Disaster and Trauma During Childhood: The Role of Clinicians

Stephen J. Cozza, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry
Uniformed Services University
Child Traumatic Exposures

- Physical and Sexual Abuse
- Domestic and Community Violence
- Medical Trauma
- Natural Disasters
- Terrorism
- War
  - Child Soldiering
  - Displacement/Refugee Status
  - Parental Combat Exposure
- Torture or Kidnapping
- Traumatic Grief
Individual Trauma vs. Community Disaster
Community Effects of Trauma

- Destruction of infrastructure
- Possible disruption of emergency services
- Permanent effect on community
- Death of loved ones
- Loss of jobs
Community Effects of Trauma

- Parental distraction/preoccupation/unavailability
- Disruption in schedule and routines
- Separation of families
- Induction of fear and erosion of safety
- Opportunism that undermines safety
What happens next?
Trauma is a Process, Not an Event

Cascade of Events Post Parental Injury

- fear of loss of parent
- separation from non-injured parent
- hospital visits
- change in parenting ability
- move from community

TIME (months)
Stages of Disaster

Predisaster

IMPACT

Rescue and Response

Recovery

TIME
Treating
Responding
Preparing

Primary
Secondary
Tertiary

Prevention
Preparedness

- predisaster requirement
- education
- emergency planning
- drilling for different scenarios
- community relationship building
- “before the fact intervention”
Welcome to FEMA for Kids! I'm Herman, the spokescrab for the site. This site teaches you how to be prepared for disasters and prevent disaster damage. You can also learn what causes disasters, play games, read stories and become a Disaster Action Kid. And don't forget to learn about FEMA. A story about my search for a disaster-proof shell is great reading, too!

Hey, parents and teachers -- we have resources for you! Parents & Teachers page has activities, curriculum and safety information you can use in the classroom or at home!

http://www.fema.gov/kids/
Get Prepared

Preparedness
An everyday task for everyday life

Being prepared for emergencies is crucial at home, school, work and in your community.

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood, workplace or school or can confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services – water, gas, electricity or telephones – were cut off?

Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. The best way to make you and your family safer is to be prepared before disaster strikes. We encourage you to:

Spotlight
- Pandemic Flu Public Education
- Partners in Preparedness
- Preparedness: A Family Guide Brochure Available with Clorox
- Family Preparedness Brochure Available with Target
- What's your RQ (Readiness Quotient)? with the Council for Excellence in Government

http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/
Psychological First Aid

Crisis Counseling

Psychoeducation

Triage

Screening

Risk Communication
a non-treatment intervention

basic information about trauma response

provide comfort and support

establish and ensure safety

connection with community resources
Recovery and Social Environment

- Child is contained within layers of support
- Transactional interplay between layers
- Interaction may be mutually constructive or detrimental
- Family is the closest social support
- Encourage recovery by supporting role functioning
Disaster Recovery and Children

- Most dependent are most vulnerable in the process
- Disruption of family equilibrium
- Distraction of responsible parties
  - many contingencies to address
  - manage anxiety and personal stress
  - potential impairment of role functioning
Disruption of relationships, interpersonal strife, loss of attachments

Reduction of parental efficacy – influence of parental distress or psychopathology

Target parental and community efficacy as it pertains to child recovery
• Children are subject to many of the same effects of trauma as adults
• *BUT* they express their distress differently
• Behavioral manifestations may be misunderstood
• Limited communication skills
• Younger children may harbor cognitive distortions about meaning of trauma
Treatment

Understanding risk

Diagnostic considerations

Evidence informed treatments

Traumatic Grief
Resilience Variability in Trauma Response

Time of trauma

- subject 1
- subject 2
- subject 3
- subject 4

functioning

functional illness

time
• Most disaster victims recover without the development of psychopathology or the need for treatment
• PTSD is not the only psychiatric condition that may result
  – depression
  – risk behaviors
  – substance use disorders
• Variable rates of child PTSD have been reported in the literature after traumatic event (5-75%)
Resilience vs. Psychopathology

• Difficulty in PTSD diagnosis due to differences in child presentation

• Risk Factors include:
  – prior history of trauma
  – preexisting emotional or behavioral problems
  – severity of stressor and proximity of exposure
  – psychopathology in the parent
  – immature familial coping patterns
  – characteristics of post-disaster environment and available support
Treatment Strategies

- Psychoeducation
- Parent guidance
- Family intervention
- Supportive services
- Trauma Focused CBT
- Traumatic Grief Treatments
- Pharmacotherapy
Unique Role of Child Clinicians

- **Community Consultants** – maintain ongoing relationships to schools and other agencies that routinely engage children

- **Child Development Expert** – understand the developmental considerations unique to children at all levels of development

- **Child Advocate** – highlights the special needs of children when others may not be aware
Unique Role of Child Clinicians

- **Clinician** – treats clinical disorders in children, understanding the importance of interaction with parents and families
- **Educator** – communicates information to decision makers and community leaders
- **System Specialist** – effectively coordinates services between different agencies
Available Resources

WORKING PAPER

How Schools Can Help Students Recover from Traumatic Experiences
A ToolKit for Supporting Long-term Recovery

LISA M. JANCOV, UNNECY M. MORSE, TERRY TANIBIAN, BRADLEY D. STEIN

March 2008

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN

On the Edge: Children and Families Displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Face a Looming Medical and Mental Health Crisis

From the National Institute of Mental Health

Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters

Available Resources