frame, yet I fear that something may be lost if one does.

The Handbook of Counselling Psychology (Hollanders, 2003) highlights the integrative position as an important stance for counselling psychologists, and though I very much appreciate integration, I would be cautious if integration were to fail to respect contradicting multitudes when it integrates them. Some schools of psychology, indeed some epistemologies, cannot be integrated without much being lost, and I see a value in remembering pluralism and the simultaneous holding of mutually exclusive positions, sometimes at the expense of a more consensual and coherent integration. Paradox may be of essence in psychology, in accordance with Soth (2004): "Through embracing conflict, ambiguity and paradox as pervasive and necessary ingredients in psychological work, we may be able to ground and re-seat ourselves more thoroughly than through legislating ideological 'clarity'.". Paradox is present in my epistemological position in that it isn't fixed; indeed I would rather see my epistemological and ontological position as charged and dynamic, encompassing a wide range of positions. It is important to note that this view on epistemology *allows* paradox; it doesn't strive towards it in an anarchic fashion.

Finally, with reference to this specific piece of research, an acceptance of paradox works towards ensuring that the whole picture of the participants' lifeworld shines through, be it contradictory or not. Indeed, from the very building blocks of existence[2] to the most fundamental experience of human freedom[3], I am faced with the need to accept incoherence. This sceptical attitude towards objectivity is also evident in the early existentialist authors, with Kierkegaard seeing objectivity as passion and creativity being subdued in favour of rigid adherence to illusionary rules of one truth (1846/1992), and Nietzsche calling it downright stupid:

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[2] Though physics continually strives towards a coherent picture of the world, Heisenberg and Bohr's acceptance of potential paradox allowed them to arrive at the quantum mechanics and uncertainty principle that have underpinned modern physics for the past 80 years (Heisenberg, 1979).

[3] This paradox is well represented by Rogers: "The fully functioning person, on the other hand, not only experiences, but utilizes, the most absolute freedom when he spontaneously, freely, and voluntarily chooses and wills that which is absolutely determined." (1969, p295), and further detailed by Sartre (1943/1966, p481-487) and McCulloch (1994, p57), both representative of Sartre's early, more expansive view on freedom, views that are more curtailed in later works (Sartre, 1960/1976, p739-741, 1972/1974, p34-35).

A 'scientific' interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore still be one of the most stupid of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning…. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially meaningless world. Assuming that one estimated the value of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas: how absurd would such a 'scientific' estimation of music be!" What would one have comprehended, understood, grasped of it? Nothing, really nothing of what is 'music' in it! (Nietzsche, 1882/1974, §373)

3.1.2   Epistemology

Though my own take on epistemology is fluid and pluralistic, I have chosen to limit this study to one perspective, the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. I acknowledge that the simultaneous investigation of multiple perspectives (as in perhaps adding positivistic as well as purely social constructionist perspectives to the hermeneutic phenomenological one) would produce an even richer account. On the other hand, a clear and firm declaration of the perspective from which this specific research was made allows the reader to situate both the researcher and themselves more transparently. Furthermore, adding on the exploration of methodologies and results of multiple additional perspectives would run the risk of detracting from the depth of the exploration of this single perspective, for practical reasons of time needed for research as well as the limitations on the length of this dissertation.

Hence, in order for the reader to know what underpins this specific research, I below undertake to specify the epistemology that forms its foundation. In addition to the method being coherent with its epistemological convictions, it has to be effective and appropriate. It should fit the objective of the study, address the questions in the research proposal, and draw as much relevant and rich data from the interviews as possible, and then make it understandable to the reader. The end of this section on methodology will thus detail the practical reasons for choosing to utilise Jonathan Smith's

(Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method of analysis as opposed to other methods. Finally, this section will conclude with an exploration of my reflexive position – my personal connection to the work and how I have affected the research as well as how I've been affected by it. It is worth noting that me situating my position on epistemology above is in a sense partly reflexive, in that it accounts for my view of the world, and hence how I engage with the phenomenon studied.

3.1.2.1 Phenomenology

I first turn to Husserl (1929/1977) (further explained by Smith, 2003) and the tradition of phenomenology for the description of subjective experience. The research question being about *experiencing* something makes phenomenology, the exploration of the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990), a natural avenue to follow. Phenomenology was originally concerned with perceiving experiences as they are through using techniques to avoid our preconceived ideas, indeed our natural attitude, tainting the essence of the experience. The aim was to be able to identify the essence of a conscious experience in a universal sense, not only a subjective one.

As this transcendental phenomenology met existentialism in Heidegger (1927/1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) among others, hence creating existential phenomenology, the potential for transcending our deep embeddedment in life was questioned. Individuals were seen as being always in a situation, linked with others, always moving in relation to time, constructed from a multitude of social, historical, political factors. Indeed, it can be argued that "Phenomenology requires the uncovering of meanings concealed by the phenomenon's mode of appearing." (Shinebourne, 2011, p18-19, with reference to Moran, 2000). Furthermore, as van Manen (1990) details, phenomenology in its pure transcendental form may also be unattainable since experience is always recounted retrospectively, hence interpreted and hermeneutic (to be explained further below). His argument is that shining the light of attention on a specific experience as we are having this experience,

fundamentally alters the experience. Ergo, a genuine experience of one's lifeworld must be investigated after it has happened.

3.1.2.2 Cycles of reinterpretation

Taking the cue from van Manen's (1990) point above about experience being interpretation, my perceptions get tainted by my patterns or old interpretations of the world, and the resulting experience influences my interpretations. However, there are times when we manage to be more aware of our assumptions and influences, this leading to a more clear perception of our world, one less mechanically following our patterns of interpretation. Indeed, this is what epoché (Husserl, 1929/1977) or bracketing out our preconceptions as we aim to perceive more clearly, strives towards.

It is important to note that bracketing does not serve to allow us to see the object of our experience more clearly – it is not about seeing the world out there more clearly. Indeed, it is about seeing *our* world more clearly. We identify and temporarily put to the side our preconceptions about an experience in order to more clearly perceive the experience. This is a quite radical act, as we temporarily let go of our natural attitude of relating our experience with the world of objects, and instead focus on simply the experience (Husserl, 1954/1970, 1913/1982). Finlay discusses the tension between description and interpretation, seeing epoché as difficult to reconcile with interpretation (Finlay, 2009, p8). This seeming contradiction between an attempt to temporarily put one's assumptions to the side in order to engender a more clear description, whilst at the same time actively interpreting hence assuming, can be resolved in two ways. Finlay points to van Manen (1990) as she sees description and interpretation as existing on a continuum rather than being in opposition, and she argues that interpretation when done appropriately is a valid technique. I agree with her point, and would also highlight the term *temporarily* in the phrase 'temporarily put one's assumptions to one side'. This temporal sense of epoché allows me to move dialectically between

description and interpretation, a process similar to Gadamer's hermeneutic circle although his movement is between the particular and the whole (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p167).

This is also what I will be doing continually during the analysis stage of this research, attempting to bracket out not only my old preconceived ideas, but also notice as new constructions arise in the contact with the material, both noticing and appreciating, and then temporarily letting go of them in order to work towards a more lucid experience of the individual participant. Much as I attempt to be aware of the way that I engage with the participant's statements however, I must accept that the participant's statements are how they interpret their experience now, sitting in an office with a researcher, far away from the original setting, having had many months to forget, interpret and re-interpret their narrative. With reference to the impossibility of a pure access to phenomenology detailed above, this study is indeed *my analysis* (not an untainted direct account) of how support is *interpreted now* (post-facto, not in the moment in the field) by the participants.

Existential phenomenology includes language as a central component of our lifeworld - "Language is the house of Being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home." (Heidegger, 1947/1998, p239), hence I would like to move from Husserl towards Derrida (1972/2010) and a more language-influenced world of signs and contexts.

3.1.2.3 Language and discourse

The semantic and deconstructionist turn from Husserl is crucial, as it moves even further away from the Husserlian teleological movement (Caputo, 1997, p117) of logocentrism (Derrida, 1972/2010, p21-22), phenomenological or otherwise. "Deconstruction is a certain Husserlianism, a theory of the constitution of meaning and ideality, but one that is always already exposed to a certain Joyceanism, to the irrepressible anarchy of signifiers…" (Caputo, 1997, p183). I see Caputo's quote (referring to Derrida's thought) as indicating that Husserl was too focused on creating a coherent and logical system, and that the administration of some Joycean anarchy would be suitable. With Derrida,

Gadamer and Ricoeur (even Heidegger's later works, as he moved from "a concern for language

from the viewpoint of man's speech to a concern for language's essential contribution to the very

possibility of man's speech" (Kockelmans, 1972/1986, pXII)), language starts to take centre stage,

and I find especially Gadamer's position on language as our access point to the world useful. He sees

language as the way in which we engage with reality. It is not necessarily an impediment (this would

be closer to Derrida's position), and Gadamer argues that language indeed can clarify the world for

us (Wachterhauser, 1999). At the same time, we can "fall into a conversation" (Gadamer,

1975/2004, p345) in the sense that we can end up having little control over our language and indeed

be controlled by it.

It can be argued that the focus on language reaches its peak in discourse analysis and social

constructionism (Gergen, 1999, Foucault, 1969/1982). These are areas that are close to my

epistemological position, however the engagement with power and language is at the cost of a

reduced engagement with experiencing, hence making such an intense focus undesirable for this

research. One could also see such an intense focus as being in a sense skewing the picture, and

hence argue that an intense focus on language would not only diminish the clarity of the account of

the experience, but also diminish the clarity of the account of language. Not only is experience

experienced through language, but language is expressed through experience and a separation or

undue bias on either would confound both. I see Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009, p196)

engagement with and inclusion of social constructionism in their model as testament to this balance

of including yet not limiting oneself the exploration of language.

With reference to this specific piece of research, I hold that an attentive focus on language and its

uses also serves to deepen the understanding of pre-reflective notions in the participants'

experience, gleaning potential insights into deeper assumptions that may not be immediately

reflected upon by the participant.

3.1.2.4 Background and foreground

I would also like to highlight the importance of the background – what gets pushed away in my experience. As I have an experience, I'm having it instead of something else, something that has withdrawn, something other (Levinas, 1978). My experience is thus in relation to what it is not, and this is essential especially in the domain of psychology, support and need. Again, Levinas very much worked in the footsteps of Husserl – "Our analyses claim to be in the spirit of Husserlian philosophy, whose letter has been the recall in our epoch of the permanent phenomenology, restored to its rank of being a method for all philosophy." (Levinas, 1978/1981, p183). And indeed, Husserl was also discussing the relationship between background and foreground: "The foreground is nothing without the background; the appearing side is nothing without the non-appearing." (Husserl, 1893-1917/1964, p78). These notions are crucial in the analysis of the participants' experience of support, in that not only the statements, but also the contexts of the statements, are analysed. Furthermore, a vigilance and attentiveness towards lack is of essence both in the practice of psychotherapy and psychological research – what is the individual *not* talking about, and what are they choosing to put in the background when highlighting something else?

3.1.3 *Interpretative hermeneutic analysis*

I've chosen to use IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - in the tradition of Smith and Osborn (2003), and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), since it combines flexibility to deal with the complexities of broad and heterogeneous human experience with a rigorous framework to assist both researcher and reader in making sense of the material. I have been greatly helped by Max van Manen (1990) in his more in depth philosophical treatment of hermeneutic phenomenology, and see no issue in adding his insights to those of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). Langdridge (2007), McLeod (2001) and Willig (2001) were also of importance in identifying IPA as my preferred choice, and also clarified the alternatives.

As detailed in the sections above, the participants' descriptions of their experience of support are influenced by the setting of the interview and how they perceive me; by the possibilities, impossibilities and characteristics of the language used; by the internalized social norms and assumptions they have et cetera. I'm not receiving a pure description of experience, nor is the experience as experienced by the participant free from outside influence and distortions. A good example of the influence of culture upon experience would be Watters' (2010) account of how experience of mental health issues in individuals is profoundly affected by cultural norms and how they change when culture changes.

To make matters even more complex, the research presented in this dissertation is my interpretation of my experience of the participant's interpretations of their experiences – a double hermeneutic (Smith, Osborn, 2003, p51). This is a crucial point – up until now, I have only discussed the subjective component of experiencing, how being a certain person in a certain setting affects how I experience the world, and how my interpretation of this experience is a central component in how I see it. Now, I'm moving a significant step away from the experience – I'm attempting to say something about *someone else's* experience, something that according to Gadamer may be nigh impossible: "the other presents himself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a self and other." (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p268). I am always involved and implicated when I describe the other. An acceptance of this can then lead to an attempt at fusing the horizons of self and other.

> "Every finite presentation has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence an essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point." (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p269).

A fusion of horizons is not about adopting the horizons of the other and letting go of one's own, but rather an attempt to acknowledge oneself as one moves *towards* an understanding of the horizons

of the other. It is not about resolving a tension between one's own understanding and that of the other, it is about acknowledging this tension and engaging with it. "The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation but consciously bringing it out." (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p273).

It is for this reason that I find that IPA (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009) provides the most useful method to elucidate international aid workers' experience of support. Its acknowledgment and scrutiny of the interpretations made by me as the researcher, and corresponding use of epoché and reflexivity to account for this is crucial considering my intimate connection with the area. It is a clear method, with clear stages of data collection, analysis and writing, offering firm support yet still being open enough to allow the experience of the participants to shine through in the finished work. It is this clarity of method that made me choose IPA as opposed to van Manen's perhaps more philosophically grounded hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990), since I felt that I could very much profit from van Manen's in depth treatment of the area of hermeneutic phenomenology, whilst still being supported by the rigour and more widespread acceptance and familiarity of Smith's IPA. Indeed, van Manen's statement from 1997, based on ideas from 1990, very much resonates with the core underlying ideas of IPA:

> "Phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational, and nontheoretic; a powerful phenomenological text thrives on a certain irrevocable tension between what is unique and what is shared, between particular and transcendent meaning, and between the reflective and the prereflective spheres of the lifeworld." (van Manen, 1997, p346)

Clarity and rigour are of essence not only for my research, but for phenomenological research as a whole. Caelli (2001) described the early difficulties of performing phenomenological research, in that solid underlying philosophical knowledge was needed in order to successfully undertake such research. She also delineated the difficulty of acquiring said knowledge due to the many conflicting

notions in the field. Indeed, early phenomenological research was criticized for having fully

misunderstood the distinction between lifeworld and scientific modes of enquiry, and also being

lacking in its understanding of the ensuring of effective methods (Paley, 1998). Though Caelli was

writing in 2001, she made no mention of Smith's 1996 article that first delineated the IPA method,

which may be understandable due to the relatively limited growth of the method at that time. It is

my contention that Smith in 1996 had actually already provided a suitable method that would

address Caelli's issues of 2001.

IPA has recently been criticised by Giorgi (2010, p3-22) for being methodologically unclear and lax,

with an almost laissez-faire attitude to method. Such viewpoints are important to address, given the

importance of clarity in the potentially vague area of qualitative research. It is essential to know and

have confidence in how the researcher arrived at his or her conclusions, and what assumptions were

adopted in order to support these methods. I was therefore greatly relieved when Smith responded

in (Smith, 2010, p186 - 191), firmly and clearly laying rest to Giorgi's queries as representing a very

limited and incomplete reading and understanding of IPA.

As will be detailed in the section on method below, IPA is a thematic method, focused on how the

participants experience and make meaning of their lifeworlds. It is not aiming to speculate on causes

for their experiences; it aims to describe experience as it is interpreted by participant and

researcher. The importance of the writing up process is highlighted both by Smith, Flowers and

Larkin (2009) and van Manen (2006) - it is not simply writing up, as the analytic process very much

continues throughout the writing. Relationship is also well described by Larkin, Watts and Clifton

(2006), the key point being that since human beings are always in relationship, "any discoveries that

we make must necessarily be a function of the *relationship* that pertains between researcher and

subject-matter" (Larkin, Watts, Clifton, 2006, p107). Taking this one step further, "IPA has been

developed specifically in order to allow the researcher to produce a theoretical framework which is

based upon, but which may transcend or exceed, the participants' own terminology and conceptualizations". (Smith, 2004, quoted in Larkin, Watts, Clifton, 2006, p113-114).

IPA is not about simply describing and packaging the participants' statements, it is also about going deeper, to the underlying pre-reflective assumptions that these descriptions point towards. At the same time, this going deeper must always be rooted in the participants' accounts, hence avoiding the risk of encumbering their meaning-making with irrelevant external theories. This injunction is exemplified by Smith (2004) in his caution not to use psychodynamic interpretations of participants' narratives, instead recommending staying closer to the text.

3.1.4   Alternate methods

I find discourse analysis very appealing from a political standpoint, especially Foucauldian discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), in that its engagement with power relations and intense sensitivity to language can highlight imbalances and subtle forms of oppression previously overlooked. However, as mentioned above, the method would be inappropriate for the aim of this research in that I wish to give a much broader picture of the experience of support by international aid workers. It would also be difficult to integrate with a hermeneutic phenomenological position on epistemology, in that personal meaning-making may be under-valued in this more social constructionist approach. At the same time, I often found during the analysis of the material that the semantic cues and underlying discourses of power were useful tools to be integrated with the chosen IPA method. Indeed, this is one of the strengths of IPA, it is both dynamic enough to allow the inclusion of Foucault's theories on power (1969/1982) and still formalized enough to be effective and transparent in its methods, something also highlighted by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p197).

Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) and their descriptive phenomenology seem to me to be missing the mark since I don't feel that there can be such a thing as phenomenology that can be simply described – for me it can only be interpreted - "'Everything is subjective,' you say; but even this is interpretation"

(Nietzsche, 1901/1968, §481). Furthermore, after the participant has interpreted and communicated his or her experience to the researcher, the interpretation is done by the researcher. Given my training in existential counselling psychology and psychotherapy, the Sheffield School (Ashworth, 2003) version of descriptive phenomenology may seem appropriate, yet I find that the same problem persists in reference to a failure to properly address the impact of participant and researcher interpretation. The Sheffield School also seems to me to be even less appropriate since they *do* interpret the material but do it from a fixed existential schema, interrogating the text based on supposedly relevant existential themes. There is also another potential problem with both variants' aim towards remaining at the descriptive level (whether this is at all possible or not). I detailed above in the literature review how I found Hearns & Deeny (2007) lack of interpretation making their research somewhat flat or lacking in depth. This is a real risk with descriptive methods, one that can be mitigated through a careful engagement with interpretation and a deeper engagement with the material.

Charmaz' grounded theory was considered and deemed useful, the constant revision and comparison of data is not unlike how the picture of the whole and the detail gradually emerges in IPA. The main reason why I chose interpretative phenomenological analysis was IPA's solid epistemological grounding in hermeneutic phenomenology, whilst this version of grounded theory seems more general, even post-positivist and constructivist in its application and assumptions (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008, p241). The original grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) was decided against for both epistemological (it borders on positivism) and practical reasons as "methodological procedures are poorly articulated and there are ambiguities in how researchers should conduct analyses." (Payne, 2007, p67).

Finally, a more quantitative approach would be useful in that the results could be more generalizable and applicable to the international development worker community as a whole. As it stands, this interpretative phenomenological analysis is an in-depth exploration of seven individuals'

experiences with no substantive claims about the population outside this small cohort. The depth of this exploration allows the discovery of themes that would be unlikely to surface in a more quantitative questionnaire, in that such a questionnaire's questions would be determined by the researcher's analysis of existing literature, as opposed to going beyond it through asking open questions. Furthermore, with reference to the provision for paradoxical findings or indeed a thorough examination of reflexivity and hermeneutics, these would be difficult to integrate with a positivist, empirical approach. Still, a quantitative study on a broader sub-set of participants, using the themes discovered in this present study, would be of great value, and will be recommended for future research.

3.1.5   Reflexivity

Given the importance of reflexivity delineated above, I made a dedicated attempt at being aware of and bracketing my own suppositions, and also disclosing as much of them as I can in this sub-section.

I've worked as an international development worker and humanitarian worker for close to five years in differing settings under the umbrella of the United Nations, ranging from intense scenarios in southern Afghanistan to more relaxed environments in Sri Lanka, Timor L'Este, India and Eritrea. I never considered accessing psychological support for difficulties encountered, be they social or personal or indeed related to security incidents. I found my time in the field exciting, empowering yet sometimes lonely. I never experienced the violence or threats of the same as particularly difficult to deal with, rather more exciting and good for impressive 'war stories' with friends back home.

My issues commenced when I returned home, with high levels of stress and alienation. I spent considerable time in therapy and reflection, trying to find out why I was so irritable and in despair, most often focusing on the more spectacular explosions and rockets of Afghanistan as being the likely reasons. Now, in retrospect, I would say that my acceptance of the predominant PTSD discourse made me construct my narrative along those lines (Watters, 2010).

