Psychosocial Capacity Building in Response to Disasters:

A culturally informed approach
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Agenda

- Introductory exercise about resilience
- The Social Ecology of Disaster
- Differences in Cultural Orientations
- Comparing a disaster mental health orientation with Psychosocial Capacity Building
- What makes people resilient after a disaster?
- The use of groups to foster resiliency.
- Self care
Family and Cultural Lessons

- Think about your answers to the following questions.

- Who do you go to for help when you are experiencing a crisis?

- What lessons did you learn from your family about what helps you to survive a crisis or challenging times?

- What cultural values are reflected in these lessons?

- Do you feel that these lessons are aligned with or distinct from mainstream North American cultural values?
Helping individuals and communities to recover from a disaster necessitates an understanding of:

1. Self and personhood in a sociocultural context.
2. The relationship between self and family, community and culture.
“...the construction of self involves a dialectic between universal biological and social aspects of human nature, on the one side, and the process....of creating meaning in particular social interactions based on shared cultural models and value orientations.”

P.199
The Interaction between the event, social ecology and Personhood.
A philosophy of disaster response

Thus when responding to a disaster as outsiders, we need to understand *how* and *what* people who are insiders are experiencing and how the disaster influences:

1. What is means to be a person.
2. What a person needs from others, particularly family and community.
3. What have individuals and communities lost, what do they seek, and what will help them to achieve their goals towards their vision of recovery.
Social Ecology of Disaster

- Community
- Economics
- Environmental (Geographic and Geological Factors)
- Technological Infrastructure
- Physical Infrastructure
- Resources and Capacity
- Social Networks and Capital
- Media
- Relationship to Adjacent Communities
- Relationship to Larger Political Entities
- Cultural Beliefs and Values
- Political Dynamics
- Structural Inequalities
- Homophobia
- Sexism
- Racism
- Organizational and Human Resources
- Historical Patterns and Legacies
Questions for Responders

- What do we hope to achieve?
- What informs our ‘expertise’?
- How will we know if we have been helpful?
- What harm can we do despite our good intentions?
- What will happen after we leave?
From your experience

• What are people most concerned about when there is a disaster?
• What do you offer that is most helpful to them?
The Multiple Levels of Impact of a Disaster

• Individual – body, thoughts, feelings, meaning, behavior, connection to past and future.

• Family – Changes in structure, roles, boundaries, autonomy, relationship to community.

• Community – Infrastructure, social relations, social networks, professional and civic organizations, social cohesion, social trust, cultural practices, transitional pathways
Culture and Personhood

• What we think
• What we feel
• How we express what we are feeling
• How we make sense (meaning) about what happened.
• What we need to feel better
• Who can offer us what we need
Questions About Personhood (Summerfield)

• What kind of risks can be faced?
• What do you seek help for?
• Who do you seek help from?
• What do you share and not share with people outside of your family?
• Is sharing helpful?
• When are people likely to be fatalistic?
• When are people likely to feel hopeful?
• What is normal and abnormal behavior?
Western Disaster Mental Health

• Focus on universal, bio-physical reactions
• Use of trained professionals to provide counseling and psychological treatment
• Sensitivity to psychiatric pathology that results from disasters
• Employ a lot of counseling and therapy techniques with individuals and groups
• Relies on ‘evidence based practices’
• Use of Psychological First Aid/Crisis Intervention/Skills for Psychological Recovery
Critique of Western Disaster Mental Health Approaches

- Focus on trauma - Minority of people develop severe trauma (PTSD) – 5-30% (Friedman, et al)
- Focus on individual at expense of family, group, community
- Greater tendency to treat survivors as victims
- Relies on expertise, diagnosis, creates hierarchies
- Greater focus on symptom reduction than the process of healing.
- Western notion of “professional boundaries” fits in some contexts but not others.
- Lack of sustainability
- What constitutes ‘evidence’?
- Who determines effectiveness?
Psychosocial Capacity Building

• Strength and resiliency based.
• Connects psychological well-being with social well-being
• Respect for natural healing processes
• Utilizing local people and resources – training of trainers.
• Cultural practices are centralized.
• Professionals provide consultation and support to community leaders, local healers, etc. without taking over
• Caution about unintended effects
What does this look like in practice?

