Compassion Fatigue & Disaster Response

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Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China

Tornado
Picher, Oklahoma USA
6th Annual Asia-Pacific World Conference
Focus: Disaster Preparedness & Response

Understanding the effects of disaster on children: a developmental-ecological approach to scientific inquiry

Addressing the psychosocial needs of children following disasters

Compassion fatigue and disaster response
Taiwan Earthquake, March 31, 2002
6.8 Magnitude
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Lessons Learned

- Stay focused on the primary goal: assisting people in crisis
- Care for responders
- Disaster preparedness/training
- Model of global humanitarian partnership
  - No nation can go it alone when confronted by disaster
  - Recent example: Myanmar
The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned

- We are not as prepared as we need to be
- Creating a culture of preparedness
- Design and build a unified system of response

http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/02/20060223.html
Compassion

 Defined

• An emotion that is a sense of shared suffering
• Most often combined with a desire to alleviate or reduce the suffering of another
• To show special kindness to those who suffer

Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China
Compassion

Defined

- Compassion essentially arises through empathy, and is often characterized through actions, wherein a person acting with compassion will seek to aid those they feel compassionate for.
Compassion Fatigue

- **Defined**
  - The emotional remains of exposure to working with the suffering, chiefly those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events
  - Professionals must contend with not only with the normal stress or dissatisfaction of work, but also with the emotional and personal feelings for the suffering

*Earthquake*  
Sichuan Province, China

*Floods*  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa USA
Compassion Fatigue

- Figley, 1995; 2003
  - “the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”
- Is not burnout
  - Appears more rapidly
  - Helplessness
  - Isolation and confusion
  - Faster recovery rate
  - Symptoms are more mild to moderate


Key Information

- Vulnerability
- Risk Factors
- Effects
  - emotional
  - physical
  - behavioral
  - cognitive
  - spiritual
  - interpersonal
- Institutional costs
- Protective factors
- Prevention
Who is Vulnerable

- **People who work with trauma victims**
  - Emergency care workers
  - Counselors
  - Mental health professionals
  - Medical professionals
  - Nursing professionals
  - Clergy
  - Human service workers
  - Other professionals
    - Physical therapy, etc

Tornado
Picher, Oklahoma USA

Floods
Cedar Rapids, Iowa USA
Risk Factors

- Continuous exposure to patients and or family dynamics
- Individual personality traits
- Younger Vs older (inexperienced Vs experienced clinician)
- Over identification with the client
- Lack of support
- Ongoing career/social stressors
- “Code of silence”
Effects

- **Emotional**
  - Sadness, grief, depression, anxiety, dread or horror, fear, anger, shame
  - Intrusive Imagery (nightmares)
  - Numbing
  - Hypersensitivity
  - Overwhelmed

- **Somatic Complaints**
  - Fatigue
  - Headaches
Effects

◆ Behavioral
  • Sleep disturbances
  • Appetite changes
  • Accident prone
  • Losing things
  • Increase in negative coping like smoking, drinking, eating, workaholic, and substance abuse
  • Self care deficits

Cyclone
Myanmar

Typhoon
Manila, Philippines

Cyclone
Myanmar
Effects

Cognitive Shifts

- Changes in beliefs, expectations, and assumptions
  - Suspicion and vulnerability
  - Loss of control
  - Loss of self esteem
  - World view narrowed
  - Victim mentality
Effects

- **Spiritual**
  - Questioning prior religious or spiritual beliefs
  - Anger at God

- **Interpersonal**
  - Withdrawn
  - Mistrust
  - Projection of anger and blame
  - Relationship disturbances
    - Professional and personal

Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China
Institutional Costs

- Decrease in quality and quantity of job performance
- Low motivation
- Increase in mistakes
- Dissatisfaction or negative attitude
- Absenteeism/presenteeism
- Tardiness/call outs

Tornado
Suffolk County, Virginia USA

Floods
Cedar Rapids, Iowa USA
Protective Factors

- Inner strengths or resources
  - Self esteem
- Satisfaction with job, profession, personal relationships
- Experience
  - Cumulative effects of daily trauma can make one more resilient
- Social and Professional support systems
- Positive institutional responses

Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China
Prevention and Strategies

- **Institutional**
  - Reasonable expectations of workload, sufficient resources, and staffing
  - Supportive supervision
  - Acknowledgement of the difficult work and consistent praise of hard work

Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China
Prevention and Strategies

- Institutional
  - Ongoing staff education and understanding of the problem
  - Creating a positive institutional environment and acceptance – eliminate “code of silence”

Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China
Self Care Strategies

- Personal support systems
- Diverse interests
- Personal boundaries/work boundaries
- Tending to spiritual needs
- Time management

Tornado
Hugo, Minnesota USA
Self Care Strategies

- Relaxation and time off
- Nutrition, sleep, exercise
- Evaluating personal control
- Getting help

Typhoon
Philippines
Basic Tenants

- We are all affected by the work that we do
- To some degree, these responses are normal
- Each professional can be an observer of others responses

Tornado
Picher, Oklahoma USA

Earthquake
Sichuan Province, China


Questions?
Thank you