Embarking on this research, I focused my weekly psychotherapy even further on issues that came up in the course of interviewing and reflecting upon the participants' material. Given the acknowledged presence of the researcher in the IPA method in listening for themes, organizing them and then creating the results section, I feel that my therapy was essential to the exploration of my own investment, preference or indeed resistance against specific areas of the results as they unfolded. One example is how my disappointment with the participants due the lack of connection or care for the population they were to serve connected with elements of shame for having at times been similarly disconnected and career focused. Equally, as their narratives gradually developed over interviews, transcription, analysis and write-up (especially in the hermeneutic, interpretative turn of the write up), I experienced my own narrative changing. I went from feeling strange and damaged to feeling normal and accompanied by their stories, allowing the interpretation that was developing also become partly my interpretation. Indeed, the normality engendered was not only because I could resonate with the participants, but also that the participants' experiences seemed to be quite similar to most 'normal' people in the world. Not only was this a positive and healing experience for me however, it also highlighted the need for vigilance and professional epoché, not allowing my own needs for solace to guide the analysis.

I found that my research diary as well as my continued dialogue with my research supervisor, along with the open and unjudging space of therapy, became three pillars of support and guidance, keeping me on track. My research diary was an impromptu collage of emails to old UN colleagues where thoughts could be played with, writings in my personal diary, along with an actual notepad designated for the purpose. If therapy was a space for engaging with the research's impact on me, the diary was a space for engaging and developing ideas, whilst my dialogue with my supervisor served more as a check and balance, ensuring that the ideas and themes I discovered indeed had a substantial and clear grounding in the participants' verbatim material. It was a real challenge to engage in such an intense and immersive research process on an area that I had such an intimate and emotional connection to, and I feel that the three pillars of therapy, diary and supervisor were

crucial in order to substantially limit unmindful skewing of the results due to my own reactions and history.

3.1.6   Validity

Although indicated above with reference to this being my own interpretation and also through having purposive and homogenous sampling instead of aiming towards a broad and representative sample, it is valuable to address the area of validity (is our instrument measuring that which we intend it to measure?) directly. Different criteria have been proposed for the endeavour of assessing validity in qualitative studies, and like Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and also Langdridge (2007) I will utilize Yardley's (2000) four principles in order to offer one way of performing this assessment.

Yardley's first principle is that of sensitivity to context, a principle that asks of the researcher to be well grounded in not only the method of analysis, but also the philosophy – the methodology and epistemology – behind it. The context also includes the socio-cultural setting where the study was made, and also the relationship between researcher and participants. My in depth enquiry into methodology above, the rigorous methods followed, and a dedicated commitment to both reflexivity and a mindfulness of the relationship during the interviews, support this principle.

The second principle refers to commitment and rigour, and is supported in this research by the dedicated and rigorous application of the methods mentioned above, and a similar commitment during the interviews, a commitment that is further assisted by my training in psychotherapy and psychology.

Yardley's third principle relates to transparency and coherence. The transparency of this study can be evaluated on the basis of the results chapter below through an enquiry into the clarity of my presentation, and also if the conclusions I draw from the themes actually make sense. This principle also refers to sections above, again asking us to ascertain whether the procedures and participant selection is clear and appropriate. The component of coherence does not refer to having coherent

results, but rather as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p182) mention: "It is not that contradictions shouldn't be in the data, they are often the richest part of the text, but the analysis of the contradictions should not in itself be contradictory!", hence referring to the clarity and coherence of the analysis.

Like Langdridge (2007), I question Yardley's fourth principle, that of impact and importance. Though I very much hope that my research would yield interesting results that have an impact upon how we view the world, a lack of impact does not invalidate the quality of the research. For me, knowledge has an inherent value, even when it doesn't impact upon the world beyond the reader.

In addition to these four criteria, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p183) discuss the independent audit as a crucial component for the establishment of research validity. They make a clear distinction that this independent audit is not about a different researcher being likely to arrive at the same result (considering the subjective nature of the research) but rather that it is the establishment that the results are credible and make sense, that they are one of many possible results but that it is a credible one. The way that this dissertation is structured with appendix four clearly displaying superordinate themes, themes and subthemes and also each participant's contribution to each theme, allows the reader to examine the movement from the participants' accounts via themes and superordinate themes onto results and then ultimately discussion and conclusion. Furthermore, the continued involvement of my research supervisor and her monitoring of how the transcripts were analysed into themes, also contributes to the independent audit of the research's validity, as indicated by Smith et al:

> "supervisors can conduct mini audits of their students' work by, for example, looking at the first interview transcript annotated with the student's initial codes, categories or themes. The supervisor can then check that the annotations have some validity in relation to the text being examined and the approach being employed." (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p184)

3.2   From methodology to research questions

Having decided to use IPA in order to explore and analyse international aid workers' experience of support, I first made a very detailed list of questions, hoping to catch every aspect of the participants' lifeworld. The objective of the interviews was to ascertain how the participant experienced support to their psychological well-being, before, during and after their mission. However, after input from my supervisor and also a more detailed reading of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), I chose to reduce the amount of questions. Though still technically questions, my prompts were more akin to indicators of the territory I wanted the participant to explore. Three temporal territories were delineated – before deployment, during deployment and after deployment. Within each of these temporal territories I explored three aspects of the experience of support: when there was support, when there wasn't, and finally when there were wishes for support. The questions were slightly reviewed after the first interview in order to elicit richer material. This was achieved through initial questions revolving around what brought them to this work, and also why they did it as opposed to someone else. The material from the first interview – initially seen as a pilot – was still seen as valuable for the research as a whole, and was incorporated as a regular interview, with my supervisor's support.

Being a semi-structured interview, it was to a degree able to move dynamically where the participant wanted it to go, and I saw my role more as setting the tone and territory of the discussion rather than engaging in direct questions. I found Smith's (Smith and Osborn, 2003) analogy of the funnel, a broad questioning that then narrows in on particular details, quite useful here. As such, my phenomenological exploration of the participants' lifeworld with regard to their experience of support, was informed by van Deurzen's four worlds (1997), discourses of power (Gergen, 1999, Foucault, 1969/1982), relationship to time and temporality (Cohn, 2002), and finally sense of belonging (Camus, 1942/1983, 1947/2004) and coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). Still, the interview was open enough to allow space for issues outside of these foci as well. The questions

were used in order to ensure that areas important to the research participant with reference to the experience of support in international development missions were explored, as opposed to being used to confirm or deny certain suppositions. In a similar vein, there was an overt aim to avoid prediction of outcomes. I was helped by Robson (2002) on interviews and also by Willig's point (2001) of the usefulness of acknowledging ignorance in order to elicit the implicit assumptions of the research participants. The establishment of these questions were very much made with caution in order not to let my unmindful pre-understanding of the area obfuscate the differently constructed meanings of the research participants, acknowledging the important work on critical language awareness done by Fairclough (1995) in conjunction with my intimate and long term connection with it.

A list of interview prompts and questions is attached (Appendix 4).

3.3   Method

3.3.1   Design

The study was performed using purposive sampling hence selecting a small and homogenous group, in accordance with Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p48-51) and Langdridge (2007, p58). A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, after which the digital recording was transcribed verbatim. IPA analysis followed, commenting on different interpretational levels resulting in themes that were gradually clustered together to create a picture of international development workers' experience of support.

3.3.2   Participants

Seven participants were recruited through a large international development organization in a European country that for reasons of anonymization will be called Shire. Again, for reasons of anonymity and protection of the participants the name of the organization will not be stated, and the pseudonym DevAid will instead be utilized when referring to it. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009,

p52) recommend between four and ten interviews, making seven the mean, cautioning that "it is more problematic to try to meet IPA's commitments with a sample which is 'too large', than with one that is 'too small'" (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p51) and that "it is important not to see the higher numbers as being indicative of 'better' work" (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p52). The crucial factor is the acquisition of 'rich material', something that was achieved with these seven participants. I found Harré's (1979, p133) illustration of the tension between the wish to have an extensive sample in order to be able to generalize on one hand, but the concurrent loss of intensity of this information as the sample size rises, useful when arriving at this number of participants.

DevAid were very supportive of the study after relevant documentation of ethical clearance and risk assessments had been discussed (I have received ethical clearance (Appendix 1) and also clearance on my risk assessment (Appendix 2) from Middlesex University). DevAid HR subsequently emailed out the Personal Information Sheet (Appendix 3) that detailed confidentiality, research details and opting out procedures. The email and the Personal Information Sheet were clear that there was no pressure to partake, and indeed no issue to withdraw from the study if one were to partake. In order to achieve as homogenous a sample as possible (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p48-51), only international development workers that had returned from a complex emergency (two specific countries were identified as being in a state of complex emergency, and in the interest of confidentiality they will be referred to as Amun and Fulai) between six and twelve months ago were contacted. Due to this restriction, recruitment and interviewing were continual over the first quarter of 2010. Having a homogenous sample is a crucial point, as it indicates the position on 'representative sampling' that hermeneutic phenomenology takes. I am studying a phenomenon in a small group of participants, and want these participants to be as similar as possible to each other from a demographical viewpoint. I make no claims outside the group I'm studying, and do not aim to provide a representative mix of gender, ethnicity or age (Langdridge, 2007, p58). At the same time, I would wish to have an understanding of the broader picture, and therefore I side with Haug (1987) in the hope that the existence of a specific experience in one location indicates the possibility of this

experience existing elsewhere, a contention also shared by Harré (1979) and Smith (2004, p43). Again, this is a hope, not a claim. As will be discussed in future research [6.4], a quantitative study that would investigate the validity of my results would be most welcome, and would then enable claims of varying strengths to be applied to the general population of international aid workers.

Some of the participants had connections (being born or partly growing up) outside Shire but all now legally resided in Shire. Two men and five women participated, with ages ranging from 32 to 37 with a mean of 34.

The interviews were in person, and took place in DevAid's secure and confidential offices. They were recorded digitally. The digital recordings were securely stored on an encrypted hard drive (using TrueCrypt in AES mode, NSA Top Secret cleared) (CNSS, 2003). The research participants received and signed consent forms (blank copy in Appendix 5, the signed originals are kept on file but not attached for reasons of anonymity). The interviews lasted between 35 and 75 minutes, usually close to 60 minutes.

3.3.3   Method of Analysis

This is an important sub-section, especially considering Giorgi's (2010, p3-22) critique of IPA's method's not being prescriptive. Though I do feel that Smith (2010, p186 - 191) has left these criticisms to rest, Giorgi's critique does point to an interpretation of IPA as not methodical. Having thus clearly explained my vantage point above in the section on methodology, I now undertake to clearly delineate my method in this sub-section, hence in a way making Giorgi's critique inapplicable to this study.

Following the semi-structured interviews, the digital recording was transcribed. I then listened several times to each recording, correcting the transcription and also making initial descriptive notes in the margins (see Table 1 below for an example). After this, I commenced with the analysis proper. Focusing on one participant at a time, I went over each line (a line in this context has a similar

meaning as in a screenplay, with the researcher's question being one line, the response the next, with no relevance to the actual number of lines on the page) and commented on it. My comments were initially mostly descriptive, merely describing what the participant was saying. As I gradually became more familiar with the text, I added more interpretative and semantic notes, and also occasional queries or ideas that came up for me. Finally, using both the verbatim and my comments thereupon, I started drawing together emergent themes, and labelled the text with these.

Table 1: Anonymised transcript excerpt

Emergent theme	Verbatim	Descriptive	Interpretative	Queries and Ideas
The DevAid psychological support failed to provide rationalization and understanding of attacks, he had to do it himself Acknowledging that something is difficult is supportive Support is seen as emotional support The lack of psychological monitoring allows staff to go beyond their limit	Probably, yeah, and then my having a psychologist would have helped to rationalize some of this I think. And to understand emotionally how it was affecting me, and probably draw strength from it. By a better understanding knowing, well, first of all a better understanding is always better, but having also, some advice on coping strategies, things that you can do, or, knowing what your limit is. Cause I think that's another danger, not that I experienced this but I can imagine for some people there's a limit, and after you cross that limit, then it starts to get bad. So there were people who became very, very addicted to alcohol, I would say, and that was their way of escaping, but that's because they'd reached their limit. Because they had no outlet, say actually you've reached your limit, you need to do either this, this or this, then sort of reverted to the original psychotherapist	A psychologist would have assisted in the rationalization to manage stress. It would also have given understanding and coping strategies. The reason that some people turned to alcohol, or pass their 'limit' of anxiety or stress, is that there is no psychologist there to tell them that what they need to do as they approach the limit.	A psychologist needs to help with understanding and coping (rationalization). A psychologist would be an outlet that saves people from going over the limit (and self-medicating with alcohol).	The original psychother apist = alcohol?

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As can be seen in the table above, my descriptive comments remain close to what the participant said, in effect paraphrasing or summing up what they said. The interpretative ones are more speculative and include more of what I feel is being said, my reactions and thoughts. In a similar way, when I made semantic comments, noticing how a participant consistently used metaphors with reference to something, or maybe very non-committal and self-diminishing language, it would be my ideas that I would note down about it – it is an interpretation and not a fact. The queries and ideas column was reserved for wild ideas that if they reappeared consistently or in other ways could add to the understanding would be useful, otherwise they would be disregarded. The emergent themes were very tentative at this stage, more akin to loose ideas taking form than firm labels. There was an average of 99 distinct emergent themes per participant. Each theme was seen to apply on average two times. Having completed this process with a participant, I would then print out the emergent themes and try to cluster them into groups, and a shape gradually started to form. Some emergent themes fell in importance, being either weak or indeed being subsumed under other stronger themes. Having established this tentative understanding of a participant, I would then move on to the next one, repeating the process.

In the end, I had seven hierarchically organized theme trees in front of me, superordinate themes subsuming themes which in turn subsumed subthemes, and I proceeded to investigate where the commonalities or indeed discrepancies lay. A total of 693 emergent themes had been organized by individual, and the task was now to create a picture of the whole. Some groupings quickly became obvious, whilst other emergent themes stood alone, represented by merely one or two participants. It is important to note that being contrary or different from the general picture did not imply that the emergent theme should be scrapped, this with reference to the openness to paradox and plurality discussed earlier. The criterion for whether an emergent theme should remain was with reference to its importance for the "participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences"

(Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p79) and how well it was connected to the original verbatim. In the end I arrived at a prototype of the theme tree in Appendix 6, and commenced with writing the results chapter that follows this methodology section.

The writing up was much more than writing up in that it became part of the iterative research process. A crucial part was the necessity to go back to the original verbatim of the participants (using the line references connected to each theme, linking it back to all the places in the transcript where it originated), and how this affected the theme tree. Some themes had gained in importance during the analysis, an importance that wasn't fully reflected in the original verbatim, and hence had to be diminished in their prominence. Yet others had been neglected and needed to be pushed to the foreground more. Furthermore, during the course of the writing an entirely new theme emerged. I see this this as testament to the centrality of the writing process that van Manen continually highlights (1990, 2006). It is also an example of Gadamer's (1975/2004) hermeneutic circle in that there is a movement between the whole and the particular, both informing the other. As I lived with the text over time, a background assumption of the participants became manifest, there was something about 'us and them' that underpinned many of their assumptions and attitudes. I found it difficult to make this interpretative step, initially finding such level of interpretation unethical towards the manifest text as uttered by the participants, yet the degree of fit with the material when it was applied made the choice seem more natural and appropriate.

3.3.4   Ethical awareness

It is important to recall Bauman's (1993) advice in the inception of discussing ethics – it is not about creating a safe, impeccable position. It is about engaging with the conundrum of trying to create knowledge without causing undue harm - and even that is a tentative position. Another side of ethics often forgotten in research is the imperative to question culturally and socio-economically constructions of truth and discourse that have a repressing effect on the vulnerable, one such construction according to Bracken, Giller and Summerfield (1997) being the traumatizing PTSD

discourse, another being the increasing medicalization of the human existential cycles of living (Szasz, 2007, van Deurzen, 2009). What follows below however, is a detail of how the research was carried out ethically with reference to the *participants*, with reference to BPS guidelines (2009), and also informed by Bond (2000).

There was no deception of research participants; they were informed of the aim and method of the research before they consented to partake, and they could withdraw their consent at any time without any consequences for them.

The interviewees were not in physical danger at the time of the interview; the interview did not directly examine areas that could be termed 'traumatic' and instead focused on existential motifs. I did not engage in psychotherapy with the research participants. DevAid provided access to their in-house confidential counselling service, in the event that the interview would necessitate it.

The relatively small number of international aid workers returning to Shire is an issue since research participants could be identified from details in their accounts. Fortunately, the IPA method focuses on themes of subjectively experienced meaning, as opposed to detailed individual portrayal. When these themes were illustrated, details were changed to the highest extent possible whilst still ensuring that the flavour and idea of the illustration was retained and therefore anonymisation was ensured. The digital recordings were encrypted at all times according to the principles detailed above (CNSS, 2003), and will be erased when no longer needed for the research.

4   Results

4.1   Introduction

Three superordinate themes were identified in the analysis:

I: Peer support

II: Formal support

III: The experience of going on mission

I will commence with an in-depth look at the participants' descriptions of their experiences of being supported by peers (colleagues and friends around you, family back home et cetera – the first superordinate theme) and then move on to looking at how the experience of formal support (in-organization counselling support, support from management, organizational and structured support – the second superordinate theme) was described. After this I will turn to their descriptions of the experience of being on mission – the third superordinate theme. This section will initially be presented in a temporal fashion, delineating descriptions of the experience of deploying to, being in, and finally coming home from the duty station. The details of being on mission will be wrapped up with a more in-depth look at how the concepts of normality and alienation were recounted, and also how the participants related to security and management issues.

In addition to the thematic presentations above, I will conclude with a section that will explore the participants' experience of themselves, their personalities as well as their motivations. Unlike previous sections, this will be an idiographic view of the participants.

4.2   Superordinate theme I: Peer support

Figure 1: Superordinate theme I: Peer support

Peer support was seen as the crucial and strongest supporting element for the participants. It seemed a constant background, an internalized assumption that never left them. I will examine this experience below, starting with the more overarching theme of peer support being strong, then moving on to the more subtle way that it was experienced as enveloping and being in the background. I will then examine the negative side of peer support, the sometimes too close or engulfing aspect of it. Finally, I will detail the emerging 'us-and-them' theme.

4.2.1   Theme I-1: Peer support is strong

There was a general preference for peer support amongst the participants, an appreciation of it, and the continued experience of it as a strong and important part of life on mission resounds throughout the participants' accounts. As will be seen in further detail below, there was an almost organic, naturally developing sense to peer support. "*I think the informal networks will naturally develop and they'll probably be the most useful in terms of supporting individuals."* (Sid: 144).

Peer support was seen as strong, not only in dealing with the stress and hardships of the mission country, but also with reference to personal problems from home. The excerpt from Kim below speaks to her preference for intense relating.

> *you really do eat your meals with your colleagues, you socialize with them, you work with them. I just think that kind of intensity I think it really suited me but, I also think it really supported me as well. Particularly, because I went through a break-up of a relationship as well while I was there. [ ] I just you know, got through that in way that I don't think I could have done if I was just in Shire City going about my normal business and I think that's kind of a testament to the strength and the intensity of the relationships you build up there.* Kim: 62

There is a connection to the experience of normality in how peers made you feel at home and normal. Social occasions like dinners and parties became crucial in remaining balanced and

resourced. Still, Sid foreshadows the more negative and overwhelming or intrusive potential of peer support. *"when I went to a friend's house for dinner I would come to work the next day kind of you know happy and refreshed and felt like I was living a normal life, whereas times when I would three four five days without leaving the compound I think like anyone I got cabin fever"* (Sid: 91)

Peer support during the mission was not only from colleagues at the duty station, but was also described by many participants as also being from friends and family back home. *"absolutely, that was a really, for me that was probably my single biggest supporting mechanism, because I spent about three or four hours a day Skyping with [partner]."* (Paul: 230). This is in stark contrast to how family at home was often described as *not* supportive for the participant when they actually came home.

