



IMMIGRATION
DETENTION
MONITORING



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MODULE 7.1 COPING WITH THE EFFECTS OF MONITORING



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



LEGEND

 **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

 **REFLECTION ACTIVITY**

 **SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

 **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

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CHAPTER 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND MODULE STRUCTURE

✓ BY THE END OF THIS INTRODUCTION, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- ✓ Identify what elements are required to maintain safety and well-being of monitors before, during and after the monitoring visit.

Please read the following chapters carefully and complete some short assignments.

This module should take you around 50 minutes to complete.



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Chapter 1

THE CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION MONITORING: BE PREPARED

Immigration detention monitoring takes place in a wide variety of locations, not all of them properly conceived as or designated as immigration facilities (see Module 2). Often these locations are not suitable for the purpose of functioning as immigration detention facilities; in many cases they may be dilapidated, overcrowded and unacceptable in terms of hygiene and living conditions. Moreover, asylum-seekers and other immigration detainees held in such facilities may be agitated and uncertain about their legal situation, and their relationship with the staff may be very tense. All these factors make immigration detention facilities, like other places where people are deprived of liberty, challenging places to visit. Monitors must be prepared for what they will be exposed to.

Monitoring remains a very challenging area of work. Monitors may be exposed to:

- Closed facilities with barbed wires
- Gates and doors made of steel
- Locked gates and doors
- Guards that observe you
- Overcrowding
- Asylum-seekers, perhaps in large numbers, gathering around you as they wish to find out who you are, why are you here and whether you can help
- Questions being asked, raised voices
- Distressing personal stories
- Desperate pleas of help
- Asylum-seekers who are physically or mentally unwell
- Self-harm
- Poor living conditions
- Unhygienic living condition

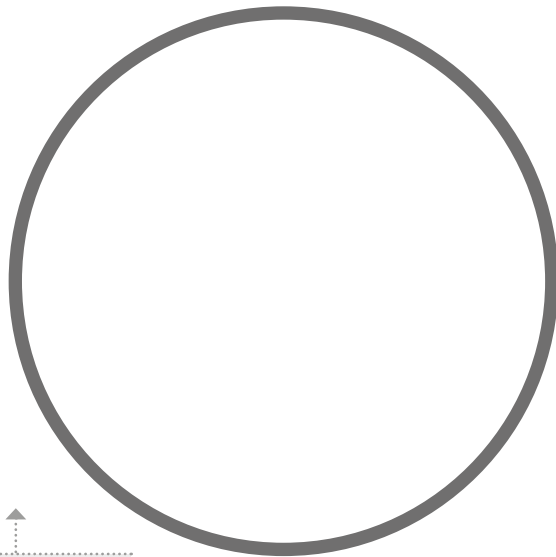
Let us examine some helpful tips that can help you cope with the effects of monitoring.



THE DEMEANOUR OF MONITORS

It is paramount that you as a monitor remain calm in this challenging environment and concentrate on the monitoring visit that you are there to carry out. Be aware of your own limitations and do not expose yourself to any risks. Be prepared and be aware that you may be overwhelmed by the experience and even get upset.

Managing perceptions is vital in the context of detention monitoring and can help you cope with the difficult task of monitoring.



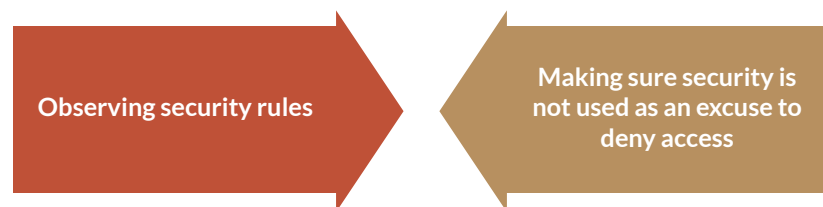
Click on each circle
to learn more.





3.1 Safety and security

Nearly all places of immigration detention will have written internal rules intended to ensure and maintain security and good order. As a general proposition, it is prudent to observe the internal rules. However, monitors will need to be careful to strike a balance between observing security rules and making sure that such rules are not used as an excuse to deny access to parts of the immigration detention facility or certain detainees. This needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration your previous experiences in the location or facility. If such situations arise, monitors must determine whether continuing a visit is the best option. They need to address their concerns directly to the responsible authority at the first appropriate opportunity.



Although the non-criminal status of people held in places of immigration detention should inform security assessments, this does not remove all security risks. In any closed environment where people are held against their will, and especially in a place where the negative effects of deprivation of liberty are strongly in evidence, tensions can run high and personal security may be an issue, as in the event of a fire or a riot. Places of immigration detention are no exception, especially where detention policies and practices lead to high levels of anxiety and uncertainty. You must remember that as a monitor you should never place yourself, your team members or anyone else you interact with at risk.

Any restrictions that facility staff advise must be demonstrably necessary for the monitors to determine that security considerations are not being used as an excuse to restrict access to certain places or detainees.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the monitors, and principally the team leader, to decide what to do.

