Resiliency in the Face of Disaster: Strategies for Survivors and Responders

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Ensuring Resiliency during Disasters

- Mitigate hazards
- Enhance preparedness
- Ensure effective emergency response
- Rapidly recover
What We Know About Disaster Reactions

Typical phases of disaster

- Pre-Disaster
- Warning
- Threat
- Impact
- Honeymoon
- Heroic
- Disillusionment
- Reconstruction

- Emotional Highs
- Emotional Lows
- Inventory
- Trigger Events
- Anniversary Reactions
- Working Through Grief
- Coming to Terms
- Setback
- A New Beginning
- Up to One Year
- After Anniversary
Human Reactions to Disasters

- Everyone who experiences a disaster is affected by it
- People pull together during and after a disaster
- Stress and grief are common reactions to uncommon situations
- People’s natural resilience will support individual and collective recovery
Human Reactions to Disasters, con’t

- Most will naturally recover
- Some will have serious or severe reactions
- Few will develop diagnosable conditions
- Most do not seek treatment
- Survivors often reject help
Risk Factors-Population Exposure Model:

A. Injured survivors, bereaved family members
B. Survivors with high exposure to disaster trauma, or evacuated from disaster zones
C. Bereaved extended family and friends, first responders
D. People who lost homes, jobs, and possessions; people with preexisting trauma and dysfunction; at-risk groups; other disaster responders
E. Affected people from the larger community

Adapted from DeWolfe, 2002.
Two Types of Reactions

- **Individual reactions:**
  - May cause stress and grief.
  - May cause fatigue, irritability, hopelessness, and relationship conflicts.

- **Collective reactions:**
  - May damage community support.
  - May affect individual coping.
Individual Reactions

- Physical
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Behavioral
Signs of Severe Distress

- Depression, sadness, feelings of hopelessness
- Headaches, stomach problems
- Colds or flu-like symptoms
- Difficulty sleeping
- Poor work performance
- Reluctance to leave home
- Fear of Crowds, strangers, or being alone
- Increase substance use/abuse
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Suicidal Ideations
Characteristics of Disaster Responders

● May have the same disaster reactions as the general population

● Sometimes they are survivors of the disaster and may have experienced associated trauma

● Distinct from the general population and value group identity
Characteristics of Disaster Responders

- Were assigned to or elected to be part of an organized response to a catastrophic event
- Can be traditional like police officers or fire fighters
- Can be non-traditional like public health, construction or transportation workers
- Self-reliant and often reluctant to seek help
Characteristics of Disaster Responders

Stress reactions can result from:

- Life threatening danger
- Exposure to bodily injury or dead bodies
- Extreme fatigue, weather exposure, sleep deprivation
- Extended exposure to danger, loss, or emotional and physical strain
Disaster Responders’ Experiences and Reactions

Key Terms:

- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout
- Vicarious Trauma
Compassion Fatigue

Is characterized by:

- Work-related, secondary exposure to extremely stressful events
- Being exposed to traumatic events through the experience of those you are helping
- Symptoms with a rapid onset and associated with a particular event
- Fear, difficulty sleeping, recurring upsetting images, avoidance of reminders of the event

Source: Hudnall-Stamm, The ProQOL Manual, 2005
Burnout

**Is characterized by:**
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Difficulties in dealing with work or effectiveness
- Gradual onset of negative feelings
- Feelings that your efforts make no difference
- Very high workload
- Non-supportive work environment

*Source: Hudnall-Stamm, The ProQOL Manual, 2005*
Vicarious Trauma

Is characterized by:

- A stress reaction experienced by professionals who are exposed to stories of traumatic events by those seeking help
- Long lasting changes in how these professionals view themselves, others, and the world
- Symptoms similar to, but not usually as severe as, posttraumatic stress disorder

Source: US Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crime
Resilience

What is resilience?

- Resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change.
Factors affecting resilience:

- Life situation
- Individual traits and coping styles
- Disaster and trauma experience
- Family and social support
- Spiritual beliefs
- Presence of perceived control, and hope
- Availability of accurate information
- An effective and caring emergency response
Individual Resilience

Ten ways to improve resilience:

- Make connections
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems
- Accept change as a part of living
- Move toward your goals
- Take decisive actions
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery
- Nurture a positive view of yourself
- Keep things in perspective
- Maintain a hopeful outlook
- Take care of yourself

Individual Resilience

Strategies to improve resilience:

