Psych/Social/Spiritual Issues in a Disaster

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Significant Life Events

• “Nodel” Events
  – Birth, Death, Marriages
• Life Changing Events
  – Disasters
  – Severe Illnesses
  – Divorce

• Professor Dumbledore to Harry Potter
  – “It is not what happens in life that makes a difference, it is how you respond.”
Impact of Significant Life Events

- **Psychological Impact**
  - What am I feeling?
    - How is my inner-self responding?
      - Conscience and unconscious self

- **Social Impact**
  - How does this upset my normal social systems?

- **Spiritual Impact**
  - Why is God letting this happen?
    - A special type of theology called “Theododicy”
      - Tornados called “Finger of God” (Nightly news, Joplin, MO 2011)
Emergency Management Cycle

- Preparedness
- Response
- Relief (Cleanup)
- Mitigation
- Recovery

Incident
Disaster Recovery Timeline

Based on the United Methodist Committee On Relief (UMCOR) disaster recovery formula, each phase of this disaster recovery is estimated to last:

Emergency Response = 4 days
Relief – 4 x 10 = 40 days (One month +)
Recovery $40 \times 10 = 400$ days (1.10 year)
Disaster Preparedness Phase

• Psychological
  – Denial – We don’t have disasters in Spokane

• Social
  – My schedule is to full to take on anything else

• Spiritual
  – God is all powerful and will protect me.
  – Bad things do not happen to good people.
Emergency Room Nurse

• Mother brings in her 4 month old child
• She left the baby with her new boy friend all day while she was working.
• He apparently threw the baby against the wall to shut it up.
• The baby is conscious, but lethargic, and not moving its right leg.
• The mother is hysterical.
Emotional Roller Coaster

Honeymoon → High hopes → Reality sets in → Disaster Strikes → Disillusionment

Recover Well → Little extra help → Great Difficulty
Response or Emergency Phase

• Psychological
  – Shock
  – Fear/anxiety
  – Overwhelmed
  – Vicarious traumatization

• Social
  – Changes in Family dynamics
  – Disruption of Social Network
  – Routines of life gone

• Spiritual
  – Why is God doing this to me? (Job)
  – This Disaster is God’s punishment/wrath
  – The will of Allah (Muslim)
  – “I thank God for sparing me.”
Relief or Clean up Phase

- Psychological
  - Bargaining – If I am good, people will help me.
  - Feelings of being alone/abandoned
  - Hope followed by disillusionment

- Social
  - Why is there no one to help me?
  - Recognition of inadequate (missing or overwhelmed) social support systems

- Spiritual
  - Why do “Bad Things Happen to Good People”? (Rabbi Kushner)
  - “There is no God” (California Wild Fire)
  - Pray harder!
  - Nature is destructive because of original sin
Long Term Recovery

• Psychological
  – Anger – “Help me Now!”
  – Depression
  – Suicide risk increases
  – Reaction/formation – Create a support group/focus on helping other victims
  – Acknowledgement that life will never be the same again.
  – Open to Change – Seeking a “new normal.”

• Social
  – Increase in alcoholism, spousal/child abuse, divorce
  – Isolation – I don’t have the energy to go to church, etc.
  – Relocation to make a “new start.”

• Spiritual
  – God can bring good out of a bad situation
  – God will provide
  – Suffering helps test our faith and purify us
  – “Who knows what is good and what is bad?” (Buddhist)
Defense Mechanisms

• Don’t correct a person’s psycho/social/spiritual support rationale.
  – “This is all part of God’s plan.”
  – “This disaster happened to teach me to be a better person.”
  – “I should have moved years ago.”
  – Natural disasters are evidence of Biblical “end times.”

• If their defense mechanism is working for them, let it be no matter how ridiculous it seems to us.
Disaster Workers Have Their Own Psycho/Social/Spiritual Reactions

• Advantages of debriefing when rotating out of the disaster work.
  – Nightmares that night.
    • Firefighter after a suicide by train.
  – Psycho/social/spiritual reaction may not show up immediately
    • Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

• Have a formal debriefing when you get home and on anniversary dates.
  – At 9-11, we had debriefing before we left for home and then at monthly intervals.
Stages of Grief
(Not Sequential)

- Denial and Shock
- Pain and guilt
- Anger and Bargaining
- Depression, reflection, loneliness
- Reconstruction
- Acceptance and Hope
Remember that Children Grieve Differently

• Children of all ages Grieve
  – Even toddlers know that something is very wrong.
  – Even pets grieve the loss of a family member.

• Children (ages 4 – 8)
  – Grieve in bits and pieces
    • They act out their grief through their play.
  – Child specialists can help them work through their grief.
Red Cross Integrated Care Team

• Developed at Singapore Airlines Crash in Taiwan in 2000.

• Four Red Cross members on the team.
  – Nurse
  – Mental Health Worker
  – Spiritual Care Worker
  – Client Services Worker
    • Case Worker

• Worked with family members waiting for the remains of loved ones coming back from Taiwan.
Summary

• The Psycho/Social/Spiritual impact in a Disaster is a major factor in the lives of people.
  – It differs by what phase the client is in.
  – It differs by whether you are a client or a disaster worker.
  – It differs by age
  – It differs by social status.
  – It differs by gender

• The Psycho/Social/Spiritual impact is always present.
  – Always expect psycho/social/spiritual issues.

• Listen to your client and be supportive.
Free Disaster Training

• Independent Study Program
  – WWW.Training.Fema.Gov

• Psychological First Aid – American Red Cross

• QPR (Suicide Prevention Training)
  – www.QPRInstitute.com

• Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
  – www.lifeline.org.au

• Critical Incident Stress Management
  – www.ICISF.org

• Child Care Training
  – www.brethren.org
How Do I Get Involved?

- American Red Cross Volunteer
- VOADS – Voluntary Organ. Active in Disaster
- COADS – Community Organ. Active in Disaster
- Church of the Brethren Child Care Volunteer
- United Methodist Care Team Volunteer
- Long Term Recovery Group
Questions?
The Kitchen Table Case
Case Management

Materials

Money

Personnel

RECOVERY
Emergency Room Nurse

- Mother with 4 mo. old
- Left the baby with boyfriend all day.
- He apparently threw the baby against the wall to shut it up.
- Baby is conscious but lethargic and not moving its right leg.
- Dentist was mowing his lawn.
- He reached under the mower to clean out an obstruction.
- The mower shaved down the ends of the middle, ring and little fingers on right hand.
Man With Leg Brace