

Psychosocial Response to CBRN Terrorism: Establishing a Multi-Service Decision Support Tool

Garry Stevens

*Senior Research Fellow, SCIMHA Unit,
University of Western Sydney*

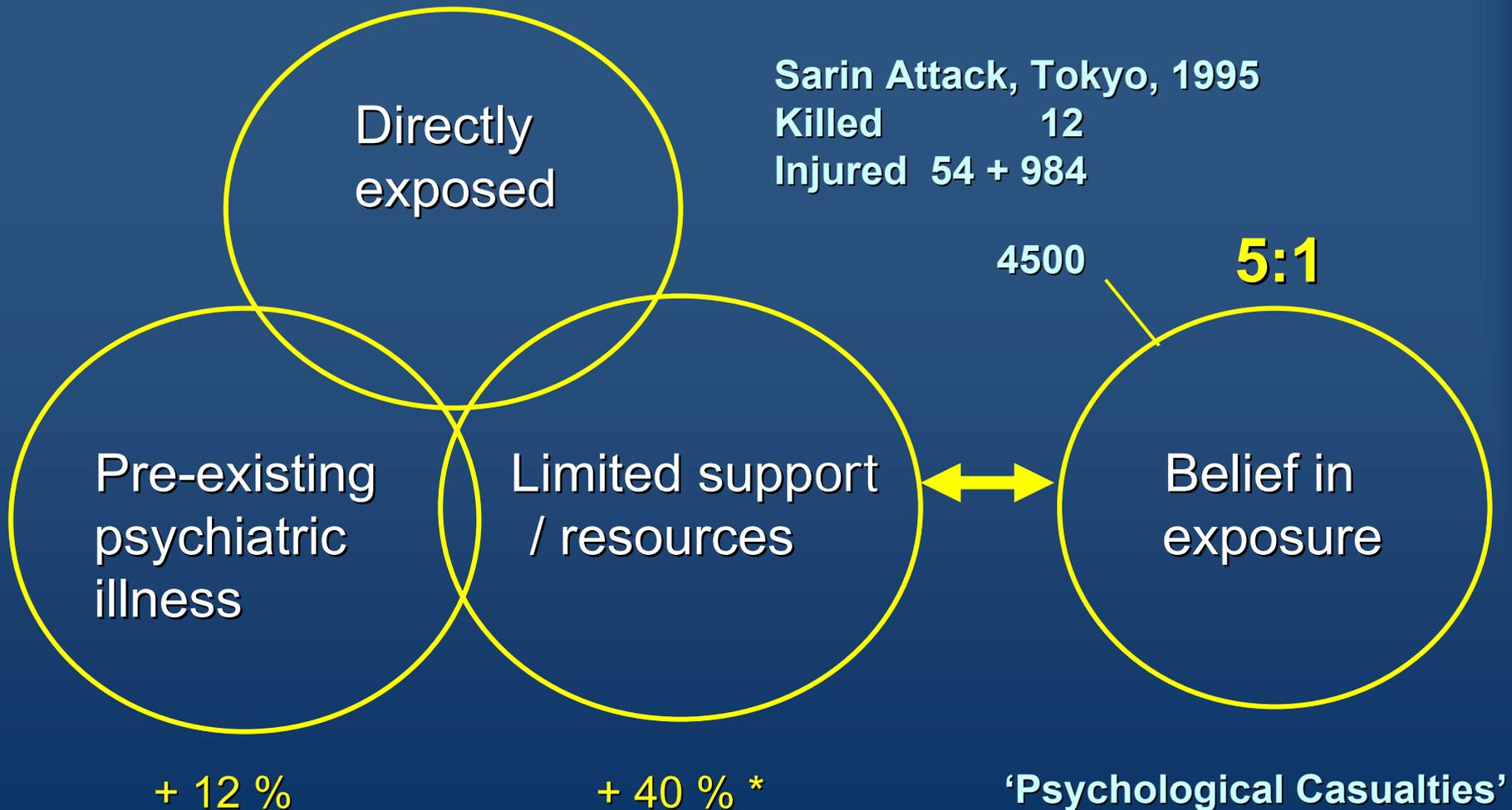
Prof Beverley Raphael & Dr Mel Taylor

SCIMHA Unit, University of Western Sydney



Sarin gas attack, Tokyo 1995

CBRN: Vulnerable Groups

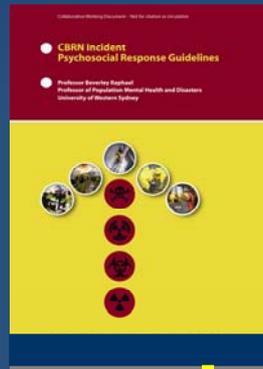


Psychosocial Guidelines Project

NSST, UWS, CT User Groups

- Consultation
- Lit Review
- Surveys

