



Topical Issues On

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

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Disaster Risk Management Begins With Information

ABOUT CRISIS INTERVENTION IN DISASTER SITUATIONS

Interventions to manage disaster situations naturally depend on their impact. Disaster impacts can be tangible or intangible. Tangible impacts are losses and costs that can be easily quantified in monetary terms. Such impacts include damage to infrastructure and injury among others. Logistical costs related to response can also be quantified.

On the other hand intangible impacts are complex, less apparent and cannot be meaningfully quantified in monetary values despite being real and significant. These impacts include social and emotional upheavals as a consequence of the disaster giving rise to increased stress levels. Generally all human activity, thought processes and emotions are constantly challenged by stressors. In some instances inner conflict due to non fulfilment and dearth in the meaning of life may give rise to stress. However disaster situations are a major source of stress making it imperative to institute proactive measures to assist individuals and communities to adapt and cope effectively.

Various coping skills may be employed with positive results when functional adaptability is achieved while in others cases a crisis develops. A crisis is typically an intolerable difficulty that may invoke feelings of fear, distress, despair and inability to take charge of one's life as a result of a disruptive event. A well established characteristic of crisis is its universality in that no one can be said to be immune to mental breakdown and or failure of

coping mechanisms even if one is well conditioned to stressful and traumatic events. Another key characteristic of a crisis is its varying effect on different people, one may cope while another may breakdown under similar circumstances. It is therefore notable that a crisis may manifest in those directly affected by a disaster situation and may also affect those providing assistance such as search and rescue teams and other humanitarian interveners.

Crisis intervention measures must therefore be in place for the affected and those responding to the disaster.. An appreciation of roles before and after disaster strikes can enhance effectiveness of crisis interventions.

Before Disaster Strikes

Role of Individuals and Families: It is essential to take time to learn about prevailing hazards in the home, at work, at school, in the area in which one lives and in the country generally. This knowledge should equip one with the knowledge and skills on preventive and mitigation measures that need to be undertaken to minimise the risk to disaster. The less the incidence of disaster risks the less likelihood for crisis situations.

General preparedness in the home and its environs contributes to orderly and effective response thus minimises disruption. Every family member must know what actions to take in case of emergency or disaster.

Maintenance of emergency supplies such as food, water, first aid kit and emergency lighting should contribute to efficient response.

Role of Response Teams: Firstly disaster response teams need to maintain optimum levels of mental and physical wellbeing. This should enhance resilience to disruptive events. It would be damaging to expose those affected by disaster to traumatised response teams. Secondly disaster response teams must work on a rotational basis in order to provide relief in dealing with difficult situations. Thirdly disaster response teams must be well trained.

Research has shown that disaster survivors benefit greatly from immediate professional intervention. Interventions may be fleeting, momentary or longer depending on circumstances. It becomes an imperative that disaster response teams must be adequately trained to render the necessary support to those affected by disaster. This training must be a routine preparedness undertaking. Crisis response interventions must be integrated into the overall emergency or disaster plans.

After Disaster Strikes

Role of the Affected: While disaster response teams are useful and helpful to manage crisis the usual support systems of family, relatives, friends and social groupings like churches are critical in assisting one to cope. Exercise and self relaxation may also help one to cope. Professional help may be necessary when certain signs and symptoms persist. Such signs and symptoms include persistently re experiencing the disruptive event, distressing dreams or nightmares of the event.

Role of Response Teams: In the provision of support to the affected it is critical to utilize well tested crisis intervention methodologies and ensure identification of those needing follow up with more intense crisis interventions.

Response teams must themselves undergo a debriefing process. The debriefing process is a mandatory intervention designed to assist one to regain emotional and behavioral equanimity.

Both tangible and intangible disaster impacts must be addressed before and after disaster strikes.

According to the Meteorological Services the month of August marks the first month of the hot season with an average maximum temperature of 24.6°C while night time temperatures are about 9.4°C. Wind speed picks up, Gutu frequency is high and ground frost averages 0.3°C.

Remember be a good citizen, reduce the risk to disaster!

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