



Student Guide to Humanitarian Work Psychology (HWP)

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What is humanitarian work psychology (HWP)?

Humanitarian work psychology is a diverse and growing topic within the field of industrial-organisational (I-O) psychology. When explaining HWP to advisors, professors, or other students, it's useful to first highlight the basic definition of HWP.

Humanitarian work psychology concerns the synthesis of organisational, industrial, work, and other areas of psychology with deliberate and organised efforts to enhance human welfare.

The key to the definition is the expression “deliberate and organised efforts to enhance human welfare”. What does this mean? Simply put, these are activities that are specifically designed to help others and that require people to work together. For example, getting volunteers to provide relief supplies after a natural disaster would be both organised because it requires the coordination of the volunteers and deliberately focused on improving human welfare because it is designed to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the natural disaster.

Often, but not always, deliberate and organised efforts to enhance human welfare are forms of “humanitarian work” (hence the name!). However, it is important to point out that HWP also focuses on forms of work that are not traditionally thought of as “humanitarian”. For example, employees of a corporation who work together to create a diversity-awareness program to benefit minority members of the corporation are of potential relevance to HWP because they are both organised and focused upon improving the welfare of others – in this case, the welfare of minority employees.

In one sense, the definition of HWP is very broad. Take the examples given above. What do a corporate diversity-awareness program and the response to a natural disaster have in common? What they have in common, and what sets HWP apart from other areas of psychology, is the organised action of working to “help” others. This is a special form of work which requires unique considerations. These considerations include having to ask questions like:

How is working with vulnerable, impoverished, or disadvantaged populations different than helping other populations?

How can we measure whether a humanitarian initiative has been successful? What are the best criteria? The number of houses built? People's satisfaction with the assistance that has been provided?

What is the most efficient way to empower others in the workplace?

In order to understand what HWP is, it helps to know what HWP is not. Humanitarian work psychology is NOT:

- A specific group or organisation – you can study HWP no matter what your affiliation, background, or professional status; while the Global Organisation for Humanitarian Work Psychology (GOHWP) is devoted to promoting HWP, we make no claim to be the only people who can practice it;
- A discipline that only considers humanitarian work. Despite its name, HWP relates to a large number of organised efforts to enhance human welfare – from corporate social responsibility to diversity training.

What is GOHWP?

GOHWP is a coalition of individuals from low- to high-income countries devoted to supporting the field of humanitarian work psychology and its participants. GOHWP has its origins in a 2009 meeting of I-O psychologists who were interested in bringing together and promoting the work of the diverse industrial-organisational psychology scientists and practitioners from around the world who were actively engaging with forms of work devoted to the greater good. Becoming a member of the organisation opens the door to opportunities for communication with other members and to a range of valuable resources for students and others. For more information, and to become a member, go to www.gohwp.org.

Why study HWP?

The easy answer is:

Getting people organised to help improve the welfare of others is one of the most important and exciting activities in our world today.

From United Nations experts who work to bring peace and stability to impoverished and war-torn areas, to worker-organised campaigns to ensure that women are both respected and treated fairly in the workplace, HWP focuses on some of the most critical issues in today's world.

GOHWP believes that everyone who studies or practices organisational, industrial, or work psychology should care about and consider HWP. Why? Because HWP is really just good industrial-organisational psychology. By “just good”, we mean that HWP involves issues and methods that are important for everyone in the discipline.

Consider the following points:

*1. HWP focuses on the financial, environmental,
and social bottom-line*

HWP is concerned with all three parts of the so-called “triple bottom-line” which has gained increasing attention in the management and organisational sciences and that is a critical part of overall organisational responsibility (see Aguinis, 2011 [Professional Ethics and Practice topical section]). Because of HWP's focus, those who study and practice it are prepared to help organisations become better global citizens and to help the world by ensuring that organisations contribute to the greater good. This not only includes activities like corporate social responsibility but also includes the ways in which business growth and effectiveness can be translated into increased living standards for disadvantaged communities. It is becoming increasingly clear that organisational responsibility is important to society, the organisation, and the health and wellbeing of members of organisations.

