

Proposal for quality standards for psychological interventions in disaster and crisis

Background

In these last years there has been scientific discussion about the benefits of psychosocial work both before and after disasters. The importance of adopting a disaster risk management perspective to include both the reduction of social and structural vulnerabilities and the awareness of hazards in communities and to be prepared for the delivery of post-crisis/disaster services is the key to modern disaster management approaches. For pre-disaster risk mitigation education programs to increase awareness of hazards and to empower community members with skills for reducing their vulnerabilities are the key issues.

For post-crisis/disaster period especially psychological debriefing has got many critical comments on its effects. The evaluation of these critical studies shows the poor knowledge on the psychological debriefing and on the total psychosocial work after disaster. It leads to focus on quality of the psychological work among disaster victims, not on the ineffectiveness of the methods used.

The psychological work with victims of disasters sets a special need for knowledge, skills and personality. The quality of the psychological work on the field of disasters and crisis is especially important, because the victims are in a vulnerably state. This and the conditions of the work mean that the work is very difficult. That is the reason why it is important to decide commonly about the quality standards for psychological interventions in disasters and crisis.

The fields of speciality

Five special fields can be separated in the psychology of disasters and crisis. These fields need different knowledge and different expertise, but they are connected with each other and support each other. These fields are:

- 1) Developing community awareness of risks and empowering community members/NGO's with skills in identification of risks and disaster risk mitigation
- 2) Educational work before disasters
- 3) Early intervention in disasters and crisis
- 4) Leading and planning the psychosocial support and services in major disaster
- 5) Psychosocial support also to persons with specific vulnerabilities, for example children, impaired & old people, tourists and immigrants.
- 6) How to intervene in Acute Stress Disorder, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma therapy; how to listen for and facilitate empowerment and growth

In planning the quality standards all these fields should be taken into account.

Personality, skill and knowledge requirements in working in the field of disaster, crisis and trauma psychology

The work with victims of disaster provides special personality requirements. All persons, not even all psychologists, physicians or other professionals are suitable to this work. The requirements are:

- good stress tolerance (stress management skills /(self)knowledge of own limits)
- good tolerance to be an object to strong emotions
- special talents on holding and storing of emotions (if with personal trauma history then having successfully dealt with it)
- focus in action
- good leadership and ability to organise action
- good interaction skills (empathy skills)

It is very recommendable that people trained in D&C practice their knowledge on "little" daily interventions, like in emergency teams that go out after a car accident, a suicide or crisis teams working with victims of these disasters. By this way, they are able to acquire a lot of experience. If not, they risk to lose rapidly their acquired knowledge as big disasters happen rarely. In-service training once in every year is recommended to freshen up both practical skills and also knowledge.

Four working levels of psychosocial support and services and quality standards for each level

Working on all levels of psychosocial support and services provides special training. Three various kinds of levels of training and working can be differed.

1) Psychological first aid

The first level of training is basic knowledge of traumatic crisis and psychosocial support. This training should be included in basic training of all those professionals and members of NGO's , who work with victims of disasters in their work. These professionals are police officers, rescue workers, nurses, physicians, social workers, church workers, journalists etc. Also voluntaries used in psychosocial support should have this level of training.

Knowledge and theoretical background needed in this level

Mastering in both adults and children

- the criteria of traumatic events and critical incidences
- the broad concept of defining psychological victims
- psychological reactions and process in traumatic crisis and disasters
 - crisis theory and phases of traumatic crisis
 - traumatic stress and process of stress
 - death and grief
- aims and principles of early interventions
- psychological intervention methods in early interventions
 - psychological support, psychosocial first aid

Some knowledge of

- the disorders in the process
 - dissociation
 - developing psychic trauma

- posttraumatic disorder
- long term reactions after disaster
- professional intervention methods
 - psychological defusing
 - psychological debriefing
 - long term collective support and activation of the psychological working through process
 - screening those in need of crisis or trauma therapy
 - follow up of the effects of interventions
 - multicultural aspects (f.ex. religious beliefs and rituals) / ethics
 - knowledge of secondary victimization

stress management skills /(self)knowledge of own limits

knowledge of the emergency plans and intervening units involved

2) Multiprofessional psychosocial support and services

Those professional, who work with the victims of disasters and critical incidences doing acute crisis work, leading debriefing sessions and using traumatic management methods. This work is usually organised in multiprofessional way. This work calls for deeper special knowledge and skills.