- 18 Partners:
- Fire
 - DOD
 - Police
 - Paramedic
 - Red Cross



Guidelines

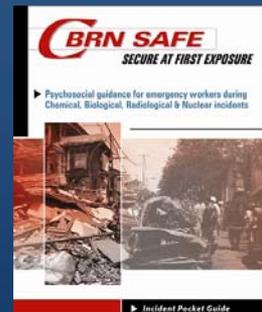
Psychosocial Management

2007

Decision-Support Tool

SAFE Pocket Guide

2008



CBRN SAFE
Training

Training Module

2008

CBRN Field Information Tool

1. Consultation – psychosocial info needs / priorities
2. Organisational Surveys

Survey 1 – CBRN Field Information Needs (N=20)

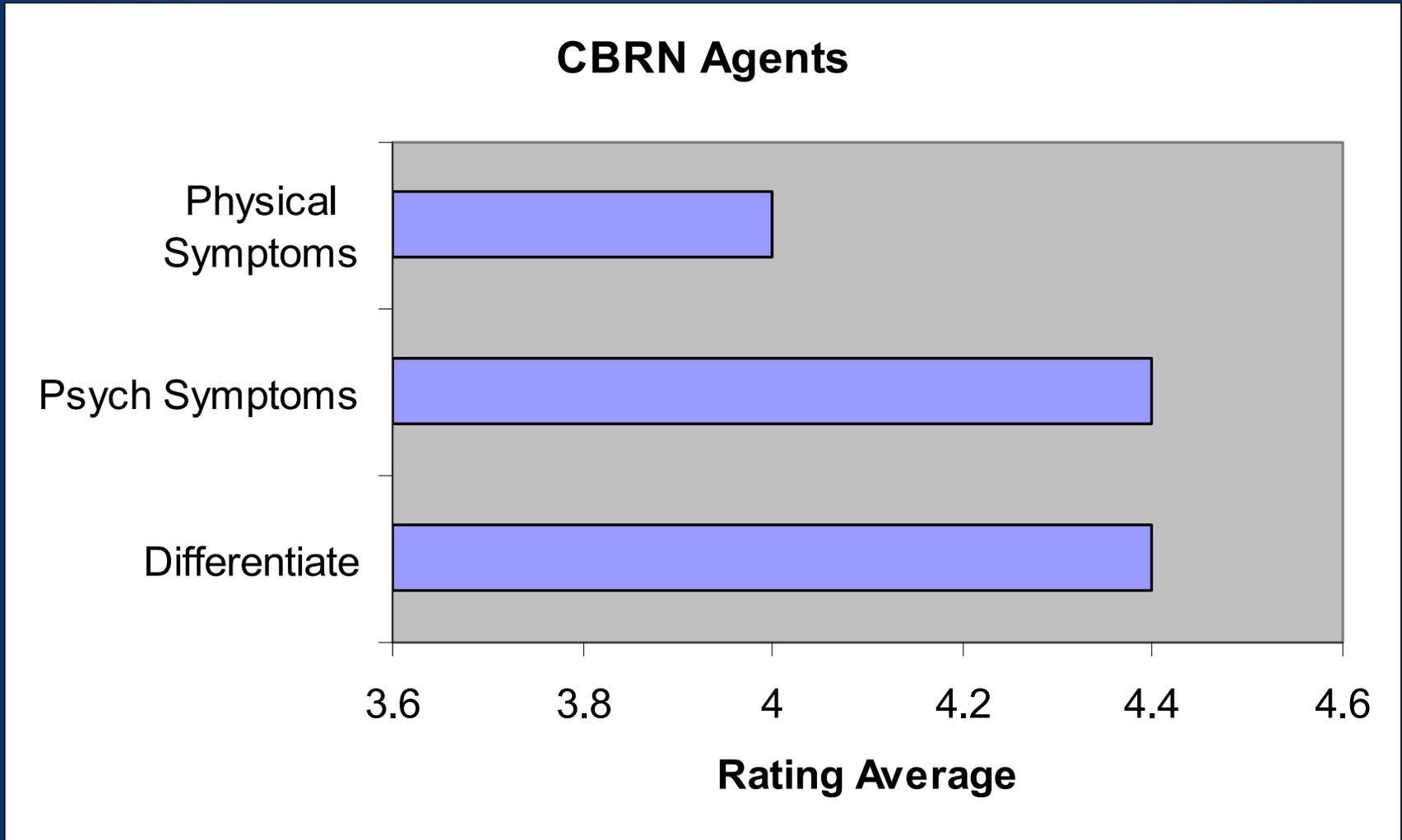
Survey 2 – Review ‘prototype’ Field Tool (N=15)