2. HWP focuses on issues in the majority world

HWP is often focused on societal and organisational issues that are of critical importance to everyone – especially the vast majority of the world’s population that lives outside of higher-income Western countries. These issues include: economic insecurity and inequality, high unemployment rates, open conflict and warfare, diseases and illnesses like HIV/AIDS and malaria, and rapid social and environmental change (see Gelfand, 2008 [Professional Ethics and Practice topical section]). While these issues affect everyone in our world, they are especially important to the “Global South” or the “majority world” – parts of the globe that are underrepresented and understudied in the dominant discourse of the behavioural sciences. Simply put, we don’t know a lot about the issues that matter the most to the majority of the world’s populations or about organisational behaviour in settings different from the Western and high-income countries where industrial-organisational psychology has emerged from and grown. Expanding our collective understanding of these issues is not only important for scientific and humanitarian purposes – it is also necessary for the discipline of I-O psychology to stay relevant in today’s world. Consider that the vast majority of the world’s economic growth comes from the majority world – and where economic growth is, so too are organisations that need I-O psychologists.

3. HWP exemplifies the scientist-practitioner-humanist model

As the I-O psychology scholar and ethicist Joel Lefkowitz has argued, psychologists – including I-O psychologists – have a duty to support human welfare around the globe (Lefkowitz, 2008 [Professional Ethics and Practice topical section]). Indeed, this is an explicit part of many psychologists’ professional codes of ethics. Thus, it is not enough for I-O psychologists to be both scientists and practitioners, they must also be “humanists” who consider and engage with the inevitable social implications of their work. In this way, for example, it is not enough to ask, “can we improve this organisation’s bottom-line by introducing a selection instrument” – I-O psychologists must also ask “should we do so” and “what are the broader social ramifications for doing so?” Engaging with the social and humanitarian implications of our work is neither straightforward nor easy. However, being familiar with scholarship in the area of HWP can help I-O psychologists to better understand the societal and community

implications of their work – which will ultimately make them better humanitarians, practitioners, and scientists.

What topics can I study in HWP?

Anything! Virtually any issue in I-O psychology – from selection to teamwork to organisational change – is relevant to the greater good and to deliberate and organised efforts to enhance human welfare. In addition, humanitarian work psychologists can work in almost any setting – be it as an academic researcher or a hands-on practitioner with humanitarian organisations.

There are at least three ways to explore what to study or focus on within HWP:

First, in order to prompt thinking about the range of issues that HWP covers, we have included a table (p. 9) which divides the content areas of HWP into various themes based upon major topics in I-O psychology and various types of organisations/sectors in which humanitarian work psychologists might work. Example research and/or practice questions are provided for each part of the table. References for example publications within each I-O topic are also included.

A second way to explore what to study and/or do with a focus on HWP is to review existing literature in the area. In the Literature and References section (p. 14), we have included references for select publications about HWP and examples of major research topics within HWP.

A third way to explore possible academic and career paths is to speak directly with current HWP researchers and/or practitioners. Conducting informational interviews to find out about what someone is doing, how they came to do it, and what they have learned is perhaps the best way to find out more about HWP and what it is that you personally want to do in your career. You might be surprised to learn how ready and willing people are to sit down and talk about themselves and their work! As a starting point, we have included the profiles of three graduate students from across the globe who have begun to focus on HWP-related issues. You can find their profiles below in the Profiles of Students and Recent Graduates section (p. 10). By becoming a member of GOHWP, you can also reach out to our other members to ask them about what they do.

Still not sure who to contact? First figure out what subjects you are interested in and who are the leaders in that area of research by finding out who is publishing and doing practical work in that area. Resources like [PsycInfo](#) and [Google Scholar](#) can tell you about research while newsletters from professional associations are often a good starting point to find out about applied work and goings-on within academic disciplines – for example, GOHWP publishes a newsletter ([see here](#)) – as does the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology ([see here](#)) and the International Association for Applied Psychology ([see here](#)). Many professional associations also maintain a list of their members and their contact information.