• Forming partnerships with local and indigenous organizations.
• Asking questions rather than providing all of the answers.
• Building capacity that will endure after responders have left.
• Including all stakeholders in all phases of the response process – planning, implementation, evaluation.
• Attunement to social exclusion and fostering inclusion.
• Maintaining an ethical standard of human rights and social justice.
Eight most important processes that help people to recover after a disaster

- Achieve a sense of safety*
- Ability to self-calm*
- Competency: a sense of self and community efficacy*
- Connections with other people and resources*
- Recovering a sense of hope*
- Grieving and mourning in culturally meaningful ways.
- Re-establishing connections with cultural practices and lessons learned from ancestors (Landau).
- Reestablishing a “sense of place” (Prewitt Diaz & Dayal, 2008)

(*Hobfall, et al., 2007)
Transitional Pathways (Landau)

• At any moment in time we have a connection with our past and future
• Past – memories, relationships, mementoes, cultural meanings, influences on our personhood.
• Future – hopes, intentions, plans, goals.
• Our connections to our past and future can be disrupted by a disaster, which destabilizes us in the present.
Memorializing
• Pathways to the past
• Collective, inclusive acknowledgement of the losses
• The process is as important as the product
• Transforming tragedy into meaning
• Giving gifts for future generations
• Anniversaries and ongoing memorializing

The Wheel of Recovery

Future
- Social Connectedness
- Finding Meaning
- Re-establishing Hope
- Storytelling, Music and Art
- Counseling and Crises Intervention
- Mutual Aid Groups
- Rebuilding
- Forging New Connections
- Validating and Normalizing
- Grieving and Memorilizing

Government Entities
- NGO's
- Universities
- Resources
- Schools
- Cultural Traditions and Lessons
- Family Bonds and Traditions
- Routines
- Integrating Lessons and Traditions

Local Organizations
- Post Disaster
- Severe Loses
- Dislocations
- Shock
- Feel Overwhelmed
- Severe Reactions
- Resilience and Fostering Efficacy
- Strengthening Family

Cultural Organizations
- Disaster

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Resilience is Holistic and Synergistic

- Resilience after a disaster is a dynamic and complex process, rather than just a set of traits.
- “dynamic interplay between the inner life of people and their social and political action” (Weyerman)
- An internal sense of power is related to a collective sense of efficacy, which comes from activities and actions taken with others.
- Can cultivate individual, family and community resilience.
Cognitive resilience

- Ability to make sense of what happened – comprehensibility.
- Ability to manage things after the disaster – manageability.
- Ability to make meaning of what happened – meaningfulness
- Ability to achieve forward movement

IMPLICATIONS: Information, tasks, talking, sharing, journaling, goal setting
Emotional Resilience

- Optimism
- Ability to sooth and calm oneself – emotional regulation
- Ability to achieve positive emotions – joy, fun, humor, hope
- Feeling held and socially connected
- Caring about others – kindness leads to happiness and a sense of “oneness” with others
- IMPLICATIONS: Setting future goals, offering hope, teaching self-calming techniques, fostering social connections, altruism and volunteerism
Attachment Resilience

• Having the capacity to form meaningful relationships with other people.

• Having the capacity to internalize sustaining images of people who have been important in our lives.

• Having gratitude and love towards others, which leads to self-love and confidence.

• IMPLICATIONS: Understand and work with a person’s existing attachment style to foster connections; guided imagery, talking, contacting important people in a person’s life; gratitude exercises.
Family and Community Resilience

- Ability of family to adapt to new situation
- Ability of family members to care for one another in a stressful situation.
- Creativity and the ability to reinvent and reestablish routines
- Reestablishing communal interdependence
- Collective story telling and memorializing
- Regaining a vision of the future

**IMPLICATIONS:** Engage family and community groups in tasks that support what is described above.
Why are groups helpful?

• Social connection with others.
• Sharing can foster empowerment.
• Sharing can reduce guilt, shame, hopelessness.
• Groups are normalizing – many activities are done in groups in everyday life.
• Synergy that comes with many people.
• Pools assets and resources, building capacity.
• More likely to endure after responder has exited.
Different Types of Groups

- Informational and Psycho-education Groups
- Counseling Group
- Activity or skill-building Group
- Recreational Group
- Mutual Aid and Support Group
Four Components that should be included in most groups

- Exploring fears and negative emotions.
- Re-connecting with sources of strength and empowerment.
- Re-connecting past, present, and future.
- Drawing on cultural traditions.
Activities to help make people feel safe (Bryant-Davis)

- Narratives - Storytelling, journaling, poetry
- Movement – dance, exercise
- Music
- Drama
- Arts and crafts – e.g. drawing pictures, sculpting
- Social support
- Social Activism
- Connecting with nature
Examples of a Mutual Aid, Social Support and Advocacy Groups

- Mothers who lost their children
- Children who lost friends or siblings
- Children who want to help other children
- Advocating for safer schools
What do you do to Maintain Self-care?
Bibliography


Bibliography