Consultation with FR Groups

1. Agents: clear & specific info
2. Symptoms: distinguish physical & psychological
3. “Broader than CBRN”
5. Crowd dynamics & ‘surge’ management
5. Stress reactions to CBRN agents ► behavioural correlates
► management
6. How to support community resilience
7. FR impacts & self-management of stress

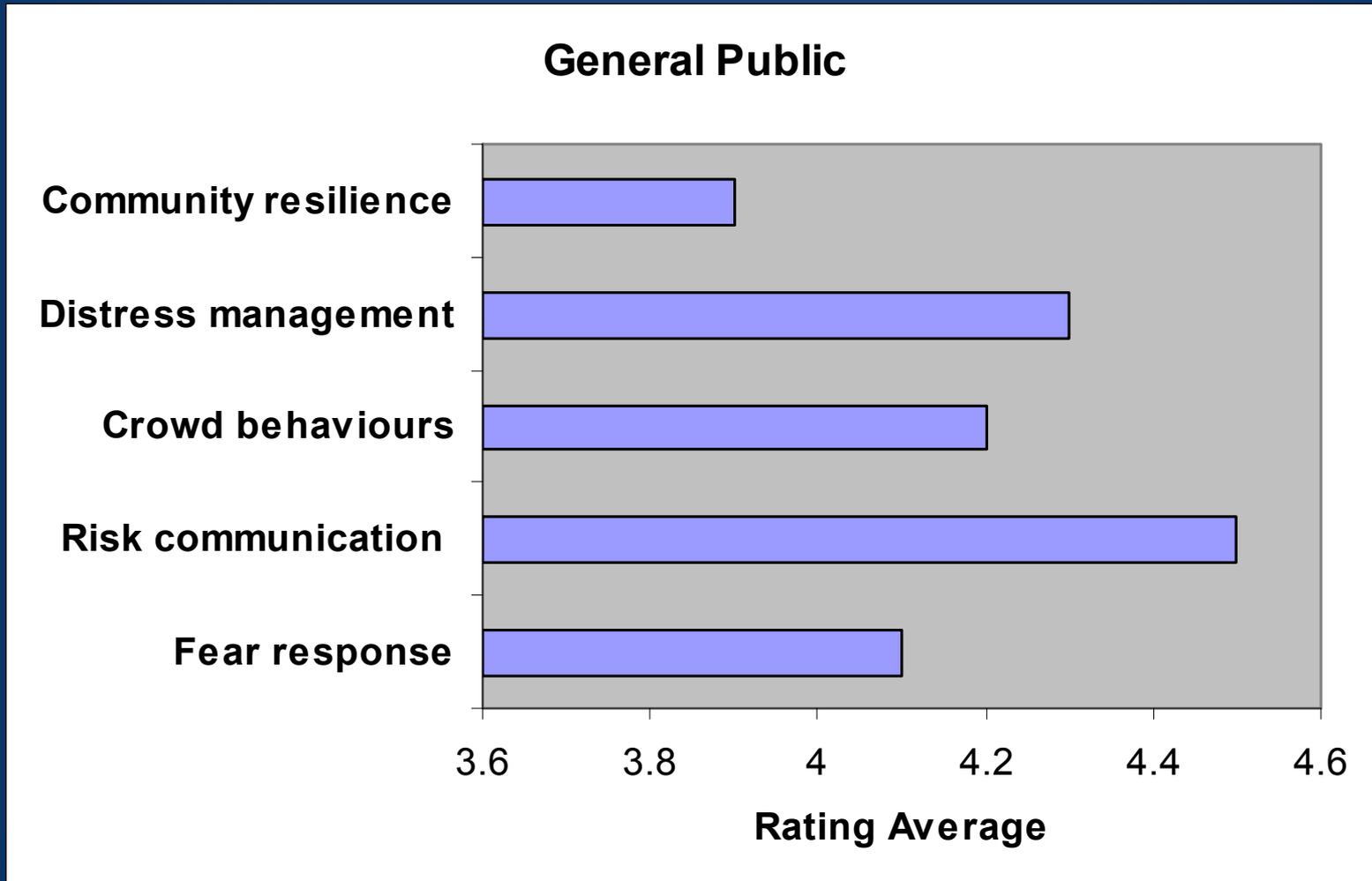
CBRN Information Needs: Agents

Survey 1 – CT User Groups (N=20)



CBRN Information Needs: General Public

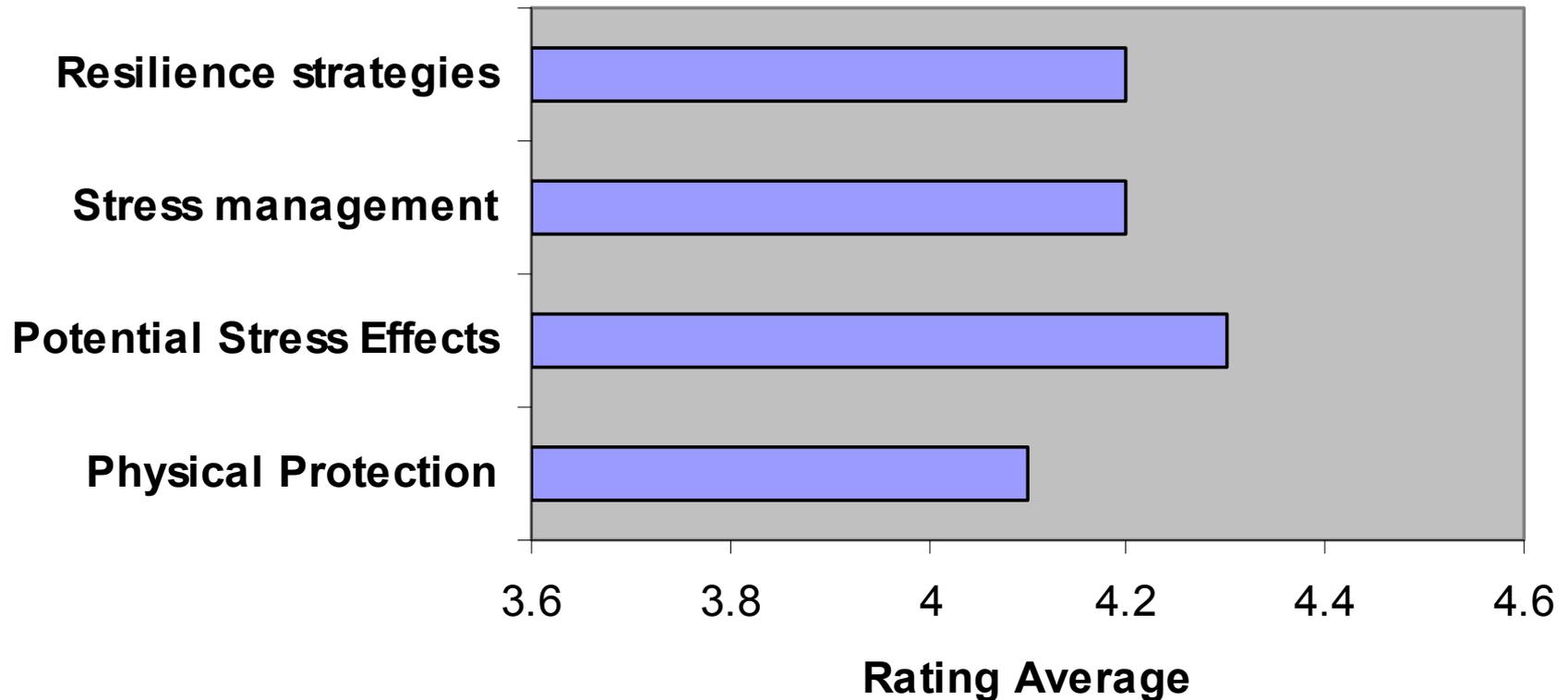
Survey 1 – CT User Groups (N=20)