Upon returning back home to Shire, peers from the duty station that had returned home just like oneself – mission colleagues – were described as being of special importance. They understood the participants like no one else at home could. They spoke the same language - knew what to discuss and what was of less relevance, whilst someone from Shire may ask more obvious yet unhelpful questions and offer similarly unhelpful responses as well. *"people will ask a bit about your experience and what it was like but, they do tend to be really general questions"* (Kim: 62). Furthermore, on top of familiarity, there seemed to be a certain kind of affinity, a sense of connection between mission colleagues. The intensity of social bonds in such a setting was seen as very different and stronger than that of the relations at home. "*back in the real world where people don't really care about you in the same way, and its a sort of a bit of a shock to the system."* (Paul: 224). Meeting up with ex-Amun workers served to create an Amun-away-from-Amun of sorts, recreating the intense social bonds as well as the familiarity and shared history. The excerpt below also points to how friends at home derived their knowledge of Amun from the news, that it was not the lived experience that ex-Amun staff had. This foreshadows the difficulties that were detailed in contacts with counsellors who may know the theory but failed to have a real experiential connection

to the Amun experience, and also speaks to the idea of 'us-and-them' in that lack of familiarity, having been given the 'wrong idea' by the media, makes it difficult to give support or interact fully with these participants.

> *I think since I have come back the most important support has actually been the network of friends and colleagues that I worked with in Amun City. [ ] I found it really important meeting up with them. Not necessarily to talk about Amun. But, just as a group of people who experienced something similar to me. Because there are people here who in my current team in particular, who are like 'why would you go to Amun?' There's just this gulf between and you can't explain that you can't and what people see on the news here in particular.* Pat: 141

As can be seen with Pat above, there was a sense that peers would understand the participants better than anyone, having had a special kind of experience, and that there was a special bond between them. The two excerpts below take this sense of specialness and connection to an even higher level – not only do the participants describe their Amun friends as familiar and close – they are actually an entirely different category of people. They are bright, capable and likeminded. *"They have similar values and interests and ahh you know bright and capable and I like being surrounded by people like that."* (Victor: 24). Eve also speaks of this special kind of connection established with mission colleagues. There is a sense that the peers need each other, and that these familiar, close, special descriptions are connected to this very need. *"there's a certain kind of person who'd be attracted to that kind of environment, and therefore, there's a lot of likemindedness, there's a lot of sense that we need each other, let's make sure that we support each other."* (Eve: 300).

The peers referred to were exclusively international colleagues, never the local staff. Indeed, there was hardly any mention of contact between national and international staff. *"There were only a couple of local staff so it really was more the international staff"* (Eve: 28). This will be further unpacked in the section on motivations for doing the work in the end of this results chapter. There

are links to group affinity here, Amun staff being outside the 'us' category. At the same time, the difficulty to even meet Amun people was seen as a factor since the security measures were so strict.

Sid described experiencing quite a correlation between how intense the work or security situation was, and the intensity of the peer support. Having served in two different mission countries (both complex emergencies), he could compare the two:

> *In Amun, there wasn't as much of the, the kind of literal sort of caring and looking after team members as there was in Fulai, mainly because the environment was very different. But, cause it's not as dangerous.* Sid: 43

> *Whereas in Amun, I felt that, that's, it wasn't as rigorous, it depended a bit more on who your boss was, and it wasn't as much part of the structure.* Sid: 148

Peer support appears to grow in strength as the intensity of the situation grows; it seems to naturally become stronger. Also, linking to the sense of need creating the experience of being supported above, the participants *needed* peer support to be strong and did indeed experience it that way. It should be noted that as Sid saw peer support weakening in a less intense office, he started seeing more formal support – his boss – as influencing the quality of support available. Peer support came first; only when it failed did formal support come to the fore.

An interesting area highlighted by the participants' accounts was that of the responsibility and the nature in which they offered support to each other. There are references to needs for one's peers to be strong, in the sense that one relied on them. *"knowing that colleagues that are posted with me are up to the job, aren't gonna flake, aren't gonna need huge amounts of support from me, because, you know, one's own resources in that environment are pretty limited."* (Pat: 232). This highlights that support from peers is not only something you get, but very much something you give. Whilst in other accounts the exchange may be described as more organic or mutual, Pat described it as a burden to deliver support. There are also positions on the duty of peers to be supportive – not as a

professional or formal duty, but rather an ethical 'the right thing to do' position. These duties were both directed at others and self. *"I think people do get quite burnt out, and I do think that it is the responsibility of the colleagues to spot that"* (Sid: 45). This account does point to what Pat was saying above about support being difficult to offer, yet its message is that this offering is an interpersonal duty, an ethics of people relating. Indeed, Eve relates an incident when the formal support was insufficient, and how the group shouldered the duty: *"someone needed to fulfil that role and in the end we all did it ourselves and everybody was hugely supportive."* (Eve: 140). She doesn't speak about something draining, nor any ethical imperative, but rather something that you simply do.

Grace had a different connection to peer support, recounting that her senior management role made her feel that she had to distance herself from the staff she managed in order to remain professional. *"I took a conscious decision when I arrived that I couldn't get too close to my team rightly or wrongly"* (Grace: 74) Still, the support that kept her going had a crucial personal quality and was, despite sometimes having an element of formal connections (line manager for example), based on the person and feelings of personal relationships. *"in terms of support Sarah my DevAid line manager in Shire City, [partner] at the end of a phone and Natalie were three of the four main parts of support. The fourth was my coach who's called Genevieve"* (Grace: 42). Indeed, she exemplifies this by highlighting the personal, family, fathering connection to a manager that then made this manager a peer and strong support.

> *helped most was [ ] my Reporting Officer in DevAid [ ] he's a friend I've known him for 6 years you know ahm I know his family and he is a very kind of pastoral person who takes his pastoral responsibility he's a father [ ] and there was that kind of fathering you know caring emotional support, psychological support ahh but mainly confidence building that he gave me.* Grace: 24

In the end, Grace found support from her peers, the crucial point being that she did not consider those working under her as peers, indeed she evidenced much fear and suspicion against them. Her

peers were in the higher echelons of the hierarchy, or indeed based on personal connections.

Grace's account, together with the generalized lack of mention of connections or deriving peer

support from Amun staff, and indeed the also often mentioned (in the section on formal support)

friction when relating to staff more senior to oneself, speaks to the theme of 'us-and-them' that will

be described at the end of this section. *"And you know I had, I had different stresses because I was*

the leader [ ] for other people you know they'd speak to their team mates." (Grace: 139).

4.2.2 *Theme I-2: Peer support envelops and holds, it is in the background*

The experience of peer support seems to be an enveloping, subtle, background experience, as

opposed to an overt and structured one. Sid consistently referred to it using visual analogies, linking

it to being seen. *"Well, I don't know, there was more just a general sense of people kind of looking*

out for each other and keeping an eye on each other." (Sid: 47).

There was a sense of a lack of deliberation, a lack of intentionality, a lack of specific details in the

support – it was just there as a backdrop. This is also connected to the importance placed on the

availability of support coupled with the statement that they didn't necessarily need to avail

themselves of it *"To know that it is there is comforting. I think it would be a very different experience*

if, it wasn't there." (Pat: 70). It supports by its very being there, not by anyone doing an active

intervention. The fact that the opportunity to avail oneself of support was there, was a supportive

factor in itself. It was available and this was often enough. *"To a point, I mean, again, these are*

indirect supports, so none of it is 'oh, I need to support you', its all, it's there, therefore its supports

you, you know, by its very, by its very being there." (Paul: 134)

There is a link from this background sense of presence of peer support to the experience of support

as something that holds and envelops you. There is clarity in regard to peer support being created by

individuals, friends, real people that support you. This support shows itself through the peers' ability

to understand the participant, and the participant's ability to trust the peers. The word camaraderie

was sometimes used by the participants, often in connection with being able to rely on one's peers,

feeling included, surrounded and supported by them. These accounts also link back to peers being one's own group, back to the idea of 'us-and-them'.

The excerpt from Pat below speaks to the importance of being able to trust one's peers enough to be open with them. As was quite common in the interviews, she proactively highlighted that the support did *not* originate from formal support mechanisms but rather from peers. *"it was more just having colleagues that I felt I could trust to talk to about frustrations or, individuals in the office or, the broader situation and stuff it wasn't necessarily systems that DevAid had put in place"* (Pat: 54).

An elucidating example of the value of feeling embedded by peers, Kim relates an example of when she was prevented from accessing peer support due to mortar shells being propelled into her compound. A strong wish for inclusion and connection is evident in this excerpt.

> *Just knowing I couldn't do anything about it. So, a lot of the other people lived in a hardened building and they could all go out of their bedrooms in fact you are supposed to go in the corridor and get away from the windows and there were some loungers in there so they could kind of get together and have a sneaky gin and calm their nerves but, if you are in a pod then of course, you can't step outside so yeah that was terrifying.* Kim: 58

This should be seen in the contrasting light of the feeling of being embedded, the relief and 'shared burden being lighter' when she re-joined her colleagues after a night in seclusion.

> *you see all your mates and your colleagues the minute you get up. You know, everyone is in the same boat going God didn't get much sleep last night. Then you kind of go in and the first thing you have is sort of the intelligence and security briefing when you are told exactly what's been going on [ ] You realize that everyone is safe and everyone is in it together and you are fine.* Kim: 60

Though the aspect of normality will be discussed under a separate heading, there is a distinct quality to peer support in that it makes things feel normal, at home, less alien. More relevant to this section

on peer support is the focus on people, the active endeavour to support through engendering social, informal peer connections. Eve relates her memory of first coming to the mission country, how her peers actively took her under their wings, how she was welcomed and included. This then led to an easier naturalization into the mission country, as her new-found peers eased the transition into accepting the mission country as normal and home.

> *in my first week my predecessor arranged a dinner in the house that she lived in, I was gonna move into her room and she invited a number of people that she thought were gonna be useful for me to meet, not from a work perspective but from social support perspective and that and that worked very well and it made me feel really welcome[ ] we just got out of Amun City a little bit and saw some you know really pretty valley nearby, it just kind of felt like I could live there and it would be a bit more like home than I'd anticipated.* Eve: 114

Paul touches on many of these themes, the sense of common ground and being similar, and also the importance of peer support not only in concrete ways but also as an internalized concept that sustains you continually. He points to special qualities of peer support and friendship that came to the fore in stressful situations, noting our tendency to connect in a more real way when nitty-gritty details get swept away by the urgency of the environment. This resonates with Sid's account in the previous sub-section, where an intense environment engenders stronger peer support. This time, however, the account relates to the difference in intensity and concomitant peer support as it is experienced between Shire friends and mission friends – the less intense end of the scale as compared to the difference between Amun and Fulai.

> *you're surrounded by people that are emotionally strong, probably a bit like you, maybe more so, maybe less so, but to some extent emotionally strong. And that, because of the situation you're in, you're able to get, you know, forget about the crap, you know the, the sort of little things that annoy people in each other in a normal environment become insignificant and irrelevant, and so people focus much more on what matters if you like*

survival, umm, the stress, the pressure, all that sort of stuff. And so, that group of cohorts that you're with play I think quite a supporting role [ ] that sort of expectation of and solidarity with others, you know, was very comforting. Umm, I think human beings are social animals, and knowing that you are not alone, in something, and that there is support makes it much more tolerable. Paul: 124

The excerpt above also furthers the understanding of one's peers being the ones providing peer support, and that these peers are similar to you, special compared to others and also have a special connection to you as a result of being in a similar and intense environment. Paul, below, highlights the solace of 'being in the same boat', indeed the importance of availing oneself of the support from being in this boat, as he questions the usefulness of simply focusing on work and ignoring incidents.

Umm, as an example, there was a bomb that went off just about a hundred meters from my house and blew in windows and doors and so on. Now, this is kind of a strange example, because on one hand people, some of the people went straight back to work, and pretended that nothing had happened, which I thought was very unhealthy. But at the end of the day we did come together, and have pizza. And even though […] nobody wanted to talk about what happened, knowing that this had happened, that we had gotten together in sort of extraordinary fashion, normally we wouldn't, was then acknowledgment if you like that this is something that required us to take a moment of pause, and to realize – yes, we are all in this together. Paul: 128

As an example of the need to rely on others, to trust others, Victor speaks of a time when he was being attacked by insurgents yet still needed to keep his colleagues informed. The assumption that a friend would never let them down fits well with the participants' reliance and trust in their peers, and also the ethical imperative to support coupled with the automatic willingness to do so.

Both of us hyperventilated for quite a long time afterwards to the extent that it was quite

difficult to speak on the phone but I had a job to do and she was obviously not going to let

me do it on my own so she was helping me even though it wasn't her job. Victor: 108

As mentioned, Grace's position was different from the other participants when it came to her

account of her experience of peer support, and there is no indication that she saw peer support as a

background or enveloping phenomenon, except of course the link to peer support being focused on

personal relationships with people as opposed to relying on formal structures, as detailed at the end

of the last sub-section.

4.2.3   *Theme I-3: More challenging aspects of peers*

There was no indication that Sid or Kim felt pressured or confined by the presence or demands of

peer support, however the remaining five participants did describe experiencing some challenging

aspects. These challenging aspects were in the territory of feeling trapped, one's privacy being

invaded, and needing to remove oneself from the intensity of the situation. Grace, the senior

manager, also mentioned experiencing some reticence or even caution in relation to the people she

worked with or managed.

The experience of feeling trapped was depicted in the following ways: *"there's no real escape"* (Eve:

30)*, "you never can get away"* (Victor: 88)*, and "this is a concentration camp"* (Paul: 98). An

evocative picture, Paul recounted how he arrived at an international airport outside Amun, relating

the story as if he was finally free to move unfettered. *"just wanting to walk to the end of the street*

to get a taxi instead of getting one right at the airport. [ ] I didn't have anyone tell me how far I could

walk, where, in which direction I could walk, I just get out and walk from there." (Paul: 222).

The excerpts below highlight different crucial ways of 'getting out' of the office, whether to parties

with friends that weren't colleagues, using Skype to speak to people outside the country, or for a

real break outside the country. It allowed the participants to let go of the stress of too much

intimacy and eventually enjoy each other's company again, being able to receive and provide peer support again.

> *having a wider network of people that you can go and talk to about all sorts of other stuff or, maybe they have been to a different part of Amun is really important.* Pat: 82

> *I mentally said to myself 'I need to start getting out of Amun even though I can't get out'. So I started searching out old friends on Skype™, to see if I could start talking to people outside of Amun.* Paul: 242

> *like living in a village it gets on your nerves and by the end of six weeks in Amun City I had to get out I didn't want to see those faces ever again then you have your break and you go back in and it's fine.* Victor: 168

Not necessarily a negative aspect of the actual peer support, but perhaps more of a fear that actually indicates the value of spontaneous peer support, Pat speaks of the importance of not formalizing peer support. Given peer support's character of being naturally developing, between peers and freely offered, it comes as little surprise that a formalization of it would indicate that it becomes part of the hierarchy, is not offered out of honest care (but rather duty or professional undertaking). *"If you wanted to hang out with a big group you could and if, you didn't, you didn't then nobody batted an eyelid."* (Pat: 66).

Finally, Grace repeatedly mentioned experiences of colleagues as being volatile and threatening. She worried about them rather than was worried for them. As above, this description was at odds with the other participants, but still has a potential link to the other participants feeling confined, invaded or needing to get out. There is also a potential link to the idea of 'us-and-them' in that her staff actually weren't seen as peers, rather they were depicted as threatening and difficult others. *"either they're adrenalin junkies you know and maybe not self-aware and as I say maybe don't have enough support networks or actually anger management problems which was an issue with one person"*

(Grace: 89). This is the culmination of Grace's differing distinction of who it is that belongs to 'us-and-them', in that the people who were 'us' to the other participants have now become Grace's 'them' (mainstream staff), whilst her 'us' (senior management) actually seems to contain what the other participants call 'them'. Nonetheless, the distinction between affinity to those she considers her group versus those outside this group remains.

4.2.4   Theme I-4: Us-and-them

There is background theme evident throughout these descriptions of peer support, indeed it will also surface as I detail different aspects of the participants' descriptions of formal support and also their experience of mission life. I have chosen to call this theme 'us-and-them', since the core of it seems to be the distinction of the participants' group in relation to other groups *"There's just this gulf between [people from home] and you"* (Pat: 141). The distinction appears with reference to higher hierarchies or superiors, and also in what can be seen as a reference to below the participants, vis-à-vis local staff. Not only power relations distinguish the group however, indeed the power differences seem to only point to a more core distinction – whether a person is 'one of us' or not. Even if on a similar hierarchal level, there seems to be a focus on similar experience, similar personality, and similar understanding. Not only is there a distinction of group, there is also an effect on the interaction between the groups in that it seems as if support is much easier to receive from one's own group *"there's nobody to empathize with you other than those who are going through exactly the same thing"* (Paul: 204). Support is rarely accepted from those that don't have the knowledge or experience suitable to be 'one of us'. Equally, support is sometimes difficult to accept from those in power, or indeed from those with much less power (Amun staff).

4.3   Superordinate theme II: Formal and other supports

Figure 2: Superordinate theme II: Formal and other supports
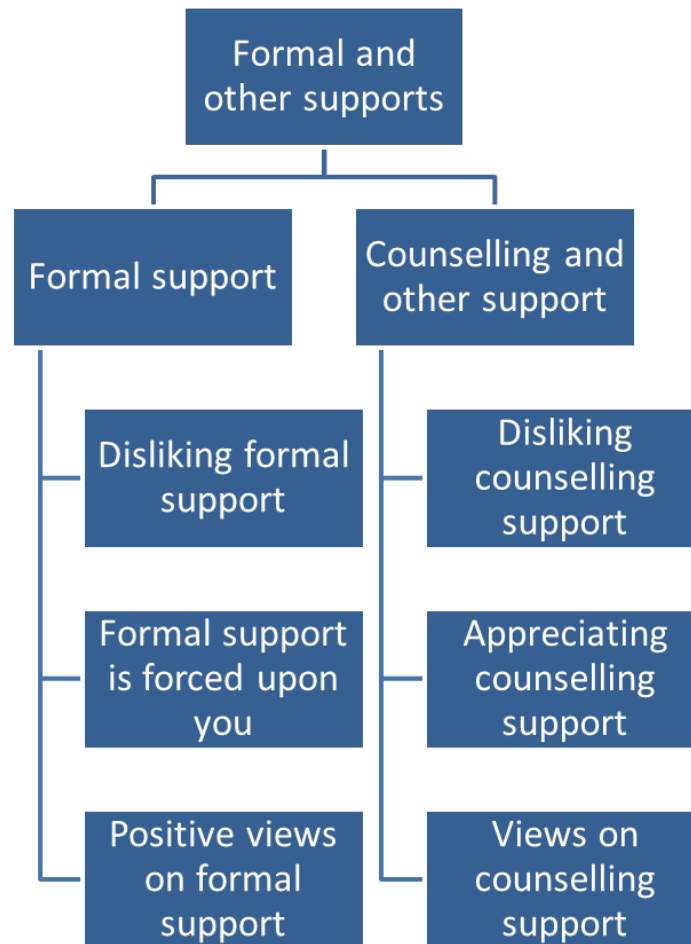
I will now examine the participant's experience of less personal and more formal forms of support. The term formal support is an attempt to convey a sense of a vertical hierarchy between the supporter and the one supported, connecting the support to being structured and rule based, the support being seen as coming from an institution as opposed to a person. There are dissenting voices to the generally negative view displayed towards formal support, and these voices will also be shown below.

4.3.1   Theme II-1: Formal support

This sub-section will commence with a paragraph of issues arising in formal support, then move on to strong negative descriptions of it, and end with some positive reports of formal support.

The experiences of formal support included qualities of it being structured and impersonal *"options of things"* (Sid: 39). Formal support was often juxtaposed with support from peers, the latter being preferred. There are links to the 'us-and-them' idea in that formal support often seems to be described in more of a 'them' sense than an 'us' one. An interesting example of this is Grace who describes her coach as more caring due to the coach working pro-bono. This is a very clear statement of how payment and the subsequent professionalization of the relationship decreased the sense of care (and 'us-ness') that the participant reported. *"she was doing this for free so again it was somebody else caring"* (Grace: 127). Indeed, this sense of distinction between impersonal structures vis-à-vis individuals with whom the participants had personal connections was continual throughout the interviews. "*I think the things I wanted were more about individuals rather than systems"* (Sid: 93), *"These systems are all very well but what actually matters is the individuals"* (Eve: 224).