Humanitarian Work Psychology Content Domain						
<i>Examples of topics, questions, and publications across the content area of humanitarian work psychology.</i>						
		Types of Organisations/Sectors				
		<u>Aid Donors: Aid Organisations, Not-for-Profits, and Governmental/Intergovernmental Organisations</u>	<u>Aid Recipients: Disadvantaged, Vulnerable, and/or Marginalised Private Citizens and Local Communities</u>	<u>For-Profit Businesses and Corporations</u>		
<i>Examples of organisations</i>		<i>Save the Children, Greenpeace International, United States Agency for International Development, and the United Nations.</i>	<i>Orphans, those affected with HIV/AIDS, impoverished communities, and pregnant mothers.</i>	<i>Individual entrepreneurs in lower-income settings, small businesses, Microsoft, and Coca-Cola.</i>	<u>Example Publications [with the respective literature subsection]</u>	
Areas of industrial-organisational psychology	<u>Industrial</u>	Work analysis	How is humanitarian and aid work shared between international teams and humanitarian organisations?	What is the nature of domestic work and how might the skills needed for that work translate into formal employment?	How is the job of an entrepreneur different in lower-income settings from that in high-income settings?	Gielnik and Frese (2013) [Entrepreneurship and economic growth]
		Selection and recruitment	What are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that make for effective aid and disaster workers?	What is the role for vocational guidance in countries with exceptionally high levels of unemployment?	How can promising entrepreneurs in lower-income settings be identified?	Hui, Zhou, Chan, Zhang, and Fan (2013) [Volunteers and Humanitarian workers]
		Performance appraisal/management and remuneration	What are the effects of the dual-salary system in aid organisations where expatriates are paid more than locals?	What are the effects of pay discrimination on women and minorities?	What are the effects of inequality in pay within a business on that business's health and effectiveness?	Carr, McWha, MacLachlan, and Furnham (2010) [Dynamics in Humanitarian/Not-for-Profit Organisation]
		Training and development	How can humanitarian aid workers be best prepared to deal with the challenges they face in the field?	How can I-O psychologists assist training and workforce development efforts in lower-income settings?	How can successful entrepreneurial skills be trained in lower-income settings?	Birch and Miller (2005) [Volunteers and humanitarian workers]
	<u>Organisational</u>	Leadership	How is leadership in humanitarian and non-profit organisations different than in for-profit organisations?	How can community leadership be fostered and co-opted to assist community development projects?	What is the most effective way for a leader to promote organisational responsibility/corporate social responsibility?	Lombardo, Schneider, and Koppes Bryan (2013) [Corporate Social Responsibility]
		Worker motivation	What is the best way to motivate volunteers involved in humanitarian aid work?	What is the best way to motivate community health workers?	What impact do corporate social responsibility efforts have on worker motivation?	Franco, Bennett, and Kanfer (2002) [Volunteers and humanitarian workers]
		Worker health and well-being	How can the health and well-being of humanitarian workers be supported while they are in conflict- and crisis-affected regions?	In what ways can people affected by HIV/AIDS be better incorporated into the formal workforce?	How can/should organisations support the health of their workers in regions affected by disease and malnutrition?	Ager, Pasha, Yu, Duke, Eriksson, and Cardozo (2012) [Volunteers and humanitarian workers]
		Organisational culture, change, and development	How can a culture that promotes accountability to and the empowerment of aid recipients be developed?	How can a culture conducive to empowerment be created in community organisations?	What sort of organisational cultures are helpful in promoting organisational responsibility?	King, Hebl, George, and Matusik (2010) [Diversity and minorities]

Where can I study HWP?

The short answer is that you can study HWP anywhere there is a program in organisational, industrial, or other related areas of psychology (for example, human resource management or social psychology). Because virtually any issue in I-O psychology – from selection to teamwork to organisational change – is relevant to HWP, there are no limitations on what, or where, you can study it.

Depending on your interests and goals, you might want to choose a program that already has begun to focus on HWP, or you might want to work with a faculty member or other students to create such a focus. There are advantages to both options. For example, if a program already has a faculty member or student who is interested in and/or focusing on HWP, you likely do not need to make the case for why the subject is both important and relevant and you might be able to join in on existing HWP-related research or applied projects. However, if a program does not have a current focus on HWP, you have the opportunity to make the case for it and to lead the way in HWP-related study, research, or work.

A good way to identify programs that are, or might be willing to focus on HWP-related issues is by looking at the research interests of faculty members of various programs. Are they interested in social responsibility, the greater good, or other aspects of HWP? Are you both interested in similar topics? If so, it might be worth approaching them to see if they would be interested in having you as a student. One good way to get involved in a program is by offering to volunteer in a faculty member's research lab.

Profiles of Students and Recent Graduates

In the next three pages, we profile two students and one recent graduate who have chosen to focus on HWP-related topics in their studies. While the backgrounds and interests of these students are unique, they share a passion for understanding and helping to support deliberate and organised efforts to enhance human welfare. In each profile, we learn about how each student became interested in HWP, what their current interests are, and what they hope to do in their future, or current, careers.

*Inusah Abdul-Nasiru – University of Ghana
Republic of Ghana*

At the time of writing, Inusah was a doctoral student, and lecturer, at the Department of Psychology, University of Ghana. He is from the Volta Region of Ghana and is on track to become the first industrial-organisational psychologist to earn a PhD from a Ghanaian institution of higher education. In 2012-2013, Inusah was a visiting student-scholar at North Carolina State University where he worked in Professor Lori Foster Thompson's IOTech4D Lab.