CBRN Information Needs: First Responders

Survey 1 – CT User Groups (N=20)

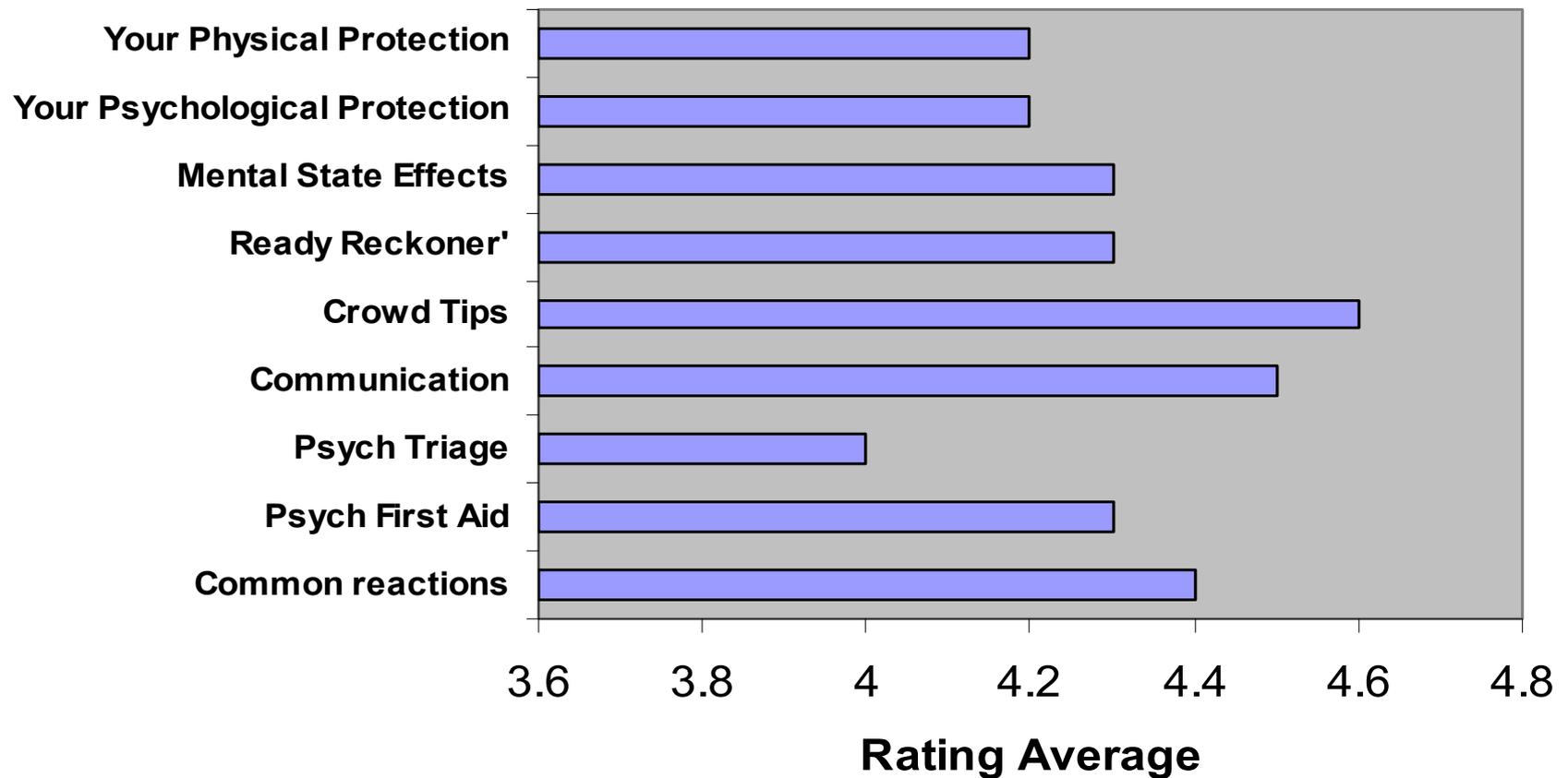
Emergency Personnel



'Prototype' Pocket Guide: Priority Content

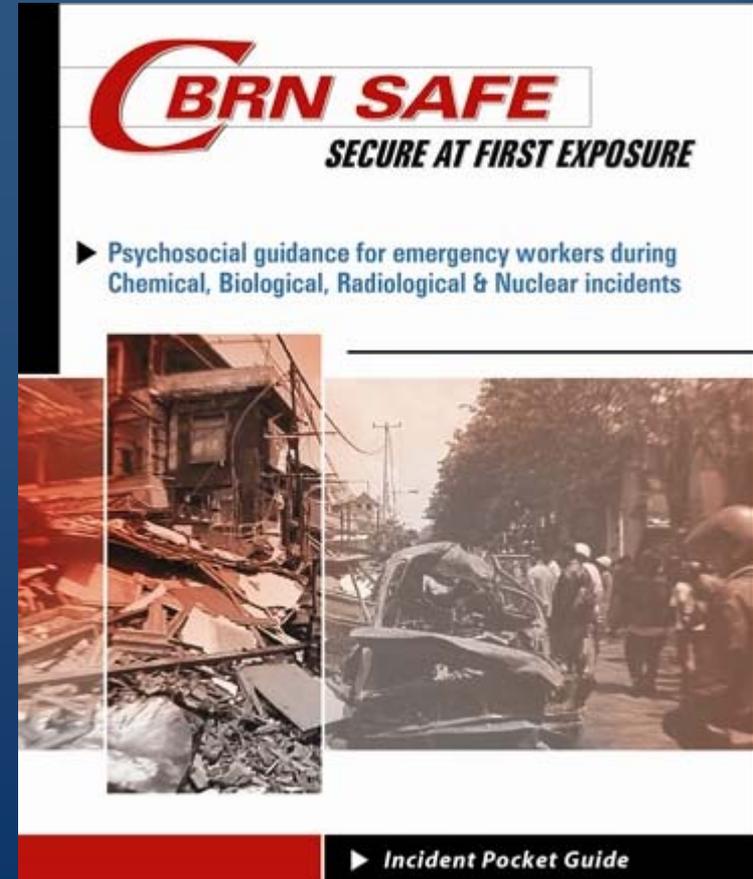
Survey 2 – CT User Groups (N=15)

Information / Content Areas



Key Points

1. **Multi-Service Incident Card (CBRN / Psychosocial) possible**
2. **Issues:**
 - **Technical detail**
 - **Procedures & Interoperability**
3. **Needs:
Crowd Dynamics &
Risk Communication**
4. **Fear / Distress:
Psychological First Aid**





“There are no right or wrong answers – only perceived threats to national security.”

Project Partners

National Security Science & Technology Unit (NSSTU)

Australian Red Cross

Australian Defence Force

Australian Federal Police

Emergency Management Australia

Victoria Police

Victorian Metropolitan Fire Brigade

NT Police, Fire & Emergency Services

Queensland Department of Health

Centrelink (Social Work Services)

South Eastern Sydney & Illawarra Area Health Service

ACT Fire Brigade

W.A. Department of Health

S.A. Metropolitan Fire Service

NSW Fire Brigade

NSW Police (CT & Public Order Unit)

NSW Health Counter-Disaster Unit

Science of Mental Health & Adversity (SCIMHA) Unit,
University of Western Sydney Medical School