There is an obvious connection to the discussion around connection to peers in the previous section, where the participants almost exclusively connected to and derived support from those that were similar and were in a similar situation as they were. The way that the participants describe their relations to these 'systems' is even further removed and alienated. Indeed, what the participants are looking for is a sense of connection, someone they can trust, "*I think a lot of the time it was more just having colleagues that I felt I could trust to talk to [ ] it wasn't necessarily systems that DevAid had put in place*" (Pat: 54), not some sort of cold impersonal system. There are also accounts of finding DevAid's support not being adequate. It should be noted that this lack adequacy is seen to be due to lack of understanding, "*DevAid doesn't get this*" (Kim: 120), something that resonates with the notion of familiarity discussed in the previous section. DevAid formal support structures are not described as 'being in the same boat' as the participants, but is rather something alien and coming from outside, making it difficult to accept and receive support from it. Another slightly negative viewpoint on DevAid's support was more practical, "*I didn't find that kind of response from DevAid particularly helpful, it wasn't what I felt I needed.*" (Pat: 54)

Some participants did take one step further in the negativity displayed towards formal support, in that they revealed an actively distrusting or scorning attitude to it. Not only was formal support difficult to avail oneself of, unhelpful or alien as described above, it was actively distrusted and scorned. There were statements of neglecting to avail oneself of the recommended formal support structures available "*I'm aware that there are a number of things that I was supposed to do and I haven't done.*" (Sid: 22), and also a reticence to open up in a personal way to management hence indicating a distrust in the relationship *"I wouldn't dream of sharing that kind of thing with my senior management."* (Pat: 119), and even direct statements of being wary of receiving formal support: "*I'm wary of getting support from within the government system.*" (Sid: 105), coupled with an account of what was considered a deep breach of trust, clearly driving the message home through both words, body language and tone: "*And particularly given that the boss then did need to take action and this person was, their tour was cut short and they were sent back. I think that that, that*

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was hmm, I think that the person in question really saw it as a breach of trust" (Sid: 51). This distrust is also linked to the sense that support is forced upon the participant, that it is something the participant does not want to do yet has to." *It was more the kind of blanket approach that 'everyone was feeling bad' which I don't think everybody was. The assumption that everyone would benefit from this kind of not quite 'group therapy"'* (Pat: 119).

Finally, there were occasions of positive experiences with formal support, and also appreciative views on the counselling support that will be detailed in the subsequent sub-section after this one. Paul had a 'two sides of a coin' approach to formal support "It was both a constraining factor, a factor that invaded you privacy [ ]. But also in the positive sense, that it's that protecting presence, that doesn't, that is awake at all times." (Paul: 174). Kim had a potentially positive view on formal support "I never felt that I lacked it because I felt very psychologically very strong while I was out there. But em that's something that could potentially be a good or you know, just I suppose a safeguard." (Kim: 98), and even Sid who was in general quite negative towards it, felt that formal support was needed as it was management's responsibility to look after the staff. "that becomes kind of something that the manager and the kind of hierarchy needs to take seriously." (Sid: 97)

4.3.2   *Theme II-2: Counselling support*

Moving on to the counselling side of formal support, I will first report the negative voices, then the positive ones. After this, I will try to convey a sense of *how* counselling was described to be experienced, looking at issues within the counselling.

Sid and Pat were quite skeptical, both towards individuals seeking counselling, and towards counselling in itself. There were positions indicating that individuals that required counselling were incompetent "*competent people, don't really [ ] turn to a counsellor."* (Sid: 40) and not being able to get on with their work, indeed indicating that these individuals shouldn't have been hired *"appoint people who will cope"* (Pat: 70). These positions were offered in a very matter of fact tone; it was a rational opinion that where there was a job that needed to be done; if you couldn't do it (indicated

by your need of counselling) you shouldn't have gotten the job in the first place. A second cluster of descriptions about *how* counselling was, had a different tone than the one above about counselling indicating incompetence in the individual. Whilst the former was more rational and aggressive, this latter sounded much more defensive. Counselling itself was described as something that was forced upon you *"they were forced to get counselling"* (Sid: 42); it was connected to formal support, management above, and was also distrusted as something that could betray the participant. *"She turned to some of the counsellors [ ] the message was immediately relayed to our boss, and she [ ] was absolutely furious because she felt this breached her confidentiality."* (Sid: 49). There was also a sense that counselling was a frustrating waste of time.

> *Our management team decided that morale was getting low and that we needed to deal*
> *with this in some "team building" kind of way. [ ] Ridiculous waste of money and, brought in*
> *a counsellor and we had to do all of these team building exercises. It was just the most,*
> *probably one the most frustrating experiences while I was there. I didn't find it supportive; I*
> *found it quite the opposite. They basically, kind of forced everyone to talk about their*
> *frustrations* Pat: 110

There were also numerous positive voices - the positive experience of counselling centered on areas such as the enjoyment and usefulness of counselling *"counselling was also very helpful"* (Victor: 78), counselling gave perspective *"put things into perspective"* (Kim: 134) and reduced stress *"allowed me to sort of de-stress"* (Paul: 170). The counsellor's perceived neutrality and objectivity were also important considerations. Moving on to issues within the counselling, the issue of distance or estrangement from the counsellor stands out. It sometimes seemed that the counsellor wasn't aware of the situation in Amun, and this engendered a sense of distance. Victor relates an example when a counsellor's ignorance of the extreme security precautions necessary when operating in the highly volatile Amundalai caused the client to have quite a rejection against the counsellor and the organization.

they were supposed to have what they called fragile state counselling, people who were

supposed to understand the situation in Amun and Fulai only when he said you know she said

tell me about your job and he said oh well you know I cover Amundalai I have to travel down

to Amundalai quite a lot and she said oh that's interesting do you drive yourself or do you go

on the bus which was really funny but ahm completely undermined the credibility for a long

time that she had with us and then obviously that the organization had with us, because he

thought it was hilarious and he told the whole office and everybody thought it was hilarious

too and it's a shame that this woman had no understanding of and probably hadn't received

any training in the kind of environment that she was counselling people in. Victor: 78

There is a connection to the earlier discussion about support being more easily received from people who have a similar lived experience, who are part of us and not them. Situations such as the above made the counsellor seem fully alien, disconnected and ignorant to the participant, hence losing all ability to help – Victor later stated that were he faced with a similar situation, he would endeavor to end the conversation as quickly as possible and never again contact the counsellor. There is almost a sense of betrayal in Victor's account of this, as if only the ones with the right credentials get let in, and that this counsellor snuck in and then got exposed. A less charged example is Paul's critique of counsellors *"Can't relate because they haven't been there. So even though theoretically I'm sure they understand the theory, you know, at least your bio says... – it's not enough"* (Paul: 154)

Also increasing the perceived distance from the counsellor was the fact that most of the counselling was delivered over telephone. The issues with distance counselling included practical details *"because a lot of communication isn't verbal, right, so having someone on the telephone is not the same"* (Paul: 152), but also links back to the connection and shared lived experience (or lack thereof) that seems to flow through many of the participants' accounts of support *"that person isn't there, and therefore in your mind doesn't know, can't relate, basically, on a very basic level."* (Paul: 152)*.* This idea is further supported by Victor's account of how telephone counselling actually could work,

as long as connection, trust and awareness of the situation in Amun had been established by the counsellor. *"one of the counsellors [ ] came [ ] and did face to face sessions with staff [ ]. So we got to know her quite well so people trusted her, she understood the context"* (Victor: 50). An outsider can become an insider and thus be able connect with and support the participants, someone from 'them' can join 'us' if they get to know us and we get to know them.

Another issue with the counselling was the wish for more specific information, more detailed cautions of the perils of coming home, the residual stress that could be experienced *"to talk me through I guess, you know you may actually not relax for the next few months you know you may make me aware"* (Grace: 95). This fits well with the strong accounts that will be explored in the next section, accounts that speak of the difficulty in returning back home, descriptions of how this was the most difficult part of the job for a number of reasons *"I think it would have been useful to have been given more guidance on what you should do after leaving"* (Grace: 97).

An interesting idea displayed by Pat, but also voiced by Paul, was the position that counselling would weaken you, weaken your defenses, soften you and make you less likely to cope in the harsh environment of a complex emergency. "*I don't like the 'are you ok, are you sure you are ok' because I think that is undermining my own belief or assumption that I am coping."* (Pat: 223). Paul adds the idea that softening may be good for the individual in the long run, yet detrimental whilst on mission.

> *what happens to you in this environment is that you sort of build your walls of protection, in your own internal walls of protection, of emotional distance from things. In order to be able to cope. So, having a mother, would require you to lower those walls. Now, in the long run, I think that's probably be very helpful, so by the time you end your time in Amun, you're probably in a healthier place, in a more relaxed place, because you have had that additional support, you've been able to get rid of some of that additional anxiety. But while you're in it, it might meant a little bit less stability, emotional stability, and therefore undermining your ability to do your job.* Paul: 148 - 150

It should be noted, which Pat and Paul clearly did note, that it is a case of establishing balance. Too much counselling may make you soft, yet there is a danger in going too far on the hardness end as well *"The difficulty is that you can take that I am fine I am resilient far too far. "* (Pat: 225), doggedly carrying on despite stress and hardship without any support.

> *Especially because when you are in an environment like that you feel that you need to be able to cope. You steel yourself. It's like, you brace for an impact. Therefore, you steel yourself, you know you need to be able to cope, and that creates a danger, that creates a danger that you're in that position and don't know how to ask for help, or don't feel that you should be asking for help, because asking for help means that you can't do this, and you should be able to do this*. Paul: 280

I see a connection with the beginning of this sub-section here, in that there is a premium on coping and not accessing support, but that this position can be a result of different mindsets. You can refuse counselling support since it would make you feel weak in Sid's case, or you can refuse it since it could weaken you in Paul's case. Or you can approach both positions simultaneously as Pat did.

Finally, Paul's position on forcing counselling on staff was in stark opposition to Sid and Pat's reticence to do so. There was significant trust in counsellors, and a strong position that counselling should be mandatory for all staff in complex emergencies. Linked to this is the notion that staff may not know what is psychologically best for them.

> *But I dare say, if you made it a requirement, because obviously a psychotherapist if they're any good, will never try and force their subject to say, but rather will go as far as that subject is willing to go. So, the experience itself should never be a negative one. So I think it should simply be put in part of your terms that says 'when you get back, you will be scheduled for a debrief with so and so, and – live with it'. Because if you leave it up to the individual, they are likely to, especially in this culture, say 'no, I don't need it'*. Paul: 258

4.4 Superordinate theme III: The experience of going on mission

Figure 3: Superordinate theme III: The experience of going on mission
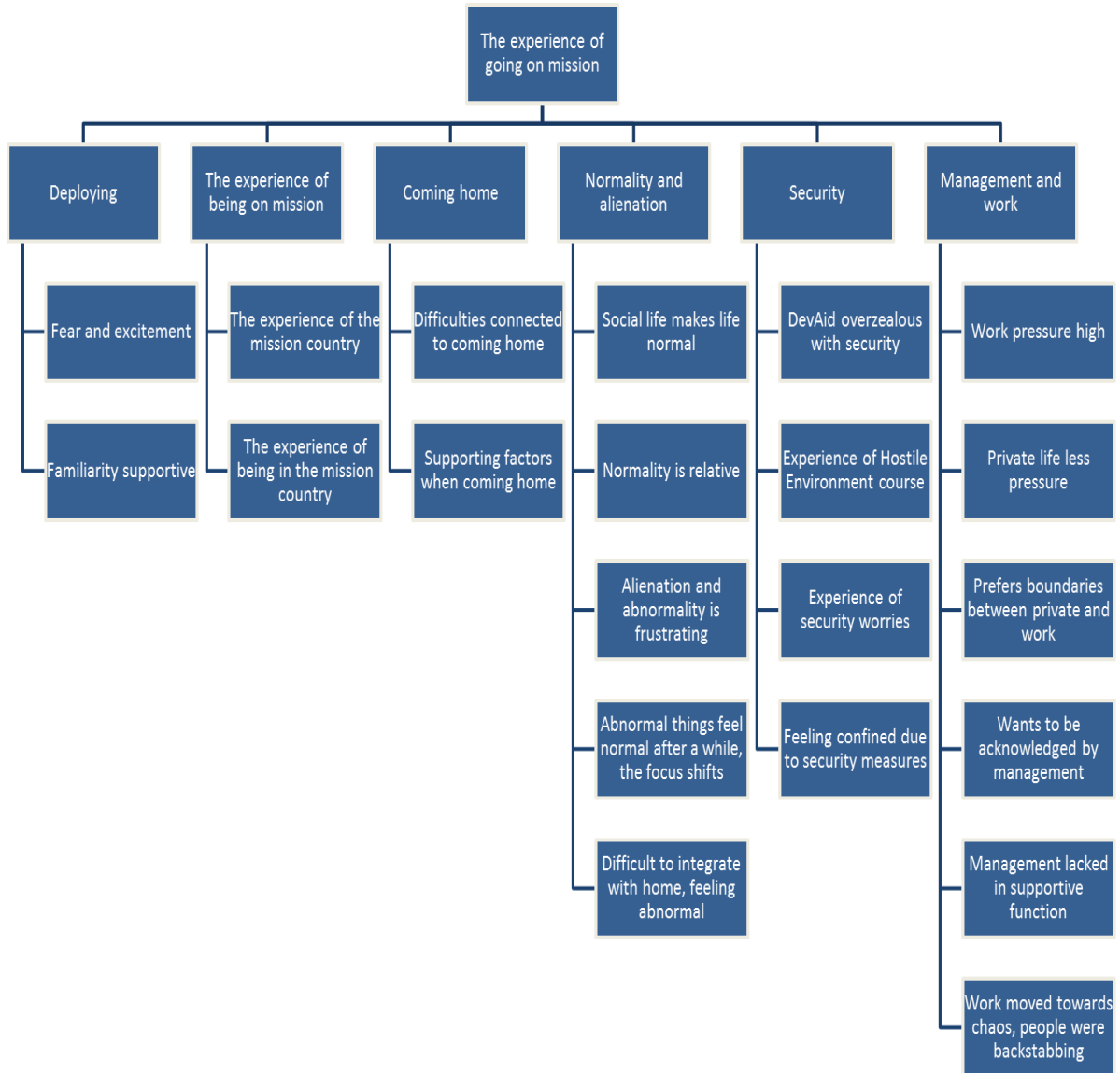
How is it to be on mission, how is it to deploy to, be in and then come home from a complex emergency? These are essential questions to ask if one is to understand the plight and also joys of being an international aid worker. As I deepened into the analysis of the seven participants, themes of alienation versus feeling at home, normality versus abnormality, and also stress versus deep experiences of purpose and well-being arose. I will start with the detailing of three temporally delineated experiences of mission life – deployment, the experience of being on mission and finally coming home. After this, I will explore the theme of normality and alienation, something that seemed to touch each participant. In closing, I'm ending by detailing more specific issues around security and management.

4.4.1   Theme III-1: Deploying

Deploying to Amun - the planning, actual travel and subsequent settling in, carried with it a mix of fear and excitement. The former emotion was often soothed by a growing or even existing sense of familiarity.

The fear and perceived chaos of deploying was linked both to unfamiliarity and security worries. The security worries were in a sense quite simple *"I was scared witless"* (Pat: 179), whilst the familiarity issues connect to the sense of being outside the group or situation "*it was a very quick and sudden departure [ ] and also start of you know a new job and you know completely new country which I knew nothing about [ ] it was a big change"* (Grace: 20) and then gradually moving into the situation and becoming familiar and hence less estranged from it, being more relaxed in it. Fear gradually turned, to some extent at least, into excitement. "*I had no pre-conception of what it would be like to be stuck in the back of a Hercules [C-130 cargo airplane] with a whole bunch of soldiers. [ ] A mixture of fear and excitement"* (Pat: 183)

Familiarity was often helped by speaking to colleagues "*I chatted a lot to people who had been out there before. [ ] it was those conversations which were most helpful."* (Sid: 136), that had been or currently were in the mission country. There was a sense of being adopted into the group *"in my first*

week my predecessor arranged a dinner [ ] she invited a number of people [ ] it made me feel really welcome. [ ] trips that involved other housemates [ ] it just kind of felt like I could live there and it would be a bit more like home than I'd anticipated." (Eve: 114), hence on top of the information sharing there was also a sense of being accepted and made part of a group. DevAid had a policy of flying in newcomers to their duty station for a week of familiarization, after which they returned home to pack and got ready for the real deployment. This may have seemed excessive *"It might be a bit wasteful to fly someone out to somewhere for a few days"* (Kim: 128), yet was highly appreciated, again highlighting the supportive function of being familiar with the location. *"helped me to be able to go there and hit the ground running and feel like sort of understood how it worked it felt a bit familiar"* (Eve: 96).

4.4.2   Theme III-2: The experience of being on mission

Looking at how the participants experienced their mission country, what they thought of it and how they related to it, Sid, Kim, Victor and Grace said next to nothing despite direct questions such as 'how was it in Amun?', and 'how did you feel about going to Amun?'. It seems as if their lives unfolded inside the DevAid compound with little personal connection to the bustling city and country outside the walls. The remaining participants had a complex view on Amun in that they experienced it as both wonderful and dysfunctional, loving the fascinating mess that is Amun. Quotes range from the quite negative ones, *"it was a complete mess and you did think well what can I do?"* (Eve: 42) to more complex statements indicating an affection yet a sense of almost despairing awareness of the difficult condition Amun was in.

> *it's fascinating because we are dealing you know, with a country that is vast, hugely varied; comprehensive; you know it's got all these different tribal dynamics, you've got the shift from old ways of doing things completely corrupted by the war [ ] how do you try and get something out of that that is vaguely stable more or less acting in the interests of most of the population. You know, how do you deal with corruption? How do you deal with a justice*

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system which is completely broken and pretty barbaric in places and you know, how do you

deal with human rights' in a place like that with lot of cultural issues really. Pat: 10

A different viewpoint is how Amun was *for the participant*. How was it for them to be there? Again, we find little from Victor and Grace – it seemed as if they weren't really interested. They did their jobs and then left Amun or Fulai in the evening either via studies *"And I'm doing a degree in [ ] so I spend a lot of my evenings and weekends doing that [ ] definitely a better use of my time than any of the other options available out there."* (Victor: 36), or speaking to their partner *"at the end of the day you know whatever happened in Fulaidinia you know I would leave and I would go back to my normal life"* (Grace: 30).

The remaining participants described their experiences in Amun as ranging from quite normal *"I think that Amun was like living somewhere normal"* (Sid: 113) and easy *"Being in Amun City was a piece of cake"* (Pat: 70), to stronger emotions like enveloping and all-encompassing *"it's all absorbent. It's all you do, think, dream about."* (Pat: 177). This all-encompassing sense will be a crucial point in the difficulty to return home since it could make Shire feel boring and scattered. The excitement of living in Amun further added to the difference from home - working in Amun could be the greatest thing in life; the peak experiences often mentioned referred to going on helicopters *"fantastic the best job I ever had for that in terms of excitement and getting out and about. It was great"* (Pat: 189), and meeting important people, being empowered *"a sense of power [ ] able to really influence"* (Paul: 52). Apart from these peak experiences, there was also a deep sense of satisfaction and perhaps happiness experienced *"in a sort of emotional and psychological sense I think I thrived in Amun more than I have thrived anywhere else."* (Kim: 74)

A more negative side to the descriptions of the experience of being in Amun were the theories that developed in regard to coping with stress. There were worries around misuse of alcohol *"some really shocking stories of drinking parties"* (Pat: 228), and views on emotional hardening *"a bomb that went off just about a hundred meters from my house and blew in windows and doors [ ] some of the*

people went straight back to work, and pretended that nothing had happened, which I thought was very unhealthy." (Paul: 128). As already discussed, emotional hardening was seen as a balance, and clearly some participants described their experiences with self and others as having gone too far on the hardened side. This hardening was often seen as contributing to issues when returning home, which is where I will now turn my focus.

4.4.3 Theme III-3: Coming home

> *you are sort of running full tilt and then you put the brakes on!* Pat: 157

It was difficult to come back home for the participants *"I think the challenges that a lot of people have are when they come back to work in Shire City."* (Victor: 164). A sense of alienation from Shire and also missing the intensity of Amun and one's relationships there permeates the interviews *"leaving something that I really enjoyed and I didn't actually feel ready to leave at the time"* (Eve: 252).

Kim highlights some crucial points that many participants shared about coming home, especially the difficulties of coming home from Amun not stemming from any particularly bad experiences there, but rather being about difficulties in trying to fit back in with Shire, missing the intensity of the relations in Amun, the focus nature of life on mission. She paints an evocative picture of the scattered life she experienced in Shire, being separated from her friends, constantly travelling to and from work.

> *really, really difficult coming back [ ] none has put it down to I mean experiencing something bad in Amun. Actually, in Amun in Amun City particularly. Even in Amundalai you didn't face much that was particularly bad [ ] you come from the situation where you've got these close intense relationships and support networks where it takes you two minutes to walk home. Where you have no other source of stress in your life, other than a really busy, busy job because you are driven everywhere. [ ] In Shire City you have to own or rent a house, you*

have to pay your bills, you have to book travel. You have to travel for two hours a day just to

get to work. You know, at the end of your working day, people go perhaps, 60 miles apart to

go to their different homes. [ ] it's not necessarily that you got PTSD or something. Actually,

it's about adjusting to normal life again and I think that's less thought about or understood.

