

MODULE 6

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Supporting the Post-Disaster Worker

Disaster Worker Stress

ASSISTING THE WORKER'S WORK

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Worker's Support: OVERVIEW

- Disaster Worker Stress Management
- Pre-event Support
- Event Safety and Support
- Post-event Support

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

QUESTIONS...

- How does the experience of post-disaster affect workers?
- What **behavior changes** have been documented?
- How can these **changes** be **mitigated**?
- What **changes** should a worker be **aware** of?
- What type of assistance should a worker expect and receive when it interferes with function?

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Functions & Role Shift: Mental Health Worker to
Psychosocial Disaster Worker

Functions & Role Shift: Mental Health Worker to Psychosocial Disaster Worker

Common Knowledge Base

- **Different** and **novel** variety of functions
- **New** attitudes
 - Co-professional, assisting citizens
- **Rhythm** and **timing**
 - Crisis contingencies-in term of hours vs days
- **Evolution** in expectations/attitudes of non-mental health disaster assistance workers
- **Participatory & collaborative** consultation

Functions & Role Shift: Impact of Disaster

Even though they (policemen, fire fighters, ambulance drivers, etc.) are prepared to experience disturbing events & conditions in their daily work, ***NOBODY*** is prepared or *immune to the devastating effects of a disaster.*

IMPACT IS SEVERE!

Functions & Role Shift: Impact of Disaster

Additionally, the Disaster Worker:

- Will experience **extreme fatigue**
- Must continually function with an intense **dedication** to the task with reluctance to be relieved from duty, even for a short break.

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

SOURCES OF *STRESS* FOR THE DISASTER
WORKER

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers Sources of Responder *STRESS*

- Long hours
- Time pressures
- Uncertain duration
- Unfamiliar settings
- New challenges
- **Role ambivalence**

Source: Flynn, 2002

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Sources of Responder *STRESS*:

TRAUMATIC EVENTS

- Multiple casualties
- Triage decision-making
- Exposure to grotesque
- Secondary destruction
- Widespread destruction

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Sources of Responder *STRESS*:

CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

Survivor Reactions:

- Extreme fear and distress
- Demand for services
- Antagonism toward responders
- Different culture and language
- Impatient for information

**STRESS
SIGNS**

**STRESS
SIGNS**

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

STRESS SIGNS

**STRESS
SIGNS**

**STRESS
SIGNS**

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

- Cognitive difficulties:
 - Communicating thoughts
 - Remembering instructions
 - Making decisions
 - Concentrating
 - Problem-solving
- Disorientation
- Confusion
- Limited attention span

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Physical/ Behavioral Signs:

- Colds
- Flu-like symptoms
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Clumsiness
- Tunnel vision
- Muffled hearing

***ASSISTANT SURGEON GENERAL'S
WARNING:***

*Full-time disaster
mental health work
can be **hazardous**
to your health.*

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

MITIGATING FACTORS
OF *STRESS*

Factors that Mitigate Post-Disaster Worker *STRESS*

- Doing work that has:
 - High value
 - Personal meaning
 - Novelty
 - Prestige
 - Honor
- “Doing good”

Factors that Mitigate Post-Disaster Worker *STRESS*

- Ability to monitor and manage stress
- Training and deployment as a **team**
- Strong peer support network
- Mental preparation prior to arrival
- Being on the cutting edge
- Experiencing “the rush”

Source: Sincere, 2001
European Policy Paper

Factors that Mitigate Post-Disaster Worker *STRESS*

- Training
- Skill and talent
- Motivation
- Proactive “*power*” role as a Post-Disaster Psychosocial Worker

Source: Sincere, 2001
European Policy Paper

Special Considerations for Psychosocial Workers

- Culture of *not seeking help*
- High performance expectations
- Delay in seeking help
- Preference for talking to peers
- Stigma of seeking mental health support
- Concern over “*fitness for duty*”

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Capacity of the Worker to Manage *STRESS*

- Viewed as a job skill
- Valued as part of the professional culture
- Addressed comprehensively through:
 - ▲ Hiring qualifications
 - ▲ Training
 - ▲ Job assignment
 - ▲ Performance review
 - ▲ Follow-up
- **Recognize individual and cultural differences**
 - *No one size fits all*

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Occupational *STRESS* Conditions

- Time pressures
- Work overload
- Minimal positive reinforcement
- High probability of conflict

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

Occupational *STRESS* Conditions

- Prolonged expenditure of energy
 - ▲ Attention to survivors
- **Coincidental incidents of crisis**
 - ▲ Multiple survivors simultaneously
- Personal crisis in the life of the Post-Disaster Worker

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

“Burn-Out” as a
Psycho-Physiological Process
&
Strategies for **Managing Distress**

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

BURN-OUT: Definition

A state of mild, moderate, or severe exhaustion, irritability, and fatigue, which notably decreases an individual's effectiveness.