Psychological First Aid - Keep S.A.F.E

- ▶ **GOAL:** Minimise harm to workers & the public after CBRN incidents.
-

S **Safety** - *Establish immediate safety*

- Offer practical help & emotional support

A **Arousal** - *Reduce intense arousal*

- If overwhelmed, calm & orientate person
- Demonstrate slow breathing

F **Fear** - *Provide info about risks*

- Actions (theirs/others) to keep safe
- Reassure – stress reactions are normal

E **Empower & Exit**

- Let them talk if they want to
- Help them act for themselves, then move on

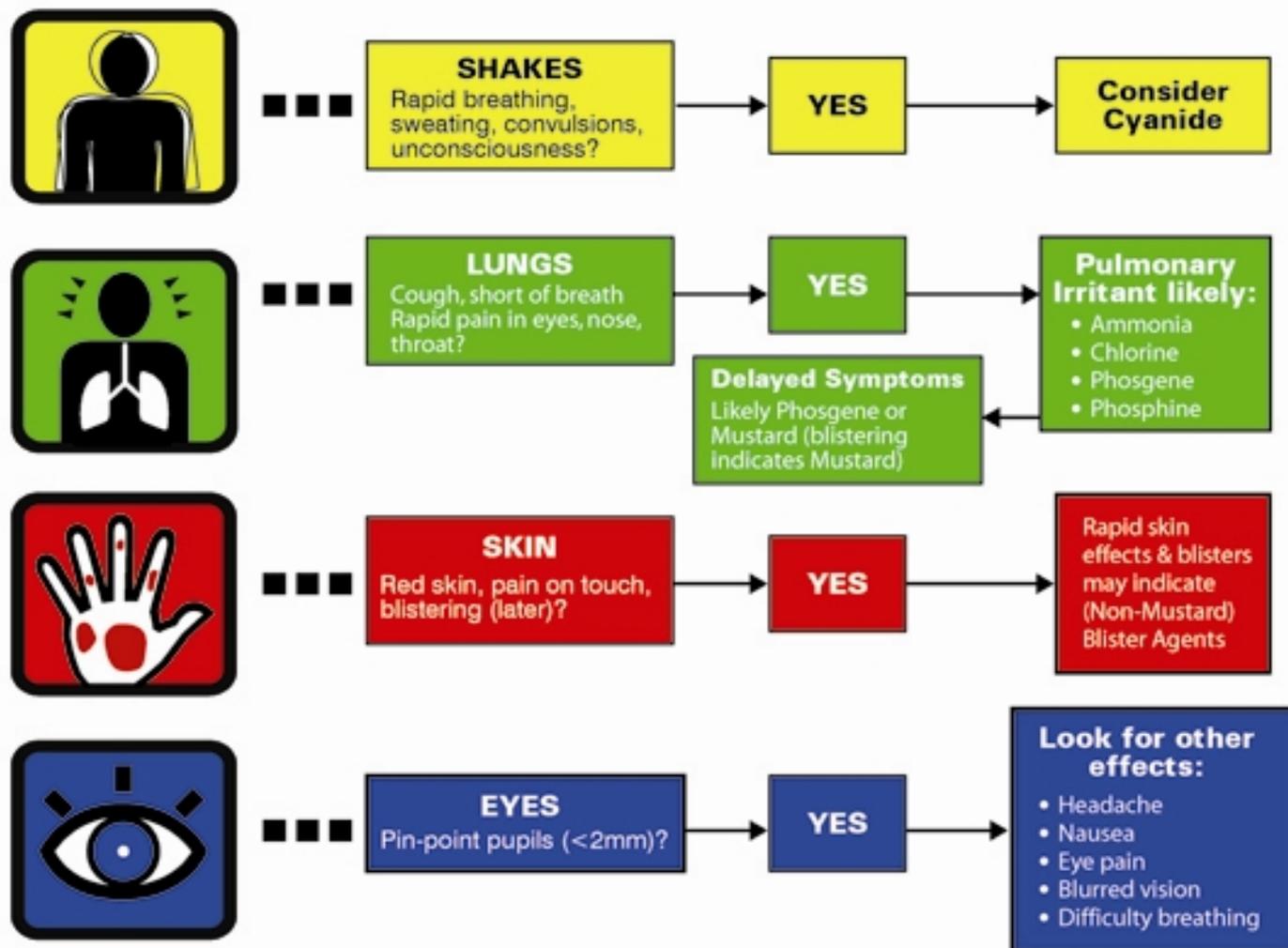
**Psychological
First Aid ▶ SAFE**

Psychological Triage

- Identify those in immediate need & ensure care
- ABC: Assess & Respond
 - **Arousal:** heightened risk
 - **Behaviours:** irrational, place self/others risk
 - **Cognitions:** dazed, disoriented, dissociated
- Arousal: calm, breathing or emergency care & sedation
- Behaviours: monitor, contain for safety, MH Ax
- Cognitions: advice, reality / protection; monitor organic impairment

Chemical Symptom Ready Reckoner

Chemical Symptom Ready Reckoner



Unexplained Scene

- Several people collapsed in small area
- Other medical symptoms
- Unusual smells