Kim: 120

A core part of the descriptions is the change in intensity as described by Kim above, and further

illustrated by Pat. It is to be noted how Pat also includes the sense of power, importance and

influence that she enjoyed in Amun, a power that feels sorely lacking in Shire.

I was finding the transition back to, a very different kind of job a very different work

environment [ ] in Amun City, where you live and work with your colleagues, you socialize

with them, you have big parties with them, you go to see Government Ministers with them,

you brief the Prime Minister with them. It's very high paced frenetic, exciting and frustrating

in equal measures and then you come to a desk job Pat: 60

Not only is life less intense, more scattered, less powerful in Shire. There was also a strong sense

that people at home didn't understand the returning participant, again a reminder of the results

described in the 'us-and-them' part of the peer support section. Unless you've been there, you can't

relate, you can't understand, you can't support. "*I couldn't really talk to people about what it was*

like. because unless you experience it yourself, you can't quite get a grasp on emotionally what does

that mean, or on a practical level what does it mean, I mean you can't quite relate" (Paul: 204).

Though returning to friends and family was often mentioned as a very good thing *"seeing my friends*

and family has been where I got most my support from." (Sid: 105), there was a sense that it was

nice since it was supposed to be nice, but that the connection wasn't that deep. *"I am enjoying being*

back in Shire City, seeing my friends, meeting my family, blah, blah, blah all of that. " (Pat: 165) At

the same time, it was described as very important to connect or keep the connection with others

with similar experiences from Amun. It created a sense of sharedness and normality, especially since

it was so difficult to have this sense of shared lived experience with friends from home. "*I think when I first came back I needed [ ] that kind of camaraderie and sort of you know, everyone having had the same experience*" (Kim: 114). This sense of alienation from Shire and its citizens, this experience of difference or abnormality will be examined at greater depth in the following section on normality and alienation.

It is important to remember that not all issues with coming home are unrelated to difficult times in Amun. Indeed, a good half of the participants mentioned persistent bodily discomforts that they linked to experiences in Amun *"an underlying level tension in my gut"* (Grace: 24). There is a sense that these bodily symptoms were more automatic, more background experiences. They happened and gradually faded away *"whenever I hear certain noises, I assume it's a mortar, obviously only for about three seconds, and I think it will probably just take some time for that to go away."* (Sid: 113), whilst the more emotional responses to the difficulties of coming back were in the foreground of the participants' experiences. Of perhaps equal or greater importance or impact was the *worry* of being traumatized or suffering from PTSD. "it's quite possible [ ] to be suffering from a mild form of post traumatic stress. [ ] there is a concern that there is an underlying long term effect that you can't quite put your finger on [ ] there's a big black hole about – was there any permanent effect" (Paul: 286-288).

There was a sense of a honeymoon period of maybe three months when returning home was joyous, and that the real troubles of returning come after this. It seems as if the elation of meeting your friends again, and the relief of leaving a strenuous job with inherent security risks, largely obliterates other concerns. Gradually, however, friend's lack of truly understanding you, the relative lack of excitement et cetera start getting to you. *"the first three months when you come back are actually the easiest because everything is new and it's nice to be back, and you know, everyone is glad to see you and you're not in a dangerous environment. It's after that, I think that it kind of kicks in a little bit more."* (Pat: 171). Consequently, the immediate DevAid focus on supporting the participants as

they returned became problematic. There was little need for support initially, it was when the excitement of returning had settled that support was needed, but then everyone expected the participants to be settled back in again, being able to get on with their Shire jobs without problem. *"there's a lot of emphasis on immediate support you know for the first couple of months but quite often you're just in a bit of a shock. It passes in a blur and it's when things get back to normal that I think more support is needed."* (Eve: 270)

Moving on to structures that were supporting the returning participants, DevAid operated a scheme where its staff was entitled to an extended holiday after their posting, this 'in-between-space' was described as very useful by the participants. *"I spent six weeks travelling with my partner [ ] it was a completely different world, it took me far, far away from Amun, in many different ways. Culturally, emotion, everything, so it was really, really, really good."* (Paul: 222).

Finally, an important message was delivered by Eve as she described how the difficulty in returning home to Shire was reduced by her being mindful of the issue. *"I lived overseas before and found it incredibly difficult to readjust to coming back so I was expecting it to be really hard and I think it's probably therefore harder for people who aren't expecting it to be difficult and they get a surprise when they come home and it's hard."* (Eve: 250).

4.4.4   Theme III-4: Normality and alienation

This section on normality and alienation is to a large extent illustrated by Paul, with other participants being highlighted as they resonate with his descriptions. Paul enquired deeply into this complex area, and I will try to delineate the ideas he put forth through explanation and quotes. Before I detail Paul's experience however, it should be stated that this section doesn't apply to Sid, Eve and Pat. Sid found his experience in Amun quite normal, largely due to having a strong social life; this was indeed something he fought hard for *"I fought pretty hard to be able to go to friend's houses [ ] to be able to go out socialize, parties and good friend's houses, was the best thing you could possibly have for your mental health"* (Sid: 89). Eve considered Amun normal since she had been

posted to much more difficult places.*"Yeah, it seems very normal to me but that's because of previous..."* (Eve: 100). Pat, on the other hand, never mentioned normality or abnormality.

Paul's account was that the notion of normality, the experienced sense of being normal, changed as the outside world changed. Still, this change seemed to have a time-lag, or a degree of inertia, which was created by one's internalized notion of that which was normal. This situation affected both his stay in Amun, as an initially abnormal and alien Amun gradually became normal to him. It also had an effect on his return to Shire. As he returned to Shire, his idea of normality had changed due to his experiences in Amun, and hence he failed to fit in and feel normal, again experiencing alienation.

Commencing with the initially alien experience of Amun, there is a frustration and alienation in Paul's and Grace's descriptions. Paul speaks here about not understanding the people and their motivations *"you never, unless you're actually in it, fully understanding what's driving individuals and what's driving their interest, so that makes it quite frustrating as well."* (Paul: 60), whilst Grace illustrates the alien nature of the physical environment *"I just felt so wrenched out of my normal life and into this like moonscape like different planet just completely alien ahm physical environment"* (Grace: 28).

Moving onto the integration, the beginning of the adjustment of Paul's sense of normality, there is a sense of a grey-zone, an in-between stage where the identification with the internalized Shire and the surrounding Amun is in flux.

> *the ability to go to a restaurant, going to a restaurant. Going to play tennis at tennis courts.*
> *Going shopping. Simple things like that made life seem more normal, therefore it lowered the*
> *sense of anxiety, because you felt actually, it's not that different. It maybe creates a bit of an*
> *illusion of normalcy, because each one of those trips required approval and an armoured*
> *vehicle* Paul: 98

This experience of normality through doing normal things was also described by Victor *"there were four or five places people could go for coffee or a meal which gave some sense of normality in your life even though you had to book three days in advance and then you had to take six body guards"* (Victor: 92)

In its inception, the occasional sense that Amun was normal was described as a fantasy. *"this is a fantasy, this is fake"* (Paul: 100). Gradually, however, Paul's account of his fantasy took on a slightly more real sense in that the Amun experience (here illustrated by tennis playing) is only occasionally interrupted by feelings that things are abnormal. *"playing tennis on clay courts, with a colleague, and, you know, at the same time thinking, but outside, you know, there's a war going on you know, there are people dying, but here we are playing tennis."* (Paul: 102) He would previously have had the discrepancy from Shire, hence a sense of abnormality, in the foreground with only occasional feelings of normalcy.

> *I think your mind adapts, and it is amazing how it does adapt, your definition of normal changes. I distinctly remember arriving and the first few months of being there maybe, or the first month or so, thinking this is so not normal, whether it's the guns in the street, whether its permission to go anywhere, whether it's somebody always knowing where you are. Yeah. None of this is normal. But then your mind sort of adapts and you sort of say, well this is, in this reality, this is normality. But in order for – by being able to do something like play tennis, it only makes that ultimate reality seem more normal if you like. That's kind of how I would describe it. It's almost like being starved of what normality is, but then having bits of food inserted which allows you to feel that things are more normal than they actually are, so that, it's almost like you are convincing yourself of something you know isn't true.* Paul: 106

The foreground and background then started alternating, shifting, though as can be seen at the end of the excerpt above, there is still an element of feeling as if one is living in a fantasy. Having first been surprised by the display of guns, they become normal and faded into the background.

Concurrently, where he would previously have assumed that restaurants are available, he gradually started being surprised the few times he could go to one.

> *the first time that I went out somewhere – to a restaurant – see – realizing I'm in a restaurant – but at the same time there's an armoured vehicle waiting for me, or there's an armoured guard there. So initially, your focus is on that which is not normal, which is the armoured guard or the armoured vehicle. But over time, those things sort of meld into the background. Because they become what you're more used to. So your focus then shifts to what is the less normal bit, which is the fact that you're in a restaurant, and then you accentuate, exaggerate that. And make that sort of the focus.* Paul: 110 - 112

Becoming habituated to Amun, accepting the abnormal as normal, also had an adaptive function in that it allowed him to not get too upset about bombings and violence – these things are normal in Amun and hence after a while normal and more acceptable for Paul.

> *[having a Shire mentality] would have brought into sharp relief that actually, yes, yesterday's bomb means you today you should be crying, or you should be scared or you should be this. Whereas without that, you know, you can continue behaving abnormally, reacting abnormally, to your surroundings in order to be able to press on, to carry on. But then you see the effects afterwards, you know.* Paul: 156

Taking the cue from the last sentence in the above quote, there is also a negative side to the shift in perception of normality. It may be useful to see Amun as normal when there, but this emotional hardening can become a hindrance once back in Shire, as has been discussed in the counselling support sub-section. One acts in unnatural, over-reactive ways, leading to shame and feeling abnormal.

> *[once back home] two gentlemen came up to us, they wanted to sell us something. And they were quite close. In the past I would have said, no,no, please, but as a result of Amun, I*

actually pushed them away, like forcefully [ ] Cause I felt they were invading my space. And

that they were a danger. [ ] I had developed as a result of being in Amun, an affinity to

spotting danger more quickly. Anything, any sort of invasion like that I immediately took to

be a danger. [ ] I felt ashamed a little bit, I thought the reaction was not warranted really, it

was an over-reaction. And my girlfriend said 'what the hell is going on with you?' You know,

it's not normal, it's not a natural reaction to have. Paul: 160 – 168

Furthermore, as seen in the section on coming home above, there is the sense that no one at home

understands what you have experienced, indeed who you have become. *"there's nobody to*

empathize with you other than those who are going through exactly the same thing." (Paul: 204)

Paul's transition from a Shire position on normality to an Amun position on it was softened by

constant insertions of 'bits of Shire normalcy', keeping the connection to back home. There was a

window to what used to be normal, and he looked out this window each evening. (It is interesting to

note how Paul took solace in the discussions with home having little connection to his mission life,

whilst Grace was supported by home having an understanding of the mission, being in a sense with

her in spirit in her interactions in the field).

First of all, and quite important actually – it was in another language. So I was speaking [ ],

so that only helped to add to the sense of 'this is completely removed from where you are

right now'. It was in my home culture, and we would discuss things about home culture and,

she would tell you, I didn't spend a lot of time talking about Amun at all. There was much

more talking about things that, things that, either our interests or philosophical things or

Shire things. So it was completely an escape valve. It was, if you like, real, sort of being able,

while being confined in an abnormal place, being able to keep my eye focused for a number

of hours a day on normality – the normality outside if you like. Paul: 234

When coming home, Paul was faced with two shocks – feeling abnormal at home, and feeling abnormal about feeling abnormal since he used to feel normal at home. He would in a sense be carrying the abnormality of Amun that he had internalized, and hence experience the friction with the normality of Shire. Paul's difficulties with this were helped by him feeling that he wasn't coming home to the same old home – he was coming home to a new kind of home – his partner was now going to live with him. Not only did it assuage the shock of coming home to something different, it would also assuage the added shock of not feeling normal in something that used to feel normal.

> *you go back in the real world where people don't really care about you in the same way, and it's a sort of a bit of a shock to the system. But luckily for me that wasn't the case, because my partner was coming to live with me, right after Amun. [ ] having her made all the difference. In that sense, I never felt that sudden shock of 'heck I'm back alone in the world, to how I was before'* Paul: 224

> *I coming from something new and abnormal to something new and normal but different, so moving from difference to difference is much easier because you automatically know you can adapt, but I think that there is a shock element to having to adapt to a normality you already knew. But realizing that actually you've had to become abnormal in some sense to be able to live in abnormality, and then you're back in normality, the abnormality sort of becomes, comes into back relief somehow.* Paul: 264

4.4.5   Theme III-5: Security

> *I felt very safe* Victor: 200

The participants often described how they felt that security issues were a bit overemphasized, in the media and the public opinion, and also in DevAid's policies and actions. *"DevAid kind of slightly panicked and I think went into complete overdrive"* (Pat: 54). DevAid's perceived overzealousness with security was also reflected in some participants' accounts on the Hostile Environment

Awareness Training course which they were obliged to partake in before deploying. *"the hostile environments training prepared me and in some ways it terrified me and sort of made the whole thing a bit worse."* Kim: 136

Kim, among others, described a general sense of not worrying about security issues in Amun *"less risk than cycling to work in Shire City and that was because of the you know, because of the systems that were set up to physically protect us.* (Kim: 52), and rather feeling occasional bouts of fear in connection with specific incidents *"the base was being rocketed [ ] it was absolutely terrifying"* (Kim: 54). The fear was not enveloping, rather occasional. Others reported a more pervasive generalized fear or security threat awareness. *"it did feel as if bad things might happen you know it is risky you're much more aware of the risk you are taking in going."* (Eve: 30). There were also reports that the fear was suppressed. *"it was only after I left Fulaidinia that I realised to what extent that there had been an underlying level tension in my gut"* (Grace: 24)

A resounding theme was the description of an experience of trust and reliance on the actual security staff. "*knowing that there was a sort of procedure, a set of systems in place supporting you, you know, and you were told, if we get stopped we'll try to drive through it, if not, we're gonna call backup, and they'll be - there's a quick reaction force that will be here in ten minutes tops*." (Paul: 120). A flip side to this creation of a safe environment was accounts of being confined and positions on this ranged from the accepting to the more defiant. *"I think they see it as their job to keep you in the compound safe behind locked doors and behind lots of men with guns and not let you out."* (Pat: 110)

4.4.6   Theme III-6: Management and work

The work pressure in Amun was extreme, and the participants worked long hours, often without days off. *"there is so much pressure to deliver you that don't breathe and step back"* (Eve: 156). On the other hand, there were few pressures or duties in their private lives. *"you have none of those normal life sources of stress at all."* (Kim: 120)

Their view on management included needs for and experiences of being seen and acknowledged. This should be seen in light of both analogies from the peer support section about support as a visual analogy, and also a more basic need for recognition. *"making you feel that you work is quite visible, and that you are quite visible and that your contribution is recognized. [ ] that someone higher up has noticed the, sort of potentially, sacrifices that you've made."* (Sid: 126) Also being linked to the ideas about peers and difficulties in including higher hierarchies into one's supports, though I'm not claiming that this idea was the only reason for their experiences, there were also descriptions of experiences of management being too insensitive or cold, even untrustworthy. "*I'd never go to him for that kind of support"* (Eve: 208)

Finally, especially Grace described experiencing chaos *"I was holding it together with an elastic band and sellotape [ ] It was a real kind of centrifugal force things would naturally be flying off on all these different directions"* (Grace: 38), strife and even deception at work "*the emotional labour of it you know, being deceived to, deceiving"* (Grace: 103).

4.5   The international aid workers' experience of self

The international aid workers' experience of self is a crucial component in understanding their lifeworld, and also a crucial component in understanding their experience of support. In a sense, an understanding of how their personalities and motivations would allow a deeper understanding of what it is that needs to be supported.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis can be performed thematically as has been done in the themes above, but also through ideographically presenting each participant (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p.109). I'm hoping to give a sense of each individual participant in this concluding section, yet am also aspiring to extract some commonalities.

4.5.1   Individual motivations and personality traits

Kim struck me as a passionate, optimistic, idealistic development worker. *"I am a real optimist so, I just I do see the best in everything. Every job I have done in DevAid I have loved"* (Kim: 42). She described having been determined on this path since the age of twelve, motivated by a wish to help, and a love of travelling. *"that I wanted to do something that involved travel and working with poorer countries."* (Kim: 16). Her issues were not with her ideals, rather with worries as to whether she could realize them or not, something that links back to her idealism and her motivation for doing the work. *"I am not convinced that you know, that our government or, the international development community or, whatever has got the right answer. But, not doubts about whether you know I value what I do"* (Kim: 36). As is suggested in this excerpt above, there were many comments indicating worries about DevAid or its staff not doing the right thing, or hiding behind bureaucracy or inside compounds. Indeed, she had a very clear sense of what she deemed right or wrong, and applied this sense to others and self in a very frank and direct way, she didn't hold back her opinions and left little room for doubt, both for the listener and herself – her views sounded like facts.

Pat was the only participant who mentioned regretting the almost complete absence of contact between the participants and Amun people *"we so rarely see any Amun people!"* (Pat: 244). This regret was not only from a personal perspective, she also saw this as a real issue for the Amun people she worked with; indeed the aid effort was questioned due to the lack of real contact. *"Yeah, and I think for them, they just see us coming and pass through."* (Pat: 246). She was also opposed to calling herself a development worker, something that for me indicated humility (to the point of disdain or feeling guilt for her own 'pampered' life), honesty and also a wish to be more 'on the ground'. It also speaks to the strong value and respect she had for development work – it is not a label you casually apply to yourself. *"I'm a civil servant. At a push I might call myself a development worker. But, I think, sitting in a well-equipped office in Amun City surround by close protection and stuff. That's not development."* (Pat: 199). She even referred to an acquaintance who actually *did* development work, someone who had earned the right to call themselves a development worker.

"Out in the fields, miles away from anyone [ ] that was real development work but what DevAid does isn't development work." (Pat: 201).

Like Kim, Pat's description of her motivation for the work was largely idealistic, fuelled by a strong urge to help *"I think it's possible and important to, in a very simplistic way make a difference"* (Pat: 4). She also resonated with Kim's love of the work, as well as Kim's issues with DevAid bureaucracy. *"Frustrated with internal bureaucracy and some of the policy stuff that I don't think is necessarily right"* (Pat: 48). There was limited engagement with emotional processes, and instead a sense that her positions were obvious, self-explanatory, with no need for examination. This is also similar to Kim, the frankness, the clarity of discerning right from wrong, although there was possibly more frankness in Kim's descriptions and more lack of engaging in emotions in Pat's account. *"I don't usually think very much about what I, how things make me feel. I tend to rationalize it or think of things in terms of systems"* (Pat: 215). In a similar vein, she described her approach to challenges as a solution-focused, analytic way. *"I think it's a much more an intellectual way of dealing with these countries or states that are so dysfunctional and how you fix those problems."* (Pat: 8).

Eve's description of her motivation lay more in the achieving and excelling end of the spectrum, where or with what she worked was less important *"it was time to get field experience [ ] you get more challenging work and more of it which therefore tends to make you more promotable at the end of it I think, so in career terms it's a sensible thing to do"* (Eve: 56). This is quite a marked departure from the accounts from Kim and Pat above, indeed this can also be seen in how Eve describes herself being an international development worker – there are none of Pat's difficulties in allowing herself this title, it doesn't carry as much meaning for Eve. *"I just happen to work on international development"* (Eve: 64). When discussing social aspects of living in a complex emergency, Eve frequently referred to her preference for being close to others, a sense of warmth and fusion was important to her. As hinted at, the fusion could become overbearing for her at times. *"there isn't anyone that I worked with in Amun that I didn't like. [ ] it was sickening how happy and*

joined up the office was" (Eve: 166). Indeed in my interview with Eve, there were constant references to being close, having tea and pancakes et cetera, and I also personally experienced a sense of warmth in a markedly 'home and safe by the fireplace' way.

Sid was experienced by me as direct, questioning, and almost abrasive during our interview. Things appeared obvious to him, he sounded self-confident and self-motivated. He spoke of key messages that he wanted to get across; there was a sense of prescriptiveness *"the key messages from me would be"* (Sid: 142), and mission to his statements, which was further highlighted by other interviews where the participants sounded more thoughtful and reflective. In line with the above, it was very difficult to get Sid to discuss emotional or detailed aspects of his lifeworld. *"I can't really think any specifics, that isn't very helpful."* (Sid: 65). Responses often sounded political and neutral to me, giving me the sense of not really meeting Sid, only meeting a professional who gave the 'right' answers. *"I think there is an issue of perception, I think if you ask both of them for different sides of the story, they'd give you quite different accounts."* (Sid: 51).

