

MODULE 4

**DISASTER TRAUMA-
PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES &
INTERVENTIONS (PART 1)**

OBJECTIVES

- To embrace the Father's heart for the traumatised
- To create awareness of what disaster trauma is
- To be an effective trauma care-giver
- The importance of cross cultural factors in trauma care-giving
- The importance of debriefing

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Psychological trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring conditions, in which:

- ▶ **The individual's ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or**
- ▶ **The individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity. (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 60)**

DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

Jon Allen, a psychologist at the Menninger Clinic in Houston, Texas and author of *Coping with Trauma: A Guide to Self-Understanding* (1995) reminds us that there are two components to a traumatic experience: the objective and the subjective: "It is the subjective experience of the objective events that constitutes the trauma...The more you believe you are endangered, the more traumatized you will be...Psychologically, the bottom line of trauma is overwhelming emotion and a feeling of utter helplessness. There may or may not be bodily injury, but psychological trauma is coupled with physiological upheaval that plays a leading role in the long-range effects" (p.14).

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA

- Excessive alertness, on the look-out for signs of danger
- Easily startled
- Fatigue/exhaustion
- Disturbed sleep
- General aches and pains

TRAUMA SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

- Sadness, crying irritability, aggression
- Nightmares
- Trauma themes in play/art/conversation
- School avoidance, failure
- Physical complaints
- Concentration problems
- Regressive behavior
- Eating/sleeping changes
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Withdrawal

TRAUMA SYMPTOMS IN ADOLESCENTS

- Similar to adult response to trauma
- Feelings of shame/guilt
- Increased risk-taking behaviours
- Withdrawal from peers/family
- Pseudomature behaviors
- Substance abuse
- Delinquent behaviors
- Change in school performance
- Self-destructive behaviors

TRAUMA SYMPTOMS IN ADULTS

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Substance abuse
- Increased risk-taking behaviours
- Withdrawal from peers/family
- Suicidal

SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF TRAUMA

- **Loss of meaning / purpose**
- **Loss of hope**
- **Change in religious beliefs**
- **Extreme cynicism**

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is a clinical condition that may develop in some people following exposure to a traumatic event.

PTSD involves three main groups of symptoms:

- Re-experiencing the trauma in the form of intrusive memories, nightmares or flashbacks
- Avoidance of reminders and numbing of emotional responsiveness
- Hyperarousal - feeling jumpy and on edge.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

- PTSD is very distressing and can lead to serious ongoing problems with social relationships and the ability to work or carry out normal daily activities. PTSD usually requires professional assistance as these problems tend not to resolve by themselves with the passage of time.
- Depression, anxiety disorders (such as panic, phobias, and general anxiety) and alcohol or drug disorders may also develop following trauma in some people. These conditions may occur with, or in the absence of, PTSD.

HOW TO HELP?

- It can be difficult to know how to help a survivor who's suffered a traumatic or distressing experience, but your support can be a crucial factor in their recovery.
- **Be patient and understanding.** Healing from emotional or psychological trauma takes time. Be patient with the pace of recovery and remember that everyone's response to trauma is different. Don't judge the survivor's reaction against your own response or anyone else's.
- **Offer practical support** to help the survivor get back into a normal routine. That may mean help with collecting groceries or housework, for example, or simply being available to talk or listen.

HOW TO HELP?

- **Don't pressure the survivor's into talking but be available when they want to talk.** Some trauma survivors find it difficult to talk about what happened. Don't force them to open up but let them know you are there to listen whenever they feel ready.
- **Help the survivor's to socialize and relax.** Encourage them to participate in physical exercise, seek out friends, and pursue hobbies and other activities that bring them pleasure.
- **Don't take the trauma symptoms personally.** The survivor's may become angry, irritable, withdrawn, or emotionally distant. Remember that this is a result of the trauma and may not have anything to do with you or your relationship with them.

**Nine Steps For Crisis Care
(Christian Counseling, Collins)**

1. **Make Contact**
2. **Reduce Anxiety**
3. **Focus on Issues**
4. **Evaluate Resources**
5. **Plan Intervention**
6. **Encourage Action**
7. **Instill Hope**
8. **Environmental Intervention**
9. **Follow Up**

The Church's Role (Rom 12:15, Isa 61:1-5)

- **Be a listening ear**
- **Be a comforting, encouraging (not exhorting voice)**
- **Jesus – Master Counsellor**
- **Follow up**

Walk with them until they are strong enough to walk again

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive Him, because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him. But you do, because He lives with you now and later will be in you.

John 14 v 16:17

Sources

- www.apa.org (American Psychological Association)
- www.sidran.org
- www.helpguide.org
- www.nctsn.org (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- www.psychology.org.au
- www.counselling.org