3.2 Security tips

Notification: Visits to an immigration detention facility should not be conducted on your own. But even when going with the team, make sure that you let your family and/or a trusted person know where you are going, how long do you expect to be away and how the facility can be reached. The monitoring team should always have key phone numbers with them in case of emergency.

Contacts within the team: If the monitoring team decides to split, all team members should be aware of where others are going and agree on a time to meet. These meeting times should be respected.

Clothing: Think about what you are wearing so that it is not only respectful and mindful of any cultural sensitivities, but also allows you the requisite freedom of movement in case you need to move quickly.

What to bring in with you: Think carefully about what items you need to bring with you and whether the security rules of the immigration detention facility allow you to bring in such items. Consider whether a particular item can expose you to a risk: for example, many detention facilities do not allow mobile phones. If you bring in yours, it may expose you to a risk that a detainee may try to take it from you.

Know the security protocol of the facility: Detention facilities usually have their own security protocols in place, and monitors should be well aware of them. The staff will be aware that you are in the facility, but they may not know which part of the facility you are at. When arriving at a particular part, it is prudent to let the staff know you have arrived and ask them if there are any security concerns. You will need to carefully weigh the information you are given to make sure that any security concerns do not interfere with the proper conduct of the monitoring visit.

Some places have so-called panic-buttons which are alarms to use in case of a security breach: be aware of their location and know how to use them.

Know your exit: always be mindful of where is the exit and how you position yourself in order allow yourself a swift exit if necessary. For example, if you enter a cell, make sure you are standing in front of the door so that nobody can block your exit.

Be aware of your surroundings: Be aware of what's happening around you. This is especially challenging during interviews because you may be engrossed in the interview process and not notice who is around you. This could not only expose the interviewees to risk of reprisals but also put you at risk.





CHAPTER 4

WHAT DO OTHER MONITORS SAY ABOUT THEIR MONITORING EXPERIENCE?

‘The first time I went to a detention place, I just could not believe how heavy are the steel bar doors. My hand was soon hurting from opening and closing them. And the heavy slam of each door- you cannot close them gently, no matter how hard you try. They slam. And they are all locked. You cannot walk free through any one of them. Each one must be unlocked as you wish to enter and locked straight after you enter. In that one day I unlocked more doors than in my whole life previously. At least it felt so.’

‘The rules of the detention facility barred all mobile phones from the facility; even the staff were not allowed to have them and so I never brought one in either. What if I had brought it with me and some detainee, in a distressed situation, would have tried to take it off me? I would have caused a security breach and the detainee would have been in trouble.’

‘After my first visit to a detention facility, my feet and legs hurt so much that I resolved to find more comfortable footwear for the next visit. That’s how I came to own a pair of ‘monitoring shoes.’

‘A detainee once asked me if he could borrow my pen. But the rules forbid passing anything on to detainees so I asked politely and apologetically whether he would mind asking an officer instead as I am not permitted to do that. It may have been a trivial matter but I could have exposed the detainee to a risk of breaching the rules if I had given the pen.’





CHAPTER 5

INTERIM ASSIGNMENT: SELF-REFLECTION

- ❓ *Can you recall the first time you went on a monitoring visit?*
- ❓ *What was most striking about it?*
- ❓ *What was most difficult?*

NOTES:

A large, empty, light beige rectangular area provided for taking notes.



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Chapter 5



CHAPTER 6

MENTAL HEALTH RISKS OF MONITORS

Monitors carrying out visits to places of immigration detention are exposed to traumatic experiences that present significant mental health risks. [Vicarious trauma](#) in people who are working with traumatized persons cannot be prevented, but its effects can be reduced.

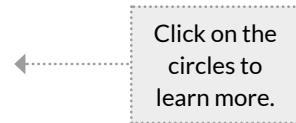


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Chapter 6

6.1 Who is at risk for vicarious trauma?

Risk factors are realities that make one more vulnerable to experiencing vicarious trauma, or experiencing more severe vicarious trauma. Understanding what your personal risk factors are will make it easier to identify what might help prevent or address vicarious trauma. Click on the diagram to learn more about personal risk factors.





6.2 Common symptoms of vicarious trauma

Symptoms of vicarious trauma are multiple and can be very different from person to person. One person may primarily experience vicarious trauma physically, through illness, pains or trouble sleeping while another may primarily show it in relationships by withdrawing from others or being irritable, depressed or anxious. Vicarious trauma can negatively affect family life and work life.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA INCLUDE:

- Emotional dysregulation
- Feeling badly about oneself
- Difficulties in making decisions
- Taking on too much responsibility
- Having difficulty leaving work at the end of the day
- Trying to step in and control others
- Problems in relationships
- Health problems
- Difficulty feeling connected to what's going on around
- Affected interaction with loved ones



CHAPTER 7

HOW TO ENSURE COPING AND WELFARE OF MONITORS

Immigration detention monitoring visits involve witnessing human suffering that exposes monitors to potential traumatizing situations and thus to vicarious trauma. To ensure coping and welfare of monitors and to prevent psychological trauma following monitoring visits, [psychological support strategies](#) should be implemented at the individual and organizational level.