Paul, almost singlehandedly responsible for the theme on normality, stood out in our interview due to his acute and thoughtful observations on the sociology and psychology of life on mission. There was an enjoyment of power and also a wish to make things better. He seemed very aware of both these traits and did enquire into them. Indeed, he saw his choice to pursue international development as based on it being the most useful one in order to make the world a better place. **"***where I could add value [ ] I could have done psychology, I could have done sociology, I could have done history, maths, you know, a number of things."* (Paul: 64) This last statement also points to a sense of capacity, almost privilege that fits well with his aspirations to power and influence. At the same time, there was a more cynical side to Paul. True to form, Paul harnessed his cynicism in order to add value to the world, and also analysed it. *"if you can hold your cynicism in check a bit, you might in the long term be in a better position to make a difference. [ ] you're better off understanding the system, and cynicism is a reflection of better understanding the system"* (Paul: 74 – 76).

Victor. I found the interview with Victor challenging, similar to the way that I experienced the interview with Sid. I felt questioned, I felt as if my questions were asking for obvious answers. As with Sid, it was difficult to get emotional or detailed 'lived experience' responses. At the same time, there was idealism "*I wanted to feel like I was making a difference [I] was quite idealistic*" (Victor: 20) and enjoyment of the work, especially the people he worked with. *"I love the people I work with"* (Victor: 24). This idealism was gradually changing as the focus was moving towards family and stability. Indeed, Victor had made a decision to not accept future overseas posting, opting for the family instead. *"thinking of having a family [ ] other priorities come into play ahm those are the things that you perhaps focus on more ahm in relation to your work than changing the world."* (Victor: 26). Victor was very rational and driven, and also held a senior role in DevAid. Maximizing his time and efficiency, he decided to do an online degree whilst in a high intensity, high level position in Amun. *"I'm doing a degree in [ ] so I have that to do at the weekends so I spend a lot of my evenings and weekends doing that which meant that I had limited time to get bored"* (Victor: 36).

Grace. There was a real sense of fragility and engagement with ambivalence and insecurity in how Grace described her experience of her world. She questioned her choices and took refuge in people that could support her. *"I used to have a very high need to be liked and a very high need for external validation and the biggest change serving six months in Fulai brought about to lower my levels of those two things"* (Grace: 34). Much as she found the backstabbing and scheming of DevAid difficult, she did partake in the odd bit of deception herself. As mentioned in previous sections, there was a suspicion of others at many times *"being deceived to, deceiving all"* (Grace: 103). There was no mention of connection to Fulai, to the Fulai people, to a wish to help, nor a wish to change the country that she was working in.

4.5.2   *Common themes in motivations and personality traits*

Having looked at the profile sketches above it strikes me that there is a real separation between idealism and professional focus amongst the participants. Grace, Sid and Eve focused on their work,

the DevAid side of things. There was scant mention of wanting to change the world or improve the situation for the people of Amun or Fulai. This does of course not mean that they didn't care, nor does it mean that their efforts within DevAid failed to create real change on the ground. But it does mean that idealism, care and connection to the countries they were in, wasn't a significant part of their description of their lifeworld. Looking at Pat, Kim, Paul and to some extent Victor, there is often a lifelong connection to caring for others. Helping others was the focus; international development was used as a tool to achieve that goal, and there were voices of frustration of not being able to achieve the change intended, and also voices reflecting a liking for power and excitement.

As detailed at length in the sections on peer support and formal support, there were elements of being guarded, keeping strong, and being rational in the participants' coping mechanisms. There were also significant elements of focusing on one's peers in order to feel supported.

Finally, connected to the participants' sense of actually engaging with Amun or Fulai, are the missing themes of being supported by Amun people and connecting with Amun people. Except for Pat, there was no mention of this by the participants, and even Pat failed to connect or engage with much success. This struck me as difficult to integrate with the several accounts of idealism and care. There were accounts of ideals, but no accounts of real, on the ground contact with those whom the ideals were described as being directed towards. Looking at the transcripts, I find two themes that can potentially address this seeming inconsistency. The first is the very practical restrictions on movement and contact with Amun people, indeed Shire staff and thus DevAid staff were amongst the most restricted *"us and the Canadians and the Americans have the tightest security ahm so you know there was a whole Amun City social life that we had no access to"* (Eve: 246). It is interesting how the quote above about restrictions focuses Eve's restriction onto her social relations with other international staff, and it brings me on to the second theme that may shed light on the lack of contact, the idea of 'us-and-them'. Life revolved around people similar to the participants, people with similar experiences and lives, people like 'us-not-them'.

5 Discussion

Semi structured interviews were conducted with seven international aid workers, the area under investigation being the experience of support in relation to their overseas mission. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was utilized in order to analyse the material, and three superordinate themes emerged.

This section will look at the results detailed above in the light of pre-existing research and literature. As is accepted in IPA, new literature in addition to that covered by the literature review may be utilized. "it is in the nature of IPA that the interview and analysis will have taken you into new and unanticipated territory." (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p113). The somewhat limited literature on existential migration is one such addition that I would like to make. Following works on migration and home by Said (1999) and Aciman (1999), Madison's (2010) work on existential migration very much illuminates the findings on alienation, homecoming and support as described by the participants of this study, and will as such be included below. Madison's (2010) research focuses on individuals that have voluntarily left their original home, and how they engage with issues of home, sense of self, difference and conformity. Another area of literature that fits well with the result is the existential, in particular relational aspects of our being-in-the-world. It is also here important to acknowledge that not only is the result one of many possible results (considering the limited number of participants as well as the inevitable subjectivity inherent in multiple levels of interpretation, as detailed in the chapter on methodology and method), but that this discussion also is one of many possible discussions. I have chosen to focus mainly on existential material to illuminate the findings, yet I do acknowledge that many other viewpoints would both illuminate and elucidate the material.

I will present each superordinate theme in turn, commencing with peer support, then formal support and finally the experience of going on mission, as in the results chapter. Following this

discussion of particulars will be a more general discussion about the whole, again in accordance with the hermeneutic circle mentioned earlier. I will also touch on the usefulness of the IPA method.

5.1 Peer support

Peer (collegial, informal) support, often juxtaposed with the lesser importance or even detrimental influence of formal (organizational, structured) support, emerged as the core component of the experience of support for the participants. This peer support was often described as a backdrop, as opposed to more direct interventions. It often supported by its mere being there, through its availability. There were also more difficult aspects to the experience of peer support described, linked to experiences of feeling overwhelmed or feeling that one's privacy was being invaded. The definition of who is a peer (us-and-them) was a constant sub-theme in the section, effectively limiting peer support to one's own group of peers. It is important to note that the depiction of the themes offered here is by no means the whole picture or the only picture that could be made. The participants' accounts included much heterogeneity, for example Grace's account of peer support was quite different from the others' in that she utilized a different version of peers.

Thomas' (2008) research resonates with many of these findings, not only in the central importance of peer support (she calls it interpersonal support), but also in details such as support being useful by its mere being there: "My analysis found that the mere perception that support was available was enough to buffer against situational stress." (Thomas, 2008, p247). The importance of peer support was also reflected in McCormack, Joseph and Hagger's (2009) research. As mentioned in the literature review, the focus on interpersonal or peer support is less evident the further one moves from qualitative research, though the importance of it is still acknowledged in for example Macnair (1995). Peer support is also an essential component of the Antares guidelines (2006), and is mentioned by Ehrenreich (albeit at the very end, and in a more practical injunction to "Talk to others (co-workers, supervisors) about your experiences and your needs. " (Ehrenreich, 2002, p29)).

It seemed paradoxical to me that the participants' families were sometimes described as supportive when available from the field via the phone, but that the same family upon homecoming was sometimes seen as not being able to provide support. I wonder if part of the reason for this seeming paradox would be that the participants would hold on to familiarity – home is familiar (hence the people there are peers), and when the participant isn't home he or she doesn't realize how different he or she has become. It is only upon confrontation with the difference, only upon coming face to face without the assuaging crackly phone line that alienation sets in (these people can't relate to me, they are not my peers anymore). This hypothesis is supported by Thomas (2008, p254), as she on one hand explains how "some saw the family of origin as the core social unit providing a sense of belonging, an anchor, connectedness, safety, and a resource during difficult times." whilst she at the same time acknowledged that "the expected familiarity of historical roles may fail to match the comfort of idealised portraits cherished in the field. There was recognition that even though relationships change over time, disappointment rises when "things are just different". "(Thomas, 2008, p260).

The centrality of peers in the experience of support can be further elucidated by moving beyond literature specifically dealing with international aid workers. Though general ideas on the mechanisms and importance of social relations can be found in most theories of psychology and sociology, I have chosen to look to existential theories in particular to clarify this area. I find it useful to highlight the existential position on the integrated and continual relational character of our lifeworld here – our internal psychology, bodily state, or indeed meaning making do not exist in separation from our social world, they co-arise (Buber, 1923/2008, Heidegger, 1927/1962, Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). This integrated stance allows me to see how the support experienced from peers by the participants is woven into all other areas of their life on mission, and also makes the crucial importance of peers more understandable when other component of life are less available (when the location is alien, mandates and meaning confused et cetera). Van Deurzen speaks of the tension

between experiencing support from peers and being overwhelmed or feeling intruded by them: "To live with the paradoxes of proximity and distance, dominance and submission, togetherness and aloneness, belonging and isolation, is a whole world in itself. It requires careful modulation of our experience and a life-long process of learning to get it right." (van Deurzen, 1997, p117). The sense of intrusion can be further illuminated by its links to Sartre's concept of how we when we relate dominate the Other in the interest of our project (Sartre, 1943/1966), essentially denying the Other's own individuality in order to make him or her into a 'thing' that supports our own individuality. This domination or objectification can be seen as an intrinsic part of relating, and points towards the less pleasant aspects of being-with-others.

Foreshadowing the more in-depth discussion of Madison's existential migrant concept below, I would here like to highlight how peers can be defined by who they are rather than by where they are from, hence clarifying the delineation component of the 'us-and-them' theme. As will be shown, the participants of this study show many of the traits of existential migrants:

> "Steinbock introduces the term 'homecomrade' to refer to those others who feel familiar to me, who I feel most at home with, with whom I share important rituals and customs. He or she 'bears' the same world as I do. Typically it is assumed that homecomrades share one's original home *place* and its sameness, but the term presents an interesting possibility. Although existential migrants have cultural traditions they share with their homeworld, it can be asked, who *really* is the 'homecomrade' of an existential migrant? Based on the participant stories, I would propose that a homecomrade for us is more likely to be another person engaged in existential migration rather than an individual who shares the home rituals and customs." (Madison, 2010, p162).

5.2   Formal support

Formal support seemed to be experienced with distrust; there was a sense that it was forced upon

the participants. Still, as with peer support, it was sometimes comforting to have it in the

background, as something one would be able to potentially access. Furthermore, counselling

support was seen in a better light, with most participants appreciating it, though there were still

elements of distrust and scepticism. It was seen as useful if the counsellor had some form of

awareness, experience or connection to the participants and also the situation in which the

participants were living. Some participants stated an element of concern as to whether counselling

would weaken their defences and make them more vulnerable to the stress of Amun.

This theme represents something new that is previously not highlighted in the literature on

international development workers. Thomas (2008) does speak in similar ways as the participants

with regard to friction between managers and staff and also head office and field, yet does not

highlight how this affects the supportive aspect. Hearns and Deeny (2007) make similar

observations, but again not mentioning the implications for the experience of support.

Formal support includes workshops, managerial support, debriefings and counselling support. Useful

information on management styles and their effects (the differences between transformational and

more authoritative transactional leadership) can be found in Burns (1978), further elucidated by

Bass & Bass (2008), Ciulla (1998) and Marturano (2004). Furthermore, difficulties of accepting

support from someone who is perceived to be in a hierarchically superior position to the participant

can be illuminated from many psychological viewpoints, be it psychodynamic rejection of parental

images or indeed feminist rejection of domination (Benjamin, 1988, covers both areas), the more

person centred idea of support being helped by originating from an unconditional and non-

judgmental regard (Rogers, 1969), or indeed later Marxist (Lichtman, 1986) psychological or even

postmodern deliberations (Burston, 2006) on power and our relations to the same. The existential-

phenomenological tradition is also concerned with power, with for example the previously

mentioned Sartre's work on how even meeting the Other is an exercise in trying to establish ownership and subjugation of this very Other into a thing that confirms our own being or project (Sartre, 1943/1966). Sartre's original ideas around the relational and the social subsequently take a more political angle in later works such as 'Between existentialism and Marxism' (1972/1974), thus speaking more directly to issues of power and the detrimental effect on the relationship between those in power and those subjugated under it. The existential phenomenological therapeutic tradition's central tenets of horizontalisation and description (Spinelli, 1989/2005) also speak to the intention of the practitioner to stay curious and respectful of the client's position, not rising above the client, hence acknowledging the detrimental effects on authority on relationship.

Though there may be some issues with regard to power and hierarchies also in the counselling support sub-section of formal support (as highlighted by Sid's account where the counsellor was seen as betraying the trust of the client, clearly aligning herself with management and authority), the main area of difficulty seemed to be an alienation from the counsellor, a sense that the counsellor couldn't relate, indeed was part of 'them' and not 'us'. The knowledge on in-group and out-group effects on counselling is informed by research on effects of racial difference or similarity in the counselling relationship, interestingly indicating that minority groups benefit from a counsellor from the same group, whilst members of the majority group have no real preference or benefit from the same (Atkinson, 1983). Considering the centrality of the concept of alienation from those at home (indeed those that have not experienced 'the field', be they at home or not) described by the participants, it can be argued that they could be seen as a minority group. This would then speak to the participants' accounts of how they feel that they would benefit from a counsellor from the same group or at least a counsellor with enough sensitivity to the unique experience of the international aid worker. As Salama (2010, p3) indicates: "Mental health professionals working in this role should themselves ideally have experience of humanitarian emergencies".

Another area of concern emerging from the results is one of worrying whether counselling would make the participant weak, lower the guard or lessen the defences hence creating weakness. The appropriateness of defences is echoed in both psychotherapy research (Strupp and Hadley, 1979) and social psychology (Lazarus, 1974, referred to in Bates and Holmes, 1995/2002).

5.3   The experience of going on mission

The experience of being on mission started with deploying there. This was described as exciting, scary, intimidating and challenging but also gradually moving towards being more familiar and at ease. This easing familiarity was usually linked to peers welcoming, including and informing the participant. Familiarity was also assisted by DevAid's policy of week-long familiarization visits before the actual real deployment. Once there, some participants connected strongly with their host country whilst others showed little in the way of relating to the country. There was practically no mention of significant personal connections to the people of the country. The work was exciting, empowering, absorbing, stressful and fulfilling. At the same time, there was not much stress connected to one's personal life since everything was catered for. Finally, coming home was often seen as the difficult part. The difficulty was seldom connected to specific events or security situations from the duty station (rather a sense of increased stress levels as a result of work, security and other issues from the mission). Instead, a sense of alienation from home, a sense of having changed, of not fitting in back home anymore, of no-one understanding, was seen as the most difficult issue to deal with when coming home. The participants described it as missing the sense of purpose, power, excitement and also intense social cohesion of mission life.

With reference to the comparative lack of engagement with the plight of the mission country as described by half the participants, and also a lack of engagement with the local populace as indicated by all participants, the increasing bureaucratization of the development world is reported by Thomas: "The general institutional requirements often have little to do with humanitarian action

that is grounded in solidarity with those affected by conflict" (Thomas, 2008, p237), and also linked to a reduced sense of solidarity with the people one is sent out to assist. This coupled with the rigorous security measures that surrounded the staff during their mission would partially serve to explain this lack of connection between many participants and the mission country. The international development world has been critiqued (Minion, 2006, Harrel-Bond, 1986) for having little connection to the ones they are supposed to serve, a critique that may be in part supported by this study. It may here be useful to highlight that the results chapter ended with an idiographic exploration of the personalities and motivations of the seven participants, noting commonalities such as the separation between more professionally focused participants as opposed to the more idealistically motivated – there were definitely accounts of care and concern for the mission country from half of the participants. Indeed, Hunt's (2009) description of humanitarian health care workers resonates with descriptions of participants in this study who spent more time in the field, or had a stronger pathos. The pathos of some participants acted as a supporting factor in that it motivated them. The corresponding lack of pathos, or indeed lack of contact with the local populace, can be seen as unsupportive, as something that stands in the way of motivation and care.

As already touched on above with reference to participants' views on their families being potentially paradoxically both supportive and not supportive, there is a central theme of difficulty in returning home. This two-sided theme (consisting both of a sense of reduced excitement or intensity, and also a sense of alienation from self and others at home) finds support in some of the literature on international aid workers, again with the qualitative literature being more strongly represented. Thomas (2008, p260) writes:

> Similar to the work by Fahey MacDonald et al. (2003), many humanitarians found the challenges of return to be greater than those of departure, especially if field mission communication had been intermittent. The 'reunion' appeared to be threatened by unrealistic expectations on transitioning from a field-based culture.

She also refers to McCreesh's re-entry syndrome (McCreesh, 2003), a concept that seems to resonate strongly with the experience of the participants of this study. McCreesh identifies similar areas of complaints, such as the initial honeymoon period or euphoria turning into boredom (less exciting life) or alienation (firstly no one understands you at home, secondly you have yourself changed, and the re-exposure to home makes you realize this, hence creating a sort of alienation from yourself). She also offers recommendations that centre on trying to be aware of the situation, as you deploy, during and after the mission. This recommendation also emerged from the interviews of this study in that awareness of potential difficulty in many ways protected against the stress and suffering.

Bjerneld et al (2006) relate the description of coming home as being a 'large black hole' (p52) and being connected to a sense of alienation from those that they had left at home. They also mention the flip side – the fear of never coming home, of continually going from mission to mission. This concern of the potential failure of reintegrating the returning humanitarians leading to them returning to their peers in the field is also shared by McCormack, Joseph and Hagger (2009, p113). McFarlane consequently speaks of "positive signs that the importance of psychosocial care programs is gaining recognition and they are being tailored to the specific needs of returned staff" (McFarlane, 2004, p4).

Difficulties in returning home are also well described by existential migrant literature and seem to centre on the 'us-and-them' theme as well as the complex notion of 'home'. The 'us-and-them' theme has been detailed above with reference to peer support, whilst the notion of home will be detailed here. Amit-Talai offers an interesting viewpoint on home, seeing it from an expat's eyes in the Caymans looking to go back to Montreal – "It's [the return to Montreal] going back to *reality*" (Amit-Talai, 1998, p41), seeing this *reality* as something one yearns for yet seemingly impossible to arrive at – *reality* cannot be found in reality. Madison identifies that "The ubiquitous primordial motif of the 'hero's return' is evoked in many of the accounts given by participants." (Madison,

2010, p44) The lack of such a welcome is echoed by the participants of my research. On what seems to me to be on a more profound level, Paul tries to make sense of normality and belonging, something that is also echoed in Madison's account "A feeling of not-belonging where everything and everyone says one *should* belong can result in a lack of confidence that one will belong anywhere." (Madison, 2010, p53) and "When it comes to returning home, contrary to expatriates' expectations, the return 'home' can be as challenging as another migration to a foreign country. Though this 'foreign' country is deeply familiar as well as unexpectedly strange." (Madison, 2010, p188). Equally, the notion that awareness of impending difficulties upon homecoming would assail these difficulties is supported: "Having an opportunity to explore the deeper existential aspects of experiences abroad might actually result in increased self-understanding for these returnees." (Madison, 2010, p188). Finally, McCormack, Joseph and Hagger's (2009) concern that a failure to reintegrate humanitarians would make them forever continue on mission is evocatively captured by Aciman:

> "exiles can be supremely mobile, and they can be totally dislodged from their original orbit, but in this jittery state of transience, they are thoroughly stationary – no less stationary than those displaced Europeans perpetually awaiting letters of transit in *Casablanca*. They are never really in Casablanca, but they are not going either. They are in permanent transience." (Aciman, 1999, p13).

5.4   Looking at the whole picture

This discussion has until now focused on the results of the analysis and how they can be elucidated or built on through existing literature. There have also been instances of themes that are different or have a stronger emphasis than the existing literature on international aid workers' experience of support, such as the us-and-them focus on peer support and difficulty with formal support, the concept of home and alienation, and the comparative lack of connection with local people.

However, it is also crucial to look at what is not in the results – what is lacking? Are there areas of the literature that is not reflected by the participants' accounts?