Knowledge, theoretical backgrounds and skills needed in this level

Mastering of all that is needed in the first level and

- the disorders in the process
 - dissociation
 - developing psychic trauma
 - posttraumatic disorder / acute stress disorder
- long term reactions after disaster
- psychological debriefing
- long term collective support and activation of the psychological working through process
- screening those in need of crisis or trauma therapy
- follow up of the effects of interventions

Some knowledge of Post trauma therapy

- social and cultural factors and trauma
- adaptation to trauma memory and its mechanism and process
- development of psychological trauma
- diagnosing psychological trauma
- principles of trauma therapy
- special trauma therapeutic intervention methods
 - trauma seminar
 - EMDR
 - CBT
 - NLP
 - Hypnosis
 - Cognitive and behaviour therapies
 - Etc.

On this level also some abilities and skills are needed. These are:

- some evaluation and diagnostic of both traumatic events and reactions in individual
- choosing the right method in right time
- the methods of early intervention
- linking post-traumatic situations with Public or National Mental Health Services or others
- giving psychological support to workers, different services and agents after post-traumatic situations
- group dynamics
- the leading of the psychological process both individually and in group
- communication with media
 - multicultural aspects (f.ex. religious beliefs) / ethics
 - knowledge of secondary / third victimization

stress management skills /(self)knowledge of own limits

knowledge of the emergency plans an intervening units involved

management – co-ordinating skills

3) Special expertise in crisis, trauma and disaster psychology

This training is needed in further developing the field, in training of others and supervision. This level of training includes all level one and two and also mastering of:

- Education and communication (knowledge of social, political and media impact / legal & financial aspects)
 - mastering of
 - theory and methods of teaching
 - communication theories and method of working with media
 - disaster management – co-ordinating skills
 - deep knowledge of the emergency plans and intervening units involved / the follow-up structures ; Good basic knowledge of disaster management system and processes
- Post trauma therapy
 - mastering of
 - social and cultural factors and trauma
 - multicultural aspects (f.ex. religious beliefs) / ethics
 - knowledge of secondary / third victimization
 - adaptation to trauma memory and its mechanism and process
 - development of psychological trauma
 - diagnosing psychological trauma
 - principles of trauma therapy
 - special trauma therapeutic intervention methods
 - trauma seminar
 - EMDR
 - CBT
 - NLP
 - Hypnosis

- Cognitive and behaviour therapies
- Etc.
- Abilities and skills
 - Mastering of all mentioned above and also
 - evaluation and diagnostic of both traumatic events and reactions in individual
 - leading and planning psychosocial support and services in major disasters / ensure the planing of regular training exercises
 - teaching and communication with media and with other stakeholders such as the NGO's.
 - trauma therapy methods

-stress management skills /(self)knowledge of own limits

- 4) Special expertise in disaster risk mitigation and preparedness methods for the public and professionals (psychiatrists , psychologists and social workers)

This training is necessary for training community members, both adults and children in the concepts of risk mitigation (i.e; awareness of hazards and vulnerabilities) and methods of reducing risks and being prepared .

This level of training needs the mastering of:

- risk assessment, including hazards and vulnerabilities
- disaster management system in a particular country and all the institutions involved
- communicating and building alliances with various stakeholders, such as various neighbourhood groups, NGO's, Schools and the media
- interactive participatory training methods
- methods to facilitate collaboration and to facilitate ownership by local communities
- Planning for the training of professionals in the three area listed above (1-3)
- Capacity and vulnerability assessment
- Abilities and skills
 - o mastering all mentioned above
- conducting risk analysis, in a multidisciplinary team, especially focussing on special vulnerable groups (such as the women, elderly, disabled, children)
- Planning of regular training exercises for psychosocial capacity building at the local level given to NGO's; neighbourhood groups.

A special task is the leading and planning of psychosocial support and services in greater disasters and catastrophes. This provides both a special abilities and skills, certain kind of personality and high standard of theoretical and professional knowledge both on crisis reactions and process and intervention methods as well as on risk mitigation and preparedness. It cloud be defined as forth level of disaster work with extra qualification needs.