Trauma, Psychology and Disaster

Claire Colliard, Director

Sport in Post-Disaster Intervention Conference

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After the earthquake in Bam....
Deep changes in the nature of conflicts since WWII
Global warming and multiplication of disasters
Increase in the number of refugees everywhere
Globalization modifies the ways of helping: huge budgets, business models, computer technologies, managerial techniques...
Concept of complex emergencies

New ways of addressing mass victimization, especially in the realm of mental health
One may distinguish:

- The Mental Health approach
- The Psychosocial approach
Populations at risk

Mental Health Risks / Resilience

Psychological consequences of disasters

- Long-term psychopathology
- Short-term psychopathology
- Acute Stress disorder
- Non-specific psychological distress
- Concerns, Behavior Change

Severity of mental health consequences

Resilience
The « Mental Health » debate

- Western model mostly targets the individual with a focus on intra-psychic dynamics
- Ignores the social and political context
- Obsession with the pathological and the abnormal
- Research biased by focusing on vulnerability instead of psychosocial resources
- Based on the idea of zero risk

...*Is it some kind of cultural imperialism?*
The PTSD concept

- Recent evolution: DSM-IV and ICD-10, growth of research on trauma – also in disasters
- PTSD concept: does not account for all the facets of trauma – Emerging concept of C-PTSD
- Needs to be integrated into a broader context: social, cultural and political
- Certain cultures do not have words for trauma, dissociation, depression...
- What kind of treatments proposed after a PTSD diagnosis in an environment in ruins...?
New approaches

- Starts with the WHO’s definition of Health (1949):
  « A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity »

- Helped develop since the 50’s the public health and community health approaches

- Need to add other disciplines: anthropology, religion, sociology, developmental sciences, economics, Human Rights, political science, especially international relations, ecology...
Disaster phases

1. Predisaster phase
2. Heroic phase
3. Honeymoon phase
4. Threat & Warning
5. Impact
6. Grieving process
7. Anniversary reactions

- Predisaster phase: One day to one or two weeks
- Inventory phase: One to three years
- Disillusionment phase: 
- Reconstruction phase: 

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Psychosocial approach: a definition

Psycho:
Influence of the psyche of individuals on their social environment

Social:
Influence of the social context on the psychological make-up of the persons

*In disaster relief, supporting the social framework to help individual people.*
Psychosocial approaches to rehabilitation

- The Psychosocial Working Group (PSWG) model
- The WHO model
- The FEMA model
The Psychosocial Working Group (Forced Migration)

- Based on the notion of psychosocial Well-Being (WB)
- WB is affected by three key issues:

  • *Human capacity*: physical and mental health + knowledge and skills

  • *Social ecology*: social connections & support that people share

  • *Culture & values*: influences how people experience the disaster, understand and respond to the events, building meaning along the way.
Core principles of this model:

- Community based approach
- Capacity building
WHO and IASC’s model (1)

- WHO with the *Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse* + a branch in Mental health in emergencies

- IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) with the “Guidelines in Mental Health and Psychosocial Interventions in emergencies” (2007)
Core principles of emergency interventions:

- Promote Human Rights and protection of all victims with maximum fairness
- Maximize the participation of local people to help resume control over their situation
- *Do no harm* by extending professional services
- Building on available resources and capacities
- Emergency activities should be integrated into support systems
How?

- Multi-layered supports
  - Basic services & security
  - Community and family supports
  - Focused, non-specialised supports
  - Specialised services
Some concluding remarks

- Systemic approach to disasters
- Bottom up instead of top to bottom
- Respects societies where family is core value
- Places the individual inside the social network
- Takes into account the time factor
- Victims are rather survivors
- Based on the concepts of well-being instead of pathology
- Based on resiliency with its coping mechanisms
The Psychosocial Approach
Definition of « psychosocial »

What it is not:
- Psychological or psychiatric treatment
- Counselling or therapy for the mentally ill or severely impaired

What it is:
- Psychological support through empathy and understanding
- Information dissemination to beneficiaries and workers
- Identifying individuals for referral to extended services
- Assisting individuals, families and communities to identify their needs
- Linking beneficiary needs and community services
- Facilitating beneficiaries’ self-help toward adaptation and resilience
- Providing worker support to mitigate stress
Core concepts for psychosocial interventions

- Well-being
- Resilience
- Stress and coping model
Well-being

Definitions:

- Another word for wholistic health: ref. WHO definition
- Subjective experience, described by the individual, or by its entourage
- Translates how people evaluate their lives, social & economic status, cultural satisfaction...
- Now largely used in public health and as a national and international economic indicator = quality of life
Resilience

- Definition: ability to meet and adapt to hardship – to “bounce back”

- Does not mean the person is invulnerable and cannot suffer!

- Can be seen either as a state/construct - or a process:
  - A state: the resilient personality
  - As a process: adaptive balance between risk and protective factors
Collective resilience in disasters

- Concept not well documented and researched yet

- Shows best in disaster preparedness programs:
  - By strengthening infrastructure, cities, and individual businesses
  - Steps for improving the safety of coastal regions
  - Preserving natural ecosystems
  - Increasing security of local populations
  - Adaptation of insurance coverage to new situations
  - Mitigation policies—softening the blows of natural forces
  - Coordinated pre-planning of response agencies
Psychological resilience

May be seen as:

- A state
- A process
Resilience as a state

The resilient personality has:

- Social competence
- Sense of autonomy
- Problem-solving skills
- Sense of purpose and future
Resilience as a process

Balance between:

• Risk factors
• Protective factors
• Inside a time frame
The stress & coping model (1)

Hans Selye’s definition:

Stress is a natural adaptive mechanism of the mind-body to external (contextual) or internal (perceptual) stimuli.

The normal course after a disaster:

- Acute phase (from minutes to days)
- Reaction phase (1 to 6 weeks)
- Repair phase (1 to 6 months)
- Reorientation phase (after 6 months)
Neurophysiology of stress response

If stimuli are overwhelming (too much for too long), the natural mechanism becomes negative:

- The fight or flight response
- The freeze response
Coping is a way to prevent, delay, avoid or manage stress.

Categories of coping mechanisms:

- Change the source of stress
- Change the view of the situation
- Tolerate the situation until it passes or becomes less troublesome
Examples of coping in disasters

- Seeking help from others or offering help to others
- Talking about their experiences and trying to make sense of what happened
- Hiding until the danger has passed
- Seeking information about the welfare of their loved ones
- Gathering their remaining belongings
- Beginning to repair the damage
More examples of coping in disasters

- Burying or cremating the dead
- Following their religious practices
- Setting goals and making plans to accomplish them
- Using defences like denial to reduce the perceived impact
- Remaining fearful and alert to any further danger
- Thinking long and hard about the event to learn from it...
After the tsunami...
Example of a psychosocial program

**Terre des hommes Foundation - Switzerland**

**Centre for Humanitarian Psychology**

**Psychosocial Program**

**in post-tsunami Sri Lanka:**

34 recreation centres
supporting over 10'000 children
and their family
over a period of 2 years
When there is hope again