A common expectation from friends and colleagues when presented with the topic of this research (indeed a central component of the Middlesex University risk assessment for this study, attachment two) is that the dissertation would focus on what may be seen as spectacular, heroic or indeed harrowing accounts of humanitarians battling injustices in the field, being subjected to traumatization and hardship. This viewpoint also shines through in novels or popular accounts of international aid work (Burnett, 2006, Cain, K., Postlewait, H., Thomson, A., 2004, Caputo, 2005, le Carré, 2005, Mortensen, 2008, or Nichols, 2000), indeed even the narrative yet supposedly authentically descriptive literature of Norris (2007) and Bergman (2003), and to an extent also many aspects of the qualitative and quantitative research quoted in the literature review. This expectation has not been met. The participants' lives do not seem heroic or spectacular, nor do their lives seem particularly hard or traumatizing. Their motivations range between idealism and career, with a general sense that there is a job to be done, so it will be done, perhaps echoing Camus' Dr Rieux in The Plague (1947/2004):

> "His [Dr Rieux] attitude at the start of the plague is "Do your job as it should be done,"
> though day after day he is exhausted, working until late in the night, sleeping 4 hours. This
> credo persists throughout the length of the epidemic, even when he learns his wife in not
> doing well. He does not stay because he feels compassion for his patients, for he soon
> "grows out of pity when it is useless," adopting an attitude of "bleak indifference," knowing
> that the epidemic means "a never ending defeat." Nor does Rieux stay to serve God: He
> does not believe, nor does he accept, as the local priest proclaims, that the plague is God's
> punishment. Without having a single cure, he refuses to give in to the plague. He believes in
> human decency, which for him requires that he continue to do his job." (Zaroff, 2010, p479).

The usefulness of the existential literature, literature that endeavours to encompass all of how it is to be, indicates that the lifeworld of international development workers is comparable to the lifeworlds of all of us – the same existential givens apply. They are not that different. At the same time, the applicability of Madison et al's existential migrant themes indicates there are certain areas that may be more highlighted for international development workers – such as a marked focus on 'us-and-them' and a potential tension around the concept of home and normality. The implications of this 'normality' paired with certain tensions will be detailed in the next chapter, in clinical application and implications for existential theory and practice.

Finally, looking at the difficulties in relating to both formal support from 'above' and the local population 'below', I find two existential concepts illuminating. First, Macquarrie highlights that "Since existentialist critique of the 'crowd' is usually considered in terms of levelling down the 'exceptional' persons who rise above the average, it is worth remembering that the collective drive towards uniformity has just as little use for those unfortunate people who fall below the average." (Macquarrie, 1972, p122). This points towards the 'us' in 'us-and-them' being protective and insular from 'them' above as well as below. Another existential motif that may serve to clarify difficulties in relating to both the population that the humanitarian supports, and also the formal support that is supposed to support him or her, is focused on *how* the interaction is conducted. Heidegger's (1927/1962) concept of 'leaping in' instead of 'leaping ahead' fits well with the descriptions of how international development as well as formal support is described by the participants to be conducted: "the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p158). The development workers take power over the Amunis and their concerns and solve them in the way that development workers do – the formal support mechanisms take power over the development workers and their concerns and solve them in what is formally considered the best way. On both occasions, the helper has taken over the one in need, "taking over the other person's concerns and projects for them, and

handing them back the task when it has been completed, or disburdening them of it altogether."

(Cooper, 2003, p19).

5.5   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The choice of a research method is an imperative one, yet it is often made before the researcher is sufficiently knowledgeable about the alternatives available, and often also not fully informed of the implications of choosing one over the other (Caelli, 2001). I was myself unsure whether to utilise van Manen's (1990) methods or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009), and only made the decision to go for IPA once I understood that the sections of van Manen that I appreciated would also be valuable whilst using IPA. As I became increasingly familiar with this method I began to appreciate the subtleties behind the straightforward guidelines in the literature on it. A deepening into the philosophy of Husserl, Sartre and Gadamer as referred to in Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) allowed me to conduct my interviews in a more subtle and mindful way. My words ceased to be simply what they were for me, they even moved from being one thing for me and another for the participant, and there was instead a sense of a mutual co-created space between me and the participant where meaning was created. This meaning was unique to that place, that time, the participant and I. At the same time, this meaning had to be extracted from this unique setting and made available as research, as a statement that is valid in the wider world. The sometimes almost mechanical thematisation of the interviews coupled with self-scrutiny allowed this meaning to be distilled.

An intense involvement with methodology in order to ascertain where the researcher situates him or herself with reference to truth, meaning, intersubjectivity and paradox is crucial for both the ability to conduct interviews, analyse the material and then in the discussion bring forth a credible and informative account of the area of study. IPA's solid grounding in methodology mixed with the practical ease with which the steps of analysis are carried out, served as a useful tool or vessel. A

different vessel would most likely have yielded a somewhat different destination, yet it is my position that the balance of phenomenology and interpretation, indeed the balance of deep philosophy and practical guidelines inherent in IPA, is highly suitable for the exploration of experience.

5.6   My reaction to the material

Looking back upon the more than two years that I have been engaged in the creation of this dissertation, I find that my relationship to the area changed as the interviews progressed, the analysis took shape and finally the writing was engaged with. Much in line with McAdams' (1993) work on how we not only create but also in a sense become our narratives, the separate narratives of the participants along with the combined narrative of this dissertation has changed how I look at my own identity as an international aid worker or humanitarian. This is more comprehensively discussed in the sub-section on reflexivity above. It is important to note here however that the proximity of the material and also the impact it had on me could be an issue. In a similar way as with a client in psychotherapy with whom I see myself as having much shared material, there is a greater need to exercise caution. The fact that a client or in this case participant has gone through a similar experience that I have, or indeed that the material resonates with me on a fundamental level, does not mean that his or her experience is the same as mine. Ergo, the analysis of the results and also the writing of this dissertation has been an exercise in balance between avoiding too many assumptions, yet still allowing my familiarity with the area to be of use.

6   Conclusion

International aid workers see themselves as different from others and consequently find it hard to profit from support from outsiders – indeed they often feel alienated from those outside their group. This alienation makes the process of coming home the most difficult part of the mission – not the supposed PTSD from explosions or the hardship whilst on mission. The issues with coming home are made even more difficult by the comparative lack of intensity and purpose compared to life on mission.

6.1   Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of support by international aid workers. Seven DevAid participants that had recently returned from the complex emergencies of Amun and Fulai were recruited and interviewed using semi-structured interviews, the focus of the interviews being how they had experienced support before, during and after their mission. The results emerging from the subsequent Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis were not unprecedented in previous literature on the area, yet displayed a significant difference in terms of where the emphasis on the experience of support lay, and also highlighted the difficulty of returning home after the mission.

Peer support, being supported by those that are seen as peers, those that are considered part of 'us' as opposed to 'them' was central to the experience of support. 'Us' could be one's group of colleagues (or previous colleagues, or even people that could be considered peers since also they had been 'in the field', once the participant was home again), and it could also be one's family at home over the telephone (interestingly, family could turn from 'us' to 'them' when meeting them upon returning home, since the meeting could accentuate how family and self had become alienated due to the participant's experiences in the field). Conversely, there were issues in being able to benefit from support that came from outside this group of peers. Formal support mechanisms of the

organization, or indeed counsellors that weren't 'one of us' and hadn't experienced the situation, were sometimes seen as not only unhelpful but actually detrimental. Notably, for both peer and formal support, the existence of support in the background (knowing that one was being cared for, the mere awareness of the availability of support as opposed to the more overt instances of it) was described as comforting and supportive.

Coming home was seen as the most difficult time by most participants, and this theme was illuminated by literature on existential migrants. The complexity of what home is and what normality is emerged as an important consideration. Moving from an exciting job with an intense peer group to a more average lifestyle with very few people understanding the participants could prove difficult and alienating.

The topics of traumatization and PTSD, so prevalent in the media and aid organizations support agendas, did not seem to be of central importance to the participants. Indeed, if anything, it was the worry that one had 'got PTSD' rather than any traumatization in itself that proved anxiety provoking.

It was also notable that the degree of personal engagement with the plight of the local people and the amount of contact with them was quite low, which could be seen as indicating that the motivation for being an international aid worker often focused on career considerations or indeed issues of identity. Furthermore, such a lack of contact with the beneficiaries of one's work could arguably act in an unsupportive way.

6.2 Methodological considerations and critical reflections

This in depth study of international aid workers' experience of support has gathered support for the inclusion of existential migrant themes in the discourse on international aid workers, and also detailed the experience of support with reference to us-and-them and also background-foreground. The rich and in depth material would have been difficult to acquire with a larger sample, so the decision to stay within the recommendations for sample size of the IPA method was deemed

appropriate. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that this in depth exploration has a corresponding lack of breadth, and that such breadth would be most welcome. Larger heterogeneous samples participating in quantitative structured interviews or questionnaires would be useful in order to ascertain the validity of the findings on the population of international aid workers. Indeed, such a hermeneutic circle from the individual qualitative research to attempts towards encompassing the whole in quantitative research could possibly reap significant rewards in the understanding of many fields. With reference to this specific area of international aid workers, it can be argued that since the existing quantitative material appears to be less in accordance with the findings of this study whilst qualitative material resonates more strongly with the results, there may be a greater need for future qualitative studies in order to more clearly establish the details of the field, before quantitative surveys are undertaken in order to enquire into the applicability of these qualitative findings on the general populace.

My choice to limit myself to one perspective, the hermeneutic phenomenological one, has also had an effect on what could be discovered or explored. A narrative analysis would perhaps have gone deeper into the personal meaning making and identity formation of the participants, deepening my understanding of what it is like to 'be' a humanitarian, hence also deepening my understanding of how support is for them. Engaging with discourse and power would surely have brought up rich accounts of hierarchies and assumptions in this fertile domain. Indeed, had I chosen to stay with my personal conviction of pluralism and looked at the area from multiple perspectives, I would not only have garnered the information from these perspectives, but also the fruitful interaction and mutual highlighting they would provide each other.

Having thus delineated what can be seen as an unavoidable sacrifice of breadth for depth inherent to the method, along with the effects of my choice to limit my personally pluralistic epistemology to a singular perspective in the interest of clarity and manageability, I would now wish to detail my critical reflections on this specific research. First, as discussed in methodology above, there is an

inherent difficulty with interviews in that they rely on the participant's recollection and subsequent interpretation of the experience they had several months ago . Therefore, I see a potential value in interviewing the participants in the field, hence garnering a more immediate account of the experience. Furthermore, guided by the results of this present study, it would be useful to establish a more in depth focus on the us-and-them experience. Finally, the question of meaning and motivation continually stood out for me as the interviews and analyses progressed. A deeper exploration as to why the participants chose this career (or indeed cause) would move closer to an understanding of both who the international aid workers are, and also potentially offer more useful ways of supporting them. Such an exploration would also link up with more general research in social support regarding participants' ability to avail themselves of support (Cohen, Sherrod and Clark, 1986).

The method of IPA was highly useful in the exploration of experience. Interviews as well as analysis of the material benefitted from the practical and detailed guides of steps to follow yet were grounded in a solid methodological base that carried through these steps. The analysis in itself was an exercise in the delicate balance between descriptive phenomenology coupled with a more radical interpretative move, allowing a rich and detailed analysis that stayed close to the participants' accounts without simply describing what they said.

Finally, with reference to Yardley's (2000) exploration of validity in qualitative studies, I would argue that the unexpected nature of the results actually indicates a greater sense of validity of them. Research does not have to be surprising in order to be good, yet surprising research indicates that something new has been found.

6.3   Clinical application and implications for existential theory and practice

This research has a potential for having an impact on how psychology and psychotherapy engages with the needs of support by international aid workers, indeed how international aid organizations

think about their provision of support. As such, I will endeavour to work with DevAid and similar organizations, and also intend to publish articles with this dissertation as their basis. Looking at the impact of missions on the participants of this study, I feel that the findings of this study would have assisted them in times of distress. Indeed, I would have been greatly helped had I had this information upon returning home to an alienating and dreary Sweden, leaving the relational intensity and excitement of the deserts of southern Afghanistan.

I feel that the clinical implications of this study are both with reference to what should be done and also what may be less advisable. I will commence with what should be done, and then move on to areas that found less support in this study.

Looking at the area from the viewpoint of counselling psychology or psychotherapy, there seems to be a good argument to consider counselling of international aid workers an exercise in minority counselling. As such, ensuring that the counsellor has some form of experience of living, working or at least visiting these volatile areas is crucial. The counselling relationship would be greatly helped by the counsellor having the credentials to be admitted into the 'us' category, with reference to minority group counselling. This acceptance of the counsellor also rests firmly on a clear mandate of the counsellor as being in the service of the client and not the organization, with clear and protective guidelines on safeguarding the confidentiality of the client, hence also safeguarding the relationship with the same. Furthermore, great sensitivity and care should be exercised when engaging with what the counsellor may perceive as the client's defences.

From a more organizational viewpoint (though these points would be useful for the counsellor to keep in mind as well), it would be of benefit to capitalize on the findings on peer support and also the difficulty of coming home that have been highlighted by this study. This would involve pre-departure briefings on the importance of peer support and also an on-going awareness and mindfulness of the crucial nature of these relationships once in the field (with the caveat that peer support networks should not be formalized, since this would be the anathema of the peer ethos).

Potentially even more important would be the highlighting of possible difficulties in returning home, and this would also be something that would benefit families and relations at home. The alienation may still be experienced, but it may come as less of a shock to both homecomer and those at home. Furthermore, an awareness of the importance of Steinbock's (1995) home-comrade networks could increase the number of international aid workers availing themselves of such networks once at home. The availability of counselling may also be more important upon homecoming, or even some time after homecoming, than in the field.

Moving on to areas that have found less support in this study, I would query the blanket usefulness of the PTSD discourse. This is not to say that it isn't useful to be mindful of the occurrence of PTSD, but rather that this study has indicated that the worry about potential PTSD may have caused more distress for the participants than the actual disorder. It is important to note that the PTSD discourse became more prevalent the further one moved from the qualitative research – the more the participants' own voices and words were heard, the more complex the picture become, and traumatization seemed almost too blunt a term. Remaining at a dichotomous level of ascertaining whether the international aid workers are traumatized or not may be doing them a great disservice.

There are also implications for the practice of existential phenomenological psychotherapy and counselling psychology. The phenomenological method utilised speaks to the usefulness of such exploration, both in research as in therapy. Indeed the semi-structured interviews very much relied on my practice and experience in phenomenology and in my continued attempt at gathering experiences of my client's or participant's lifeworld. Moving from the descriptive to the interpretative as the analysis progressed was as revelatory and as uncomfortable as I find moving from simply staying with the client's account to making an existential interpretation or understanding of the same. The tension between the individual and the communal, the description and the framework, the phenomenon and existence, indeed the ontic and the ontological (Heidegger, 1927/1962) is a tension inherent in both good therapy and good research. I also find

that the usefulness and applicability of both Madison's (2010) existential migrant themes and existential philosophy's relational aspects of existence speak to the applicability of the existential discourse to this area.

6.4 Future research

I hope that future research in this area will increasingly acknowledge the need to look at individual experiences and constructions of meanings. Furthermore, as a more direct follow-up to this dissertation would be other similar studies on differing aspects of the experience of support in humanitarian missions. We also need to explore humanitarian experience from many more vantage points and angles, the most urgent ones in my mind being research on goals and general attitudes of humanitarians. As previously mentioned, a continued movement between qualitative depth and quantitative breadth would ensure the applicability and usefulness of our research.

Another thought that often came up for me and also in my discussions with others about this material was that of traveling troupes of artists, and I would welcome a comparable study of this group. The difficulty of returning home from the tour and also the alienation of being on the very same tour, the intensity of relating to one's team or band, it all resonates with the descriptions by the participants of this study. There is something about finding oneself when away and then losing oneself when back. Ergo, I give the last word of this dissertation to Dylan (1974):

> "Being on tour is like being in limbo. It's like going from nowhere to nowhere."

7   Bibliography

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8 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Ethical clearance

Psychology Department

REQUEST FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

Applicant (specify): UG PG (Module:DPsych.) PhD STAFF   Date submitted:…………………….

No study may proceed until this form has been signed by an authorised person, indicating that ethical approval has been granted. For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved.

This form should be accompanied by any other relevant materials, (e.g. questionnaire to be employed, letters to participants/institutions, advertisements or recruiting materials, information sheet for participants[1], consent form[2], or other, including approval by collaborating institutions). A fuller description of the study may be requested.

- Is this the first submission of the proposed study?
  Yes

- Is this an amended proposal (resubmission)?
  No
Psychology Office: if YES, please send this back to the original referee

- Is this an urgent application? (To be answered by Staff/Supervisor only)
  Yes/No

                                    Supervisor to initial here_____

Name(s) of investigator(s) Niklas Serning

Name of supervisor(s) Elena Manafi

Title of study: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Humanitarian

Personnel, with specific focus on Psychological Mission Support**.**

---

1. Please attach a brief description of the nature and purpose of the study, including details of the procedure to be employed. Identify the ethical issues involved, particularly in relation to the treatment/experiences of participants, session length, procedures, stimuli, responses, data collection, and the storage and reporting of data.

SEE ATTACHED PROJECT PROPOSAL AND DRAFT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

---

2. Could any of these procedures result in any adverse reactions?
    YES

If "yes", what precautionary steps are to be taken?

> The interview could bring the participant into territories of previous traumatisation. They are therefore clearly informed about this in the information sheet. Furthermore, should the researcher make the assessment that the participant is at risk of harm due to charged engagement with traumatizing material, the interview will be gently ended. The participant is informed by the information sheet as well as during the interview that they may end the interview at any time without any fear of negative repercussions. I, the researcher, have been trained specifically in trauma therapy, and am equipped to deal with rapid deterioration of the participant during the interview. Furthermore, DevAid offers an in house welfare/counselling service but also has an external counselling service for overseas staff. This includes those recently returned from overseas and they have a few specially briefed counsellors available for Fulai and Amun.

3. Will any form of deception be involved that raises ethical issues?   NO

(Most studies in psychology involve mild deception insofar as participants are unaware of the experimental hypotheses being tested. Deception becomes unethical if participants are likely
to feel angry or humiliated when the deception is revealed to them).

Note: if this work uses existing records/archives and does not require participation per se, tick here ……….
and go to question 10. (Ensure that your data handling complies with the Data Protection Act).
4. If participants other than Middlesex University students are to be involved, where do you intend
   to recruit them? *(A full risk assessment must be conducted for any work undertaken off university premises)*[6,7]

> DevAid have agreed to assist me in finding returning humanitarian workers in their service. They have also accepted the BPS ethical research levels, and are happy to support my research.

5. When did you receive programme planning approval for this study:

6. Does the study involve
   Clinical populations   NO
   Children (under 16 years)   NO
   Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental health problems,
learning disabilities, prisoners, elderly, young offenders?   NO

7. How, and from whom (e.g. from parents, from participants via signature) will informed consent
   be obtained? (*See consent guidelines*[2]*; note special considerations for some questionnaire research*)

> I will contact the participants directly, and obtain informed consent via information sheet and consent form (both attached to this document, and emailed to the participant at least a week before the interview). I will also be available on telephone and email for discussion and clarification of the information sheet if needed.

8. Will you inform participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty? (*see consent guidelines[2]*)

     YES

9. Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase?

     YES

   (*see debriefing guidelines[3]*)

10. Will you be available to discuss the study with participants, if necessary, to monitor any negative effects or misconceptions?   YES

If "no", how do you propose to deal with any potential problems?

| |
| |

11. Under the Data Protection Act, participant information is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Will confidentiality be guaranteed? (*see confidentiality guidelines[5]*)

     YES

If "yes" how will this be assured *(see[5])*

| The digital recordings and transcripts will be digitally encrypted and secure (in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998). No names or identifying characteristics will be published in the dissertation or article. |
| |

(*NB: You are not at liberty to publish material taken from your work with individuals without the*
prior agreement of those individuals).

12.   Are there any ethical issues which concern you about this particular piece of research, not covered elsewhere on this form?   NO

If "yes" please specify:

	Yes	No
13. Some or all of this research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University	X	
If "yes", tick here to confirm that a Risk Assessment form is to be submitted	X	■
14. I am aware that any modifications to the design or method of this proposal will require me to submit a new application for ethical approval	X	

	Yes	No
15. I am aware that I need to keep all materials/documents relating to this study (e.g. participant consent forms, filled questionnaires, etc) until completion of my degree	X	

	Yes	No
16. I have read the British Psychological Society's *Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human participants*[4] and believe this proposal to conform with them	X	

(NB: If "yes" has been responded to any of questions 2,3,5,11 or "no" to any of questions 7-10, a full explanation of the reason should be provided -- if necessary, on a separate sheet submitted with this form).