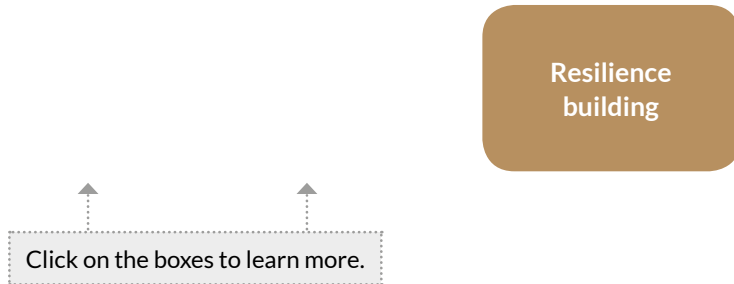


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Chapter 7

7.1 What you can do to cope?

On the individual level, monitors should be encouraged to work towards developing individual resilience. What helps a person address vicarious trauma will reflect the person's own needs, experiences, interests, resources, culture and values.



For more tips on how to cope please consult the Annex to this module.





7.2 What organizations can do

Organizations can lessen the risk of vicarious trauma by helping monitors feel supported, valued, competent and connected. Actions at the organizational level include, but are not limited to:

- Policies and procedures for staff care;
- Adequate salary and time off (including R&R) for all staff;
- Sufficient orientation, professional training and management supervision for staff to feel competent and supported;
- Raising awareness among staff about the psychological difficulties of being a monitor; and
- Ensuring access to medical and mental health support services including: information and training about the psychological and spiritual hazards of the work and about effective self-care; access to good confidential counselling support as needed; and support for families around issues such as child care, separation and relocation.

For more tips on what organisations and managers can do to help their monitors, please consult the Annex to this module.

7.3 Debriefings

Visits to places of immigration detention can be extremely demanding and sometimes deeply affecting, especially if members of the monitoring team witness people in a highly distressed state or engaging in acts of protest or self-harm, or some other unanticipated crisis incident.

All monitors should be required to undergo periodic debriefings, even if some, or even all, individual team members show no signs of exhaustion or distress. Ideally, debriefing will be carried out both individually and as a group, and be undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced personnel.

The monitoring body should also keep in mind that frequent monitoring visits may cause burnout, and monitors may become somewhat 'institutionalized'. It is important that monitors take breaks to enable them to keep a fresh perspective on the detention facility.

INTERPRETERS

Interpreters have an obligation to respect privacy and confidentiality. Their selection needs to have regard to the dynamics at play in the place of detention, including social, cultural, religious and political difference; depending on the situation, careful vetting of an interpreter's background may be necessary.

In a closed environment, particularly in isolated areas, interpreters can become either very powerful or very vulnerable people (or both) because of the confidential information to which they have access.

As a consequence, it may be necessary to consider managing these issues through, for example, regular rotation of interpreters or ensuring that interpreters are not the same as those used on a regular basis by the staff and management.

If possible, monitors ought to take the time to get to know interpreters and develop a rapport with them.

Source: [Immigration Detention Manual](#), box 3.15, p. 71

SELF-REFLECTION SECTION

Please reflect on the following questions:



What are some ways that you have changed over time because of your work?



What are some ways that caring about people who have been hurt affects you?



What are two ways you feel your work has had a positive influence on the way you see the world, yourself, or what matters to you (your sense of meaning and purpose, hope and faith)?



What are two ways you feel your work has had a negative influence on the way you see the world, yourself, or what matters to you (your sense of meaning and purpose, hope and faith)?



What are three personal (individual) risk factors/ situational risk factors that may be placing you at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma right now?



What are three personal (individual) protective factors/ situational protective factors in your life that you feel help protect you from vicarious trauma?



If you feel you may be struggling with it now, what are some ways your vicarious trauma impacts your work?



Think about your own early warning signs for vicarious trauma that you identified earlier. How might these impact your family, your colleagues and your work?



What are three activities you do regularly or enjoy doing that can help you cope with vicarious trauma?



What are some things your organization already does well to support its staff and help reduce the risk of vicarious trauma?





CHAPTER 9

KEY MESSAGES

Monitors not only need to be objective, impartial and independent; they also need to be perceived to be so.

Monitors must always respect the written rules of the detention facility while being mindful that such rules are not used as an excuse to restrict access.

Monitors must be aware of the effects that the challenging environment of detention may have on them, and of the risk of vicarious trauma.

- The periodic debriefing and self-check of monitors is necessary regardless of any signs of exhaustion.
- Organizations and managers have a responsibility to care for monitors' well-being.



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Chapter 9



This material was developed within the project 'Global Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Programme to Prevent Detention of Children and to Protect Children and Other Asylum-Seekers in Detention' funded by the European Union.

The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.