- Make a realistic plan to manage and prioritize tasks
- Making a list of tasks will increase feelings of control and self-reliance
- Do the most important things first:
  - Find a safe place to stay
  - Get water and food
  - Tell family where you are and how they can contact you
  - Get papers for your property, insurance, bank, medical records, and job qualifications
- Know that it will take time to get your life in order
- Be patient with yourself as well as others
Individual Resilience

Strategies to improve resilience:

- Eat healthy foods and drink plenty of water
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol
- Do not use drugs
- Get enough sleep and time to rest
- Engage in physical activity
- Stay active and maintain your daily routine
- Spend time with family and friends
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and support groups
Individual Resilience

Strategies to improve resilience:

- Use practical ways to relax
- Stretch or meditate
- When engaging in stressful activities, take frequent breaks
- Engage in personal time: read, cook, listen to music, or take a bath
- Talk to family or friends about your feelings
Individual Resilience

Strategies to improve resilience:

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of distress
- Recognize how past experiences affect the reactions to the current event
- Use successful coping strategies from past events
- Acknowledge feelings; don’t ignore them
- Seek help if necessary
Community Resilience

- Boost and protect naturally occurring social supports
- Build social skills and mutual support
- Provide leaders and survivors with knowledge, tools, and skills to acquire needed supports
- Facilitate locally-driven measures to:
  - Assess and address vulnerabilities to hazards
  - Identify and invest in networks of assistance and information
  - Set achievable goals
  - Enhance capacities to solve problems
  - Collectively tell the community’s story
  - Re-establish rhythms and routines
  - Engage in collective rituals (i.e., anniversary rituals)
Ensuring Resiliency During Disasters: What Can We Do?

Promoting resilience and recovery:

- Services to survivors can be planned and implemented in ways that naturally promote resilience and recovery.
- Five essential elements for service delivery are:
  1. Promote a sense of safety
  2. Promote calming
  3. Promote sense of self- and collective efficacy
  4. Promote connectedness
  5. Promote hope

*Hobfoll et al., 2007*
Ensuring Resiliency During Disasters: What Can We Do?

1. Promote a sense of safety

Action steps:

- Bring survivors to a safe place and tell them that it is safe
- Accurately describe threats and encourage perception of safety when serious threat has passed
- Encourage distressed survivors to limit viewing of graphic, traumatic images in the media

Hobfoll et al., 2007
Ensuring Resiliency During Disasters: What Can We Do?

2. Promote calming

Action steps:

- Help survivors directly solve immediate concerns
- If known, provide information on the safety of family and friends and likelihood of further danger
- Encourage community outreach and education regarding disaster reactions, anxiety management, and limiting excessive media exposure

Hobfoll et al., 2007
3. Promote sense of self- and collective efficacy

Action steps:

- To the extent possible, involve survivors in decisions regarding policy, use of resources, and community rebuilding.
- Promote healing activities that are organized by the community: meetings, rallies, community rituals.
- Include children in community recovery and encourage resumption of school communities.

Hobfoll et al., 2007
4. Promote connectedness

Action steps:

- Help survivors connect with family and friends
- Help children connect with parents
- If possible, address negative social dynamics: mistrust, impatience with recovery, and us/them thinking

Hobfoll et al., 2007
5. Promote hope

Action steps:

- Encourage rebuilding of local economies
- Support advocacy programs that assist survivors with the challenges of recovery
- Build individual and community strengths
- Community institutions should help with support systems, acceptance, and positive goals

Hobfoll et al., 2007
Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR)

Ensuring Resiliency during Disasters

- **Mitigate hazards**: strengthen capacity to withstand threats and disasters
- **Enhance preparedness**: engage society in improving preparedness
- **Ensure effective emergency response**: strengthen nationwide capacity
- **Rapidly recover**: improve nations ability to adapt and recover
Ensuring Resiliency during Disasters: What can leadership do?

- Understand disaster reactions
- Help foster resilience
- Help improve effective coping strategies
- Provide practical assistance by promoting:
  - A sense of safety
  - Calming
  - Sense of self- and collective efficacy
  - Connectedness
  - Hope

*Source: CDC, Disaster Mental Health for Responders: Key Principles, Issues and Questions, 2005*
Ensuring Resiliency during Disasters: What can leadership do?

- Ensure that first responders have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- Support colleagues, family members, and survivors
- Set priorities and allocate resources effectively
- Encourage and support effective self-care and stress management
- Provide information on how to seek help when needed
Ensuring Resiliency during Disasters: What can leadership do?

- Provide training and education to entire workforce
- Provide ongoing supervision and promotion of self-care and stress management
- Plan and implement services so they are responsive to survivors’ needs