

UK Experiences of Disaster: Lessons Learnt for Community Support

Dr Anne Eyre

Overview

By the end of this session you will have had the opportunity to:

- the psycho-social impact of recent UK disasters & needs of those affected
- lessons learned about post-disaster support and psycho-social support strategies
- the practical implications for those responding to future events involving mass traumatic death

Key Themes

- Disasters are about **people** and responding to disasters – pre, during and post impact – is about *managing and supporting people*
- Psycho-social strategies should be *proactive, pre-planned and integrated* with other elements of recovery
- Recovery strategies should be based on the principle of *enhancing resilience* within individuals and communities

Emergency': an event or situation which threatens serious damage to:

1) Human welfare

- loss of human life,
- human illness or injury,
- homelessness
- damage to property
- disruption of a supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel,
- disruption of an electronic or other system of communication
- disruption of facilities for transport, or
- disruption of services relating to health.

2) the Environment

Contamination of land, water or air with:

- harmful biological, chemical or radio-active matter, or oil
- flooding
- disruption or destruction of plant life or animal life.

3) Security of UK

- war or armed conflict, and
- Terrorism

Asian Tsunami (2004)

- Indonesia - 130,000 died; at least 37,000 others remain missing. About 500,000 people made homeless.
- Sri Lanka - 31,000+ died; more than 4,000 reported missing. More than half a million people made homeless.
- Thailand - 5,395 people confirmed dead, including about 2,400 foreigners from 36 countries. 2,800+ still missing
- Of all western countries, Sweden was the worst hit by the Asian tsunami. Nearly 550 killed & 1,500 injured
- Britain - 149 Britons died in the tsunami; 6 are still missing (Jan 06).

London Bombings

7 July 2005

- Four bombs - 3 on tube trains, 1 on a bus
- 52 people killed, hundreds injured
- 4 suicide bombers

July 21 2005

- Four attempted bombs - 3 on tube trains, 1 on a bus
- 22 July – Brazilian shot dead by police
- 6 suspects apprehended

Examples of Disaster Response

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shock/Stunned• Disbelief• Denial• Dazed• Fear• Vulnerability• Frozen, numb• Powerless/helpless	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joined search/rescue• Gave first aid• Sought help• Called home/others• Contd journey• Adaptive/altruistic• On auto-pilot• On a high
---	--

Searching

- Physical/medical/practical help
- Information
- Loved ones
- Property
- A way home
- An account of what happened

Two Types of Disaster Trauma (Kai Erikson)

- Individual trauma: a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such force that one cannot respond effectively
- Community trauma: a blow to the tissues of social life that damages the bonds linking people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community

'In most large-scale human disasters, the two traumas are experienced as two halves of a continuous whole'

Forms of Support after UK Disasters

- Helplines
- Police family liaison officers
- Family/humanitarian assistance centres
- Screen & treat programme
- Longer term support
- Self help support groups

Tsunami Support Network

(www.tsunamisupportnetwork.org.uk – *though now much pared down*)

- Website
- Newsletter
- Ongoing Telephone Support
- Information Meetings
- Support Groups

Key Principles

- Information about all aspects of the process
- Consistent, effective two-way communication
- Informed choices
- Openness, honesty, sensitivity
- Non-judgemental responses
- Opportunities to be in touch with others

Rights Based Approach to:

- information about body recovery
- viewing the body
- information about identification processes
- post-mortem reports
- visiting the site
- how and when property is returned

Base Support on Resilience Model:

Resilience is: the ability to adapt to difficult, challenging, stressful or traumatic life experiences

In practice, this means helping people to help themselves, eg organising their own support group agendas & activities