May indicate CBR Agents

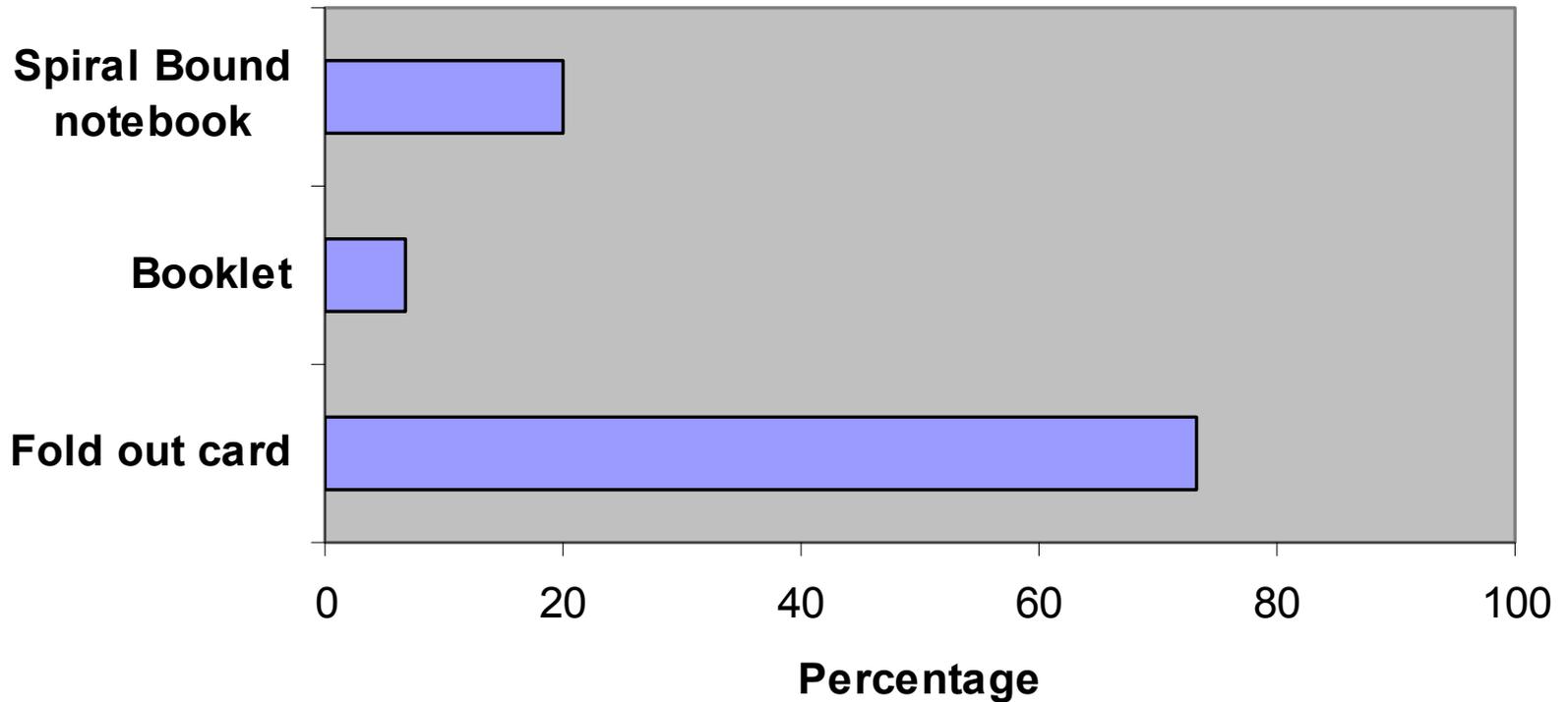
Important Note:

- Reckoner shows broad indicators only
- Use local checklists & procedures
- Remember - Step 1,2,3

CBRN Pocket Incident Guide: Format

Survey 2 – CT User Groups (N=15)

Field Tool - Preferred Format



Crowd Behaviour

■ Acute Phase

- People generally do not panic (Tokyo, WTC, Madrid)
- Appropriate, altruistic behaviour
- Movement
 - ▶ 'familiar'
 - ▶ attached groups
 - ▶ bypass controls – self present (90 min)
 - ▶ contagion
- Reduced escape routes, limited resources
- Less known - CBRN behaviour / resilience

Surge Management

Response Principles

- Positive view of public response (Allies)
- Communication
 - simple, realistic, calm
 - Authority (counter-message)
 - Normal 'reactions'
- Invisible threads
 - Facilitate 'clustered' egress / re-union
- Triage – incl. MH Triage