



DISASTER PSYCHOLOGY

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Emergency Support Network

Disaster Factors

- **Observable impact**
- **Limits are tested**
- **Social disruption**
- **Psycho-Social concerns**
- **Political definitions**
- **Demands for action**

Quarantelli, 1985

Impact Factors

- **Proportion of population involved**
- **Speed of involvement**
- **Length of involvement**
- **Predictability of involvement**
- **Familiarity of involvement**
- **Degree of personal loss**

Disaster Stress

- **Threat perception**
- **Lack of control**
- **Breach of assumptions**
- **Damage and disruption**
- **Frustration and anger**

Disaster Reaction Stages

- 1. Alarm (Warning phase)**
- 2. Threat (Personal safety fears)**
- 3. Impact (Time of high tension)**
- 4. Inventory (Damage surveyed)**
- 5. Rescue (Self-help, bonding)**
- 6. Remedy (High action, high stress)**
- 7. Restoration (Recognition of recovery)**



Many people maintain a strong mythology about the reactions of communities and people in response to emergencies.

The source of this mythology is the media, TV and the movies.



MYTH: Most people panic.

REALITY: Organised response.

2001 World Trade Centre terrorism

MYTH: Chaos and disorder.

**REALITY: Focus on what
needs to be done.**

1993 Laguna Beach Fire (Calf, USA)



MYTH: Anti-social behaviour.

REALITY: Helping behaviour

1994 Los Angeles Riots

**MYTH: People dazed, shocked
and unable to cope.**

**REALITY: Self-help and
co-operation.**

1996 Port Arthur shootings.



**MYTH: Dependence on
outside help.**

**REALITY: Dependence on
family, friends
and others in
the community.**

1994 NSW Bushfires.



MYTH: Organisations come out better off than people.

REALITY: People come out better off than organisations.

1998 Katherine Floods (NT)

Stages of Recovery

There are usually four stages of recovery.

- 1. Stabilisation**
- 2. Management**
- 3. Mobilisation**
- 4. Restoration**

What are the basics people need?

- **Removal of threat**
- **Sense of control**
- **Information**
- **Basic needs met**
- **Resources**
- **Direction for the future**

Factors which can delay recovery.

- **On-going risk**
- **Unnecessary re-location**
- **Poor communications**
- **Delayed decision-making**
- **Inadequate support systems**
- **Rumours and mis-information**
- **Blame and recrimination.**
- **Survivor syndrome**

Survivor Syndrome

- **Disturbing memories and traumatic images**
- **Guilt at having lived when others did not survive**
- **Feelings of numbing, sadness, apathy and social withdrawal**
- **Relationship problems**
- **Need to bring about closure and find some personal meaning.**

Disaster Psychology Considerations

- 1. The diversity of the population affected (age, gender, culture).**
- 2. The normality of the target population.**
- 3. Avoidance of mental health labels.**
- 4. Primary concerns need to be met first.**
- 5. The disaster climate generates many rumours.**
- 6. Disasters bring out the best in people and the worst in people.**

Psychological Recovery Techniques

- **Get people talking**
- **Be a good listener**
- **Treat people with respect**
- **Keep people busy**
- **Help out in practical ways**
- **Help people with problem-solving**
- **Don't promise what you can't deliver**
- **Stay calm in demanding situations**
- **Link people with other supports**