How did you become interested in HWP?

“My background as someone who grew up and worked in varied rural settings played a significant role. After graduating from university with a degree in psychology, I worked in Ghana for a development project sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). With my background in psychology, I saw how issues like training, performance appraisal and monitoring were crucial to community development and the welfare of Ghanaian society, hence my interest in HWP.”

What are your current interests?

“I am currently completing my dissertation on the role of organisational culture and change readiness in successful change implementation in universities. Ghana, like most of the countries in West Africa, is changing rapidly and the ability of its work organisations including universities to adapt to those changing conditions is important for national development. I have further interest in teaching HWP-related topics – like psychology and poverty reduction.”

What are your career plans?

“I am currently in academia but eventually I plan to work as a practitioner in order to bring research-tested solutions to the challenges that face organisations in Ghana and beyond. I-O psychology is not well represented in Ghana, but the discipline's potential is very great.”

What advice would you give to current/future students considering a focus in HWP?

“I would encourage them to see HWP as a very diverse and growing area of I-O psychology and to apply I-O to address challenges facing humanity such as poverty and fairness in workplaces.”

*Judith Marasigan de Guzman –Ateneo de Manila University
Republic of the Philippines*

As of June 2014, Judith is working as a Peace Program Officer in the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the Republic of the Philippines. Her work focuses on monitoring and evaluating peacebuilding interventions in areas that are affected by and vulnerable to conflict. Judith is a fellow of the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF), a collaborative initiative of The Nippon Foundation and The Tokyo Foundation. In 2011, Judith interned at the Poverty Research Centre based in Massey University in New Zealand and worked under the direction of Prof. Stuart Carr.



How did you become interested in HWP?

“I first came to be involved in peace and development work when I worked as an assistant in a research project on the different narratives that surround armed conflict in Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines. This was followed by exposure to trainings on peacebuilding as part of a local NGO that sought to train young people from different religious, ethnic and geographical backgrounds to become peace leaders in their own communities. HWP provided me with a "handle" to look at these issues. In order to better understand and assist in this work, I pursued a PhD in social-organizational psychology.”

What are your current interests?

“In my current work, I utilize my background in social psychology to help design monitoring and evaluation tools and studies for peacebuilding interventions, as well as to train various stakeholders on conflict-sensitivity and peace promotion as applied to the various stages of project development and management. I am most inspired when I see communities coming together to work for peace, struggling together to overcome biases, differences and challenges.”

What have been one of your biggest challenges?

“Peacebuilding work, with all its inherent difficulties and setbacks, is indeed challenging. Personally, one of my biggest challenges in this work involves maintaining balance between remaining passionate and connected to the ground and maintaining a certain degree of distance and objectivity. Also, managing stress in the face of work that necessitates long hours, multiple tasks, and continuous improvement also proves to be a significant challenge in this work.”

*Garett Howardson – The George Washington University
United States of America*

At the time of writing, Garett is a doctoral candidate in I-O psychology at The George Washington University and is a Consortium Research Fellow at the Foundational Sciences Research Unit of the United States Army Research Institute. He is the winner of the James C. Johnson student competition for his paper on affective training reactions. Garett has also taught courses including a class on I-O psychology.



How did you become interested in HWP?

“The opportunity arose to start working on an HWP-related project through the work of Dr. Tara Behrend, who is faculty at my program. I worked with her and others on a project examining the role of information communication technologies in development efforts from an I-O perspective. We coded articles from a past Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICTD) conference to identify places where I-O knowledge (e.g., selection, training, teamwork) could be applied to improve ICTD intervention efforts.”

What are your current interests?

“My general research interests centre very broadly on the self-regulatory processes (i.e., goal-setting, goal-striving) of how people learn to perform work. I see these interests as relevant to HWP for two reasons. First, many ICTD intervention efforts rely on introducing a new technology to people for the first time – which requires motivation and self-regulation. Second, I’m interested in the self-regulatory processes of technology entrepreneurs introducing the intervention. It’s common knowledge that even successful entrepreneurs fail multiple times. What makes someone want to persist with intervention ideas when faced with difficulties?”

What are your career plans?

“I hope to complete my studies, move on to an academic position and continue researching the ideas above. Although I am very interested in theory, I consider myself to be an applied psychologist and I believe it is important to apply one’s work to improve the state of humanity.”

Literature and References

Additional reading about HWP

Books

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Examples of HWP-related research by theme

Corporate Social Responsibility

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Dynamics in Humanitarian/Not-for-Profit Organisations

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