

## Research update: Insights from the HIRI

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Since I began working as a research scientist for the Headington Institute in September 2013, I have mainly focused my efforts on resilience: how to understand resilience, how to measure resilience, and how to utilize resilience profiles to improve resilience. It has been quite a journey! In our quest to understand resilience in humanitarian aid workers, we first set out to create a questionnaire using items suggested by the research literature on resilience. We then used factor analysis to cluster the items in ways that would enable us to target specific areas of strength or weakness, and retained items and factors that seemed to be the most robust.

Thus emerged the **Headington Institute Resilience Inventory (HIRI)**, an instrument consistent with our view of resilience as a construct composed of multiple cognitive, psychological, and relational elements that interact with physiological processes. Individuals with stronger levels of resilience are able to bounce back more easily from critical incidents, which, unfortunately, occur only far too frequently out in the field. They generally have stronger relationships, handle stress more easily, and are less vulnerable to posttraumatic stress symptoms. Resilience is an elusive concept because it is not a static quality of an individual but rather one that varies in response to many other variables. Thankfully, however, it would appear that it can be strengthened. Further, the development of a stronger level of resilience should bring benefits even without the occurrence of potentially traumatic events. So, back to the HIRI...

Individuals rate each HIRI item on a scale from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 7 (describes me very well), and items are then grouped according to which of seven resilience factors they represent. The averages of the item responses provide an indication of how closely an individual identifies with the components of the resilience factors. Higher scores (closer to 7) suggest that the individual resonates to a greater extent with the general idea of the factor, whereas lower scores (closer to 1), may indicate less interest or proficiency in that area, or a potential area of growth. Our research has indicated that teams who focus on promoting resilience benefit from decreased rates of posttraumatic symptoms in their staff.

Although we continue to fine-tune the instrument and are not yet ready for it to be used broadly, we have zeroed in on seven factors that seem to be critical for aid workers:

**Adaptive Engagement:** Engagement with life's challenges along with the capacity and openness to adapt when necessary, and the awareness of inner strength. Opportunities to learn are important, with cognitive complexity a bonus.

**Spirituality:** A sense of enrichment coming from a relationship with a higher power. Both inner beliefs and external practices are valued.

**Emotional Regulation:** Clear thinking and competency in the control and management of one's emotions. The capacity to forgive is advantageous.

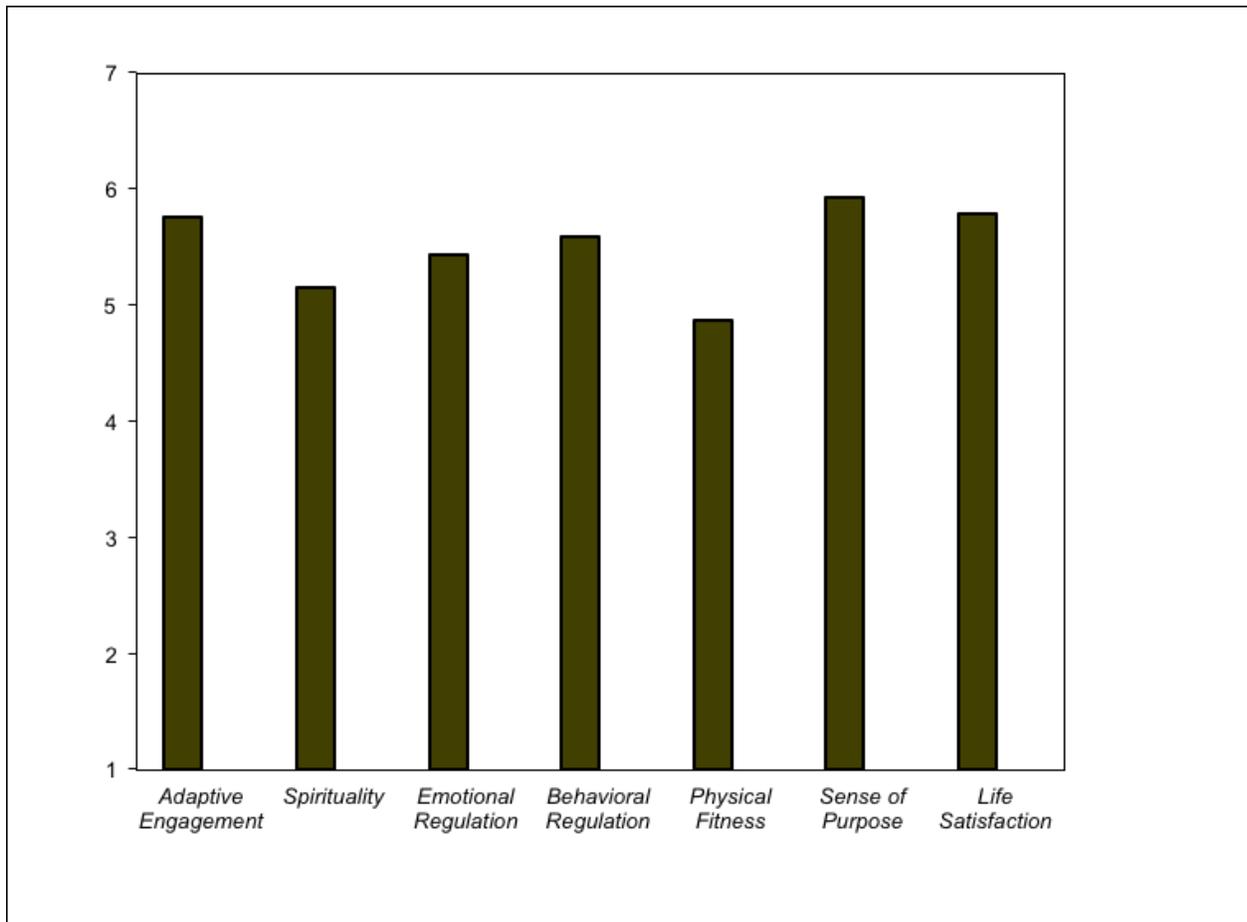
**Behavioral Regulation:** Acting in a measured, careful manner. One's capacity to control rash behaviors and to do what needs to be done allows for loyal friendships where differences are resolved, and for task completion.



**Physical Fitness:** Good physical health and the capacity to maintain an adequate level of physical activity.

**Sense of Purpose:** Engaging in meaningful work provides a sense of purpose and a way to help others. When the going gets tough, a sense of responsibility and determination are essential.

**Life Satisfaction:** Contentment with one's life's work, enjoyment of small pleasures, and a hopeful outlook. Feeling supported by friends is important.



Since higher scores closer to 7 on the HIRI would generally be desirable, we can see that as a group, aid workers seem to do reasonably well in some areas but may benefit from adopting behaviors that promote the strengthening of others. The lowest factors, Physical Fitness (M = 4.9), and Spirituality (M = 5.2) are areas that look like they could be improved. We will see how these trends hold up, as we continue to add to our data set in coming months.

As more information is gathered, the hope is to provide cutting edge insights to humanitarian aid workers and first responders so that their lives, and those of the many people they serve,