Researcher…………………………… date ……………..

Signatures of approval: Supervisor……………………………. date ……………..

Ethics Panel …………………………. date ……………..
(signed, pending completion of a Risk Assessment form if applicable)

[1,2,3,4,5,6,7] **Guidelines are available from the Ethics page of Oas!sPlus**

Please attach a brief description of the nature and purpose of the study, including details of the procedure to be employed.

Van Manen's (2000) approach to hermeneutic phenomenology will be utilized in order to interpret the experience of support by humanitarian workers. The study will attempt to identify the structures or components that support the well-being of the humanitarian worker, before, during and after their mission. No such research has until now been performed, but in Danieli's (2002) compendium of differing humanitarian organizations' approach to supporting their staff, some themes that seem to support the humanitarian worker have emerged. These themes, along with an existential view on the lifeworld (van Deurzen (1997), inform the interview questions. At the same time, care has been taken in order to allow the voice of the participant come through, whether or not their experience fits with previous literature or expectations.

Ten humanitarian workers will be interviewed; their contact details will be made available to the researcher by DevAid. However, they will be contacted by the researcher in order not to make them feel obliged to attend due to DevAid's insistence. Care has been taken to ensure the participants' safety through clear explanation of the subject of the interview, in order to avoid potential retraumatisation.

Identify the ethical issues involved, particularly in relation to the treatment/experiences of participants,

As detailed above, care is being taken to ensure the true voluntary basis of the participants. Furthermore, an information sheet will be provided to the participants well ahead of time in order to ensure that they are aware of the subject matter, and that they can opt out at any time. There is professional psychological support available should the participant need it.

Session length

There will be one interview per participant, with an estimated duration of one hour and a maximum of 90 minutes.

Procedures

DevAid has offered to provide a confidential meeting room at their premises, premises that are not only secure but also have plenty of people around as well as building security. In the event that Video Conferencing will be used, this is also at DevAid premises, on both ends.

Stimuli

The stimuli will be the interview questions, that will until the interview be unknown to the participant, although the subject matter has been clearly explained beforehand.

Responses

The responses are the answers and reactions from the participants, which will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

Data collection

The data will be anonymized prior to publication by the omission or change of names, locations or identifying details.

Storage and reporting of data

The digital recordings will be securely stored on an encrypted hard drive (using TrueCrypt in AES mode, NSA Top Secret cleared) (CNSS, 2003).

References:

CNSS., (2003)
U.S. Committee on National Security Systems (CNSS). National Policy on the Use of the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) to Protect National Security Systems and National Security Information, CNSS Policy No. 15, Fact Sheet No. 1, June 2003. Accessed March 2009 from csrc.nist.gov/groups/STM/cmvp/documents/**CNSS15**FS.pdf .

Danieli, Y. Ed. (2002)
Sharing the front line and the back hills: International protectors and providers: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers and the media in the midst of crisis. Amityville: Baywood Publishing Co.

Deurzen, E. van. (1997)
Everyday Mysteries. Existential dimensions of psychotherapy. Hove: Routledge.

Manen, M. van. (2000)
Researching Lived Experience. Albany: State University of New York Press.

INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FRA1

This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following fieldwork situations:
1. *All fieldwork undertaken independently by individual students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).*
2. *All fieldwork undertaken by postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).*
3. *Fieldwork undertaken by research students. Student to complete with supervisor.*
4. *Fieldwork/visits by research staff. Researcher to complete with Research Centre Head.*

FIELDWORK DETAILS

Name Niklas Serning

Student No
Research Centre (staff only)…………………

Supervisor Elena Manafi

Degree course DPsych

Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident	**NEXT OF KIN** **Name** nn **Phone** xx
Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed fieldwork	n/a
Any health problems (full details) Which may be relevant to proposed fieldwork activity in case of emergencies.	n/a
Locality (Country and Region)	Shire City
Travel Arrangements NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas fieldwork.	
Dates of Travel and Fieldwork	November 2009

PLEASE READ THE INFORMATION OVERLEAF VERY CAREFULLY

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment   PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed **(Col. 1).** Give the approximate date (month / year) of your last visit, or enter 'NOT VISITED' **(Col 2).** For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern **(Col. 3).**

Examples of Potential Hazards :
Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia)
Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.
Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.
Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (weils disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc), parasites', flooding, tides and range.
Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.
Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.
Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc), working at night, areas of high crime.
Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.
Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.
Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage.
Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task
If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.

Give brief details of fieldwork activity: Interviewing humanitarian workers

……
…………………….
……
…………………….
……
…………………….

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE	2. LAST VISIT	3. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
Shire City	**July 2009**	**None – Interviews will be carried out in a meeting room at the government operated and secured offices of DevAid. There are other individuals in the building in the event of an incident, as are there security personnel available.**

The University Fieldwork code of Practice booklet provides practical advice that should be followed in planning and conducting fieldwork.

Risk Minimisation/Control Measures   PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY

For each hazard identified **(Col 3),** list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken **(Col 4)** to **"reduce the risk to acceptable levels",** and the safety equipment **(Col 6)** that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted **(Col. 4),** categorise the fieldwork risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high **(Col. 5).**
Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the

consequences of an accident.

An acceptable level of risk is: a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

Examples of control measures/precautions:
Providing adequate training, information & instructions on fieldwork tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use. Assessing individuals fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of fieldwork area.

Examples of Safety Equipment: Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

4. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	5. RISK ASSESSMENT	6. EQUIPMENT

PLEASE READ INFORMATION OVERLEAF AND SIGN AS APPROPRIATE

DECLARATION: The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the fieldwork period and additional precautions taken or fieldwork discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

Signature of Fieldworker (Student/Staff)	…………………..………….…………..	30/05/2009
Signature of Student Supervisor	…………………..………….…………..	**Date** …………………….……

APPROVAL: (ONE ONLY)

Signature of Curriculum Leader (undergraduate students only)	…………………..………………………..………… ……	**Date** ……………………..……
Signature of Research Degree Co-ordinator or Masters Course Leader or Taught Masters Curriculum Leader	…………………..…………………………..……… ……	**Date** ……………………..……
Signature of Research Centre Head (for staff fieldworkers)	…………………..…………………………..……… ……	**Date** ……………………..……

FIELDWORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level

appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:

x   Safety knowledge and training?

x   Awareness of cultural, social and political differences?

x   Physical and psychological fitness and disease immunity, protection and awareness?

x   Personal clothing and safety equipment?

x   Suitability of fieldworkers to proposed tasks?

2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to:

x   Visa, permits?

x   Legal access to sites and/or persons?

x   Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?

x   Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?

x   Vaccinations and other health precautions?

x   Civil unrest and terrorism?

x   Arrival times after journeys?

x   Safety equipment and protective clothing?

x   Financial and insurance implications?

x   Crime risk?

x   Health insurance arrangements?

x   Emergency procedures?

x   Transport use?

x   Travel and accommodation arrangements?

<u>Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments:</u> Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the fieldworker participating on the field course/work. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.

JOINT RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE OF THE NEW SCHOOL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELLING AND THE SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY OF MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

1.   Study title

The title of the study is "A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Humanitarian Personnel, with specific focus on Psychological Mission Support." This research is about trying to find out what the experience of support is to humanitarian workers.

2.   Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Prior to deciding to participate, it is vital that you understand what the purpose of the research is and what it will involve, so please read the information below carefully. If there is anything that is not clear or you would like more information please ask. After reading the information please take some time to consider whether or not you wish to take part. You will not be paid for taking part in the research.

3.   What is the purpose of the study?

I want to find out how support is experienced by humanitarian workers.

4.   Why have I been chosen?

DevAid has given me lists of humanitarian workers that have recently returned from the field. You were on this list.

5.   Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. The completion and return of your consent form will be taken as your informed decision to participate. You will be asked questions about your experience before, during and after your last humanitarian mission. Please consider whether you feel able to do this before you sign the consent form, as the questions may bring back feelings and memories. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time before, during, or after the interviews without justifying your decision.

6.   What will happen to me if I take part?

I would like to interview you for about an hour; it can be shorter or longer than this (up to 90 minutes). We will discuss how things were before, during and after the mission you went on, and what you experienced as being supportive of your well-being during these times.

7.   What do I have to do?

Taking part in the research will involve participating in semi-structured interviews, in which you will be asked to answer a number of questions. There will be no right or wrong answers to the questions, what is vital are your particular answers and thoughts.

8.   Is there any risk in taking part?

Some of the questions may bring back feelings for you, either from this or previous missions. This may be even more likely if you have suffered trauma in relation to this kind of work before.

If you experience difficult emotions after the interview, you are very welcome to contact me (07515114268) or DevAid's Counselling support line on 555-555 555

10.   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your answers will inform research that benefits the understanding of humanitarian workers, and may lead to better supporting structures being developed or taught.

11.   Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information provided by you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will have right of access to personal data collected about you. Should you wish to do so, please make a request in writing to the address at the bottom of this form, alternatively the email address. Any information about you will be allocated an alphanumeric key. A record of any personal records, such as name, date of birth, address and sensitive personal data, will be kept separately to protect your anonymity. When quotes from the interviews are used in the thesis any information which could identify you, such as your specific mission or duties, will be changed. All data collected will be stored, analysed and reported in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

12.   Recordings

The interviews will be digitally recorded then immediately encrypted and kept for a minimum of three years in a secure place away from the alphanumeric key allocated to your data. Should you wish for the recordings to be erased at any time please let me know in writing and the recordings will be deleted. The supervisor may ask to see the data collected prior to anonymization. There would be no other individuals involved who could request seeing the data until it has been anonymized.

13.   What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research will be published as part of a postgraduate thesis and will be lodged in the University Library. Please consider this prior to signing the consent form. Should you wish to read the final research you can request to receive a brief summary, the entire thesis in hard copy or emailed or the website where the thesis can be downloaded. Please confirm whether you want any, or more than one, of the above mentioned options. The results will probably be published in 2010.

14.   Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The research has received approval from the joint Research Ethics Committee of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the School of Psychology of Middlesex University. Should you have any complaints about the research you can contact the supervisor, please see details below. The indemnification procedure of Middlesex University applies to the research.

15. Contact for further information

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep. Should you wish to contact myself, or my supervisor, please find the contact details below. The NSPC office will let us know that you wish to contact us. Thank you for taking part.

Researcher: Niklas Serning
Supervisor: Pnina Shinebourne

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)
Royal Waterloo House
51-55 Waterloo House
London SE1 8TX

NSPC telephone number: 0207 928 4344
NSPC email address: admin@nspc.org.uk
Niklas Serning's telephone number: 07515114268
Niklas Serning's email address: niklas@serning.com

Appendix 4 - List of interview prompts and questions

Introduction

We'll start with you, how you feel about doing what you do, why you ended up doing this.

Have these things changed over time? How has this affected how you see yourself? Have there been times when you have found it difficult?

OK, let's move on to your experience of last mission, especially how you *experienced* support. Start with your experiences during, then after, then before.

 Would you please tell me briefly about your last mission, and what you did there?

Body of interview, these questions are repeated

Experiencing support during your last mission

Could you tell me of a specific time when you **felt supported**?

Any times when you **didn't** feel supported?

How would you have **liked to be** supported?

Experiencing support after your last mission

Could you tell me of a specific time when you **felt supported**?

Any times when you **didn't** feel supported?

How would you have **liked to be** supported?

Experiencing support before your last mission

Could you tell me of a specific time when you **felt supported**?

Any times when you **didn't** feel supported?

How would you have **liked to be** supported?

Ending the interview

OK, were just about done now, and I'd really like to know if there are any other thoughts that have come up for you around your experiences, about what supports you and all that?

Do you have any questions for me? What was your experience of this interview?

OK, what will happen now is that I will transfer this interview onto an encrypted hard drive, so it will be safe. I'll erase it when the research is finished. Using your information and other participant's information, I will try to understand and write a paper on how humanitarian workers experience support. I'll write in general terms, so your anonymity will be preserved when the paper or article is published.

If any queries or worries come up for you, feel free to call me on the number on your information sheet. You could also contact DevAid directly, I understand that they have counselling support available.

So, I really want to thank you for taking your time to do this interview, it has been really useful and interesting.

Informal cues:

What happened? What did you do? How did you feel?

Emotion, cognitive, body, relational, meaning?

What does it mean to you, what does it say about you, what does it do for you?

Appendix 5 - consent form

New School of Psychotherapy and Psychology Department, Middlesex University School of Health and Social Sciences

Project title: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Humanitarian Personnel, with specific focus on Psychological Mission Support.

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication in an anonymous form, and provide my consent that this might occur.

I understand that a recording is being made of this interview and will be securely stored until a verbatim transcript has been made

Print name of participant   Participant's signature

Print name of researcher   Researcher's signature

Niklas Serning

Date

Appendix 6 – Theme table

Superordinate theme [section]

Theme [sub-section]

Subtheme

Verbatim quote. Participant: Location

I: Peer support

I-1: Peer support is strong

Peer support is strong

the most useful support was actually from your individual team Sid: 39

that kind of intensity I think it really suited me but, I also think it really supported me as well. Kim: 62

those four people they really, really, really helped hugely and if I hadn't had them then it would have been very much tougher Grace: 42

Special connection with peers in duty station

They have similar values and interests. Victor: 24

Duty or importance to connect with peers

it is the responsibility of the colleagues to spot that… Sid: 45

Experience of continued connection to family and friends at home

for me that was probably my single biggest supporting mechanism…Skyping with [partner]. Paul: 230

Needing peers to be strong

its knowing that colleagues that are posted with me are up to the job Pat: 232

there's a lot of sense that we need each other, let's make sure that we support each other. Eve: 300

I-2: Peer support envelops and holds, it is in the background

Peer support is in the background

there was more just a general sense of people kind of looking out for each other Sid: 47

these are indirect supports, [ ] its supports you, [ ] by its very being there. Paul: 134

Peer support envelops and holds

I was think that being aware that it was there and available if you needed it. Kim: 74

To know that it is there is comforting. Pat: 70

Being included and surrounded by friends

trips that involved other housemates [ ] felt like I could live there and it would be a bit more like home than I'd anticipated. Eve: 114

Relying on your peers

she was obviously not going to let me do it on my own so she was helping me even though it wasn't her job. Victor: 108

those four people they really, really, really helped hugely Grace: 42

I-3: More challenging aspects of peers

(No evidence from Sid or Kim in this theme)

Being trapped

there's no real escape Eve: 30

cause you never can get away. Victor: 88

Wanting to get out

I need to start getting out of [Mission country] even though I can't get out. Paul: 242

Not wanting to formalize peer support

difficult for people [ ] if though it is something that you have to do, rather than you want to do it. Pat: 64

Not trusting peers

a lot of the people who were there [ ] were never really suitable Grace: 89

I-4: Us-and-them

the most useful support was actually from your individual team Sid: 39

just sharing, knowing that somebody else has been through something similar that you're not slightly loopy or weird Pat: 149

the kind of people who go to places like this, there is a bit of self-selection going on, and there's a certain kind of person who'd be attracted to that kind of environment, and therefore, there's a lot of like-mindedness Eve: 300

no one in my life [at home] could ever quite picture what it's like to be like to be there Kim: 60

there's nobody to empathize with you other than those who are going through exactly the same thing. Paul: 204

They have similar values and interests Victor: 24

knowing that somebody was in the same boat Grace: 38

II: Formal support

II-1: Formal support

(No evidence from Victor in this theme)

Disliking formal support

DevAid doesn't get this Kim: 120

I didn't find that kind of response from DevAid particularly helpful Pat: 54

she was doing this for free so again it was somebody else caring Grace: 127

These systems are all very well but what actually matters is the individuals Eve: 224

It was both a constraining factor, a factor that invaded you privacy Paul: 174

Formal support is forced upon you

I'm wary of getting support from within the government system. Sid: 105

Positive view on formal support

that could potentially be a good [ ] safeguard. Kim: 98

II-2: Counselling and other support

Disliking counselling support

it would take a lot for something to happen for someone to turn to a counsellor. Sid: 40

it was just hideous and a complete waste of money Pat: 110

Appreciating counselling support

a free therapy session, it was really good. Kim: 134

being able to access the free counselling was also very helpful Victor: 78

Views on counselling support

it's a shame that this woman had no understanding of [the] environment that she was counselling people in. Victor: 78

I don't particularly enjoy phone conversations so for me that's not the ideal way to do counselling Eve: 236

I think it would have been useful to have been given more guidance on what you should do after leaving Grace: 97

you sort of build your walls of protection, [counselling] would require you to lower those walls. Paul: 148 - 150

III: The experience of going on mission

III-1: Deploying

Fear and excitement

I was scared witless Pat: 179

A mixture of fear and excitement Pat: 183

there was the excitement there was adrenalin Grace: 24

Familiarity supportive

I think it helped, talking to someone who was currently there and who could give me an idea of what to expect Paul: 270

I chatted a lot to people who had been out there before. That was the most helpful thing Sid: 136

it just kind of felt like I could live there and it would be a bit more like home than I'd anticipated. Eve: 114

It might be a bit wasteful to fly someone out to somewhere for a few days [ ] but actually, you know, that more than anything else just. Kim: 128

I was excited I was on a familiarization of it so I had a good idea of what to take with me or what to expect.   That's very helpful [ ] I think it's essential. Victor: 188

III-2: The experience of being on mission

The experience of the mission country

it was a complete mess and you did think well what can I do? Eve: 42

things don't work very well Paul: 58

it's fascinating Pat: 10

it was in some ways exhilarating Paul: 52

The experience of being in the mission country

I think that Amun was like living somewhere normal Sid: 113

a different kind of stress [ ] that took me completely outside of what I was doing. Victor: 38

I would leave and I would go back to my normal life Grace: 30

work on Amun it's all absorbent. It's all you do, think, dream about. Pat: 177

how often do you get to fly in a military plane Eve: 42

I think I thrived in Amun more than I have thrived anywhere else. Kim: 74

a sense of power [ ] at least feel that you influence. Paul: 52

III-3: Coming home

Difficulties connected to coming home

leaving something that I really enjoyed Eve: 252

It's very high paced frenetic, exciting [ ] and then you come to a desk job Pat: 60

there's a big black hole about – was there any permanent effect Paul: 288

I didn't want to come back to Shire City and sit in my flat in the evening and not see anyone till the next day. Victor: 166

an underlying level tension in my gut Grace: 24

whenever I hear certain noises, I assume it's a mortar Sid: 113

Supporting factors when coming home

I probably needed that kind of camaraderie and sort of you know, everyone having had the same experience Kim: 114

seeing my friends and family has been where I got most my support from. Sid: 105

III-4: Normality and alienation

(No evidence from Pat in this theme)

Social life makes life normal

when I went to a friend's house for dinner I [ ] felt like I was living a normal life Sid: 91

Normality is relative

it seems very normal to me but that's because of previous... Eve: 100

Alienation and abnormality is frustrating

I just felt so wrenched out of my normal life Grace: 28

that's enough and I just want to live a normal life Victor: 132

Abnormal things feel normal after a while, the focus shifts

suddenly, just driving through the streets of Amun City going whoa it's a city, it's normal Kim: 134

your focus then shifts to what is the less normal bit [ ] then you accentuate, exaggerate that. And make that sort of the focus. Paul: 112

Difficult to integrate with home, feeling abnormal

there is a shock element to having to adapt to a normality you already knew. Paul: 264

III-5: Security

DevAid overzealous with security

DevAid kind of slightly panicked Pat: 54

Experience of Hostile Environment course

the hostile environments training prepared me and in some ways it terrified me Kim: 136

Experience of security worries

I don't remember ever feeling afraid really which maybe that's denial I don't know. Eve: 34

being stressed about being insecure [ ] it's definitely an underlying thing. Grace: 103

Trust in security forces

I felt very safe with them Victor: 200

Feeling confined due to security measures

I fought pretty hard to be able to go [ ] the security manager had a different perception to the threat than I did Sid: 89

this was for my own good Paul: 178

III-6: Management and work

Work pressure high

There isn't really much work-life balance there Kim:92

Private life less pressure

your free time is more your own Victor: 40

Prefers boundaries between private and work

boundaries I guess get very blurred in a place like Amun. Pat: 119

Wants to be acknowledged by management

> *having a discussion with a director is part of that and the support you got from him was very important.* Sid: 126

> *there is an urgent apparatus, a powerful apparatus, that is vigilant and does care.* Paul: 190 - 192

Management lacked in supportive function

> *I'd never go to him for that kind of support* Eve: 208

Work moved towards chaos, people were backstabbing

> *knowing that they were stabbing you behind [ ] I was holding it together with an elastic band and sellotape* Grace: 38