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

PREVENTION THROUGH MANAGEMENT

- I. **Learn to recognize the innate stresses that accompanies high-risk work.**
- II. **Develop preventive strategies for mitigating those *stresses*.**

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

PREVENTION THROUGH MANAGEMENT

III. Learn to recognize and assess signs and symptoms of stress *when they occur*.

IV. Develop approaches and goals for managing such stress.

- Coping and use for support systems

Burn-Out”as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

PREVENTION THROUGH MANAGEMENT

V. Become aware that prevention and treatment strategies can potentially decrease or eliminate the negative effects of stress and its consequences:

✓ **Decline in job performance**

✓ **Burn-Out**

✓ **High turnover rate**

✓ **Health problems**

✓ **Family problems for workers**

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

PREVENTION THROUGH MANAGEMENT

VI. Support systems and resources available to workers for dealing with crisis situations:

- ✓ Debriefing
- ✓ Counseling
- ✓ Education

All are preventive methods for avoiding burn-out.

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

Preventive Methods to Diminish Strain & Burn-Out: **BARRIERS**

- I. High professional standards and high self expectations among workers influence appraisal of a situation.

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

Preventive Methods to Diminish Strain & Burn-Out: **BARRIERS**

II. Reluctance or discomfort in discussing **feelings**, especially those that might connote **weakness** and reflect **doubt** about one’s performance (*self-appraisal*).

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

Preventive Methods to Diminish Strain & Burn-Out: **BARRIERS**

III. Need to deny or suppress feelings during difficult situations in order to function...

- Discomfort in acknowledging and discussing those **feelings** when they emerge and produce *strain*.

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

Preventive Methods to Diminish Strain & Burn-Out: **BARRIERS**

IV. Concern that acknowledging psychological assistance will reflect negatively on job performance evaluations & opportunities for promotion.

- Values & Belief Systems

“Burn-Out” as a Psycho-Physiological Process & Strategies for Managing Distress

Preventive Methods to Diminish Strain & Burn-Out: **BARRIERS**

- V. Workers may **experience difficulty** judging their own reactions and performance when they are overwhelmed and distressed.
- VI. Shame and guilt over the contrast between the worker’s personal situation versus that of the survivors.

Buffers to Mitigate Burn-Out

Extensive Training

protects from physical and emotional strain

Available Repertoire

of coping strategies

Realistic

self-expectations and role boundaries

Buffers to Mitigate Burn-Out

Control

of over-identification with survivors

Awareness

of fantasies of “omnipotence”

Minimal

role confusion

Buffers to Mitigate Burn-Out

Modification

of identified negative coping

Practice

of positive coping

Comfort

in using support system & helpful supervision

Characteristics of Critical Incidents & Psychological Results

Support Guidelines for Workers...

Workers Should:

- ✓ Have a plan for communicating with and locating their **families**.
- ✓ Be aware of **conditions** in the field *before* reporting to their work sites.

Characteristics of Critical Incidents & Psychological Results

Support Guidelines for Workers...

Workers Should:

- ✓ **Obtain** necessary supplies
 - ✓ Including information on disaster worker stress management and self-care.
- ✓ **Ascertain** chain of command and supervision from operations center to field staff.

Characteristics of Critical Incidents & Psychological Results

Support Guidelines for Workers ...

*TEAMS should establish
roles and responsibilities.*

Workers Should:

- ✓ Develop team coordination with other community resources.
 - Red Cross, Disaster Health, and Mental Health Services.

Characteristics of Critical Incidents & Psychological Results

Support Guidelines for Workers...

Workers Should:

- ✓ **Watch** for signs of *STRESS* among their colleagues and **receive** continuing training, guidance, and supervision.

Critical Situation *STRESS*

Debriefing Process

- I. High-risk workers are potentially **vulnerable** to physical and psychological responses to human suffering, crisis situations, and death.

- II. Effective methods exist to help workers cope with what they are experiencing, or have experienced, while dealing with these overwhelming situations.

Critical Situation *STRESS* Debriefing Process

III. A “**critical incident**” can be defined as one that *generates unusually strong feelings in the worker and can become a memory that triggers previous emotional reactions.*

Critical Situation *STRESS*

Debriefing Process

- IV. Debriefing intervention is a new form of assisting in crisis resolution for high-risk workers involved in jobs entailing conditions of daily *STRESS*.
- V. This process helps to **alleviate** the worker's stress responses following tragic situations in dealing with crisis survivors.

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

*PREVENTION ASSISTANCE TO
WORKERS*

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

PREVENTION ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS...

- Organized and systematic models of intervention are currently being developed in many different parts of the world.
- The basic components consist of:
 - **Sharing** experiences
 - **Identifying** critical incidents
 - **Helping** set the situation in perspective
 - **Reinforcing** the capacity and skill of the worker

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

PREVENTION ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS...

Things *YOU* Can Do:

- ✓ Set limits
- ✓ Limit exposure
- ✓ Create a desirable
- ✓ Create balance
- ✓ **Have a personal life!!**
- ✓ Seek spiritual/creative renewal

< job schedule
organizational climate

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

PREVENTION ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS...

Things *YOU* Can Do:

- ✓ **Have a personal life!!**
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Rest and play
- ✓ **HAVE A PERSONAL LIFE!!**
- ✓ Personal therapy

Post-Disaster Issues of Psychosocial Workers

PREVENTION ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS...

ALWAYS REMEMBER

- ✓ Healthy professionals function better
- ✓ **Work is difficult** (not neutral)
- ✓ **Strong responses** to this work are **normative**
- ✓ **Psychological preparation** can **reduce** psychological risk in first responders