

The Compassionate Reach International Approach: Initiating Post Traumatic Growth among Elementary School Teachers of Dulag North District after Super Typhoon Haiyan

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Abstract: Teachers as vital instruments for rehabilitation have to be equipped with approaches as students seek recuperation in schools after a disaster. When Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) devastated Eastern Visayas, teachers became vulnerable to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Compassionate Reach International's (CRI), an American faith-based organization; responded to elementary schools training 117 teachers from 22 elementary schools of Dulag North District to become psychological first aiders to their students and among themselves, exposing to Critical Incident Stress Management modules. Using deductive content analysis, pre-intervention interviews showed manifestations of physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual problems among respondents. After 2-3 days of exposure, interviews manifested increased self-efficacy, self-esteem, ease, patience, improved relationship with others and deeper faith in God. CRI provided tools such as art materials, punching balloons, board-simulations and introduced techniques on ventilation and validation, healthy grieving, breathing, relaxation, role plays, and games.

Keywords: psychosocial first aid, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), posttraumatic growth, stress debriefing, Haiyan

Background

When Yolanda (Haiyan) devastated Eastern Visayas and the rest of the Philippines, it brought forth immense destruction wiping anything along its path. With a sustained wind of 315km/hr, Yolanda was considered as the strongest typhoon recorded at landfall (NDRRMC, 2014) and generated storm surges reaching 5.2 meters to the height of a two-story building (The Daily Telegraph, 2013). It was the strongest and the deadliest tropical cyclones ever recorded in modern history (BBC, 2013) killing at least 6,300 individuals (NDRRMC, 2014). Haiyan was also the strongest storm recorded at landfall, and the second-strongest tropical cyclone ever recorded in terms of one-minute sustained wind speed (JTWC, 2013). Reported damages were 21,833,622,975.09 in agriculture; 9,584,596,305.69 in infrastructure; 55,110,825,740.69 social services and 3,069,023,613.41 in cross-sectoral services (NDRRMC, 2014). The International response was pouring, summing to \$865 Million that included all contribution cash, in-kind, bilateral, and multilateral during the emergency phase (UNOCHA, 2015). In the education sector 11,919 schools servicing 4.4 million students were affected and vulnerable to trauma and stress (ChildFund, 2013). On the other hand, at least 183,976 pre-school and school-aged children have been displaced that need psychosocial support as well as their parents, and educators. Psychosocial need support for children, parents, and educators were the least services available during the emergency phase (ChildFund, 2013).

Children exposed to a high magnitude of natural disaster had sufficient symptoms to establish a classification of a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) syndrome (Shannon et al., 1994). This study was followed up by a second phase emphasizing PTSD symptoms was strongly related to children's exposure to the severity of the disaster, the degree of home damage sustained, and continued displacement (Lonigan et al., 1994). Interventions such as psychological first aid provided guidance for practitioners in responding to immediate mental health needs of children, adults, and families who have recently experienced disaster (Vernberg et al., 2008) and eventually lead to posttraumatic growth. This was associated with the experience of positive change that occurred as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It is manifested in a variety of ways, including an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

As psychosocial interventions were least services available, teachers as classroom councilors could be of great help. In a study of Wolmer et al., (2011) among Israeli students who experienced rocket attacks, a teacher-based preventive intervention was implemented during Operation Cast Lead, compared with a non-intervention but exposed control group. Results showed that intervention group displayed significant lower symptoms of posttraumatic manifestations and stress/mood than the control group with 57% more detected cases of PTSD (Wolmer et al., 2011). In time of disasters it could be very helpful if our teachers are equipped and trained to handle crises. In a study of Gagliardi et al (1994) to public school teachers in Arkansas showed potentially effective first-response component during disasters and isolated emergencies in the school environment. Most of the public-school teachers are deficient in both training and knowledge of emergency care and basic life support modalities (Gagliardi et al., 1994). This study could also be true or, even worse in the Philippine setting. Furthermore, Wolmer et al (2005) verified child survivors of a catastrophic earthquake in Turkey manifested that early post-disaster intervention addressing children and their educational milieu

resulted with significant symptomatic PTSD reduction, allowing the mobilization of adaptive coping, thereby enhancing their overall functioning as observed in school (Gagliardi et al., 1994).

Compassionate Reach International (CRI) is an American volunteer organization training psychosocial and spiritual care, helping volunteers to acquire skills and tools necessary to aid impacted individuals to attain posttraumatic growth after disaster (Mitchell & Everly 1986). In the Philippines, CRI worked with Mercy in Action, giving free midwifery, maternal-child care, and trauma center as well as providing chaplaincy support to midwives, doctors, nurses, and paramedics, in Dulag, Leyte, Philippines. In the desire to broaden its ministry, they extended services to elementary schools, training teachers to become psychological first aiders to their students and among themselves as they too are victims (Mitchell & Everly 1986).

Materials and Methods

The intervention program was called Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), a broad collection of support services that can be selected and applied to assist people who were experiencing a strong reaction to a traumatic event (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Consents were secured from the authorities of the Department of Education and from the respondents themselves. Those who were willing, were only included in the intervention. They were managed by trained professional who were practitioners in handling mental crisis headed by Chaplain Jamie Grubb.

A deductive content analysis was utilized in the evaluation for the thematic clusters (Braun & Clarke, 2006 & Carlozzi et al., 2018) to highlight attributes in the narratives before and after the intervention. Exposing to CISM modules; home visitations, one-on-one and group interviews were the strategies employed in the convenience and availability of respondents. Since CRI was a faith-based organization, respondents were also exposed to prayers, reflections, focus-group discussions and home visitations. Techniques used were ventilation and validation, healthy grieving, breathing, and relaxation. Activities such as art therapy, games/play, punching balloons and simulated board games were also utilized. This intervention aimed to expose teachers to psychological first aid modalities and adapt methods and techniques to handle children in crises and among themselves.

Results

Respondents were composed of 117 elementary teachers from 22 community schools of Dulag North District, Leyte Division, Philippines. Major thematic attributes included: physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual. Sub-themes were also identified in each major theme to give details on the thematic clusters.

For the physical, sub- themes included: fatigue, weakness, increased physical pain, headaches, elevated blood pressure and muscle tremors. For the emotional, sub-themes included: fear, shock, anxiety, anger, agitation, confusion and self- blame. For the cognitive, sub-themes included: impaired decision making, memory impairment, uncertainty and lack of concentration. For the behavioral, sub-themes included: inability to rest, loss of patience, pacing, loss of enjoyment in previously enjoyed activities, hyper-arousal and hyper-vigilance. For the spiritual, sub-themes included: questioning the goodness of God, withdraw from church, spiritual emptiness, theological questions and fear of death. After the exposure with the intervention, interviews with the respondents manifested thematic clusters: ease; for the physical, increased self-esteem and patience; for the emotional, increased self-efficacy; for the cognitive and improved relationship with others and faith in God; for the spiritual. The average exposure to the intervention was 2-3 days depending on the manifested outcomes of the participants. These themes were pre-identified by the researchers and the sub-themes were emergent from the narratives both observable and implied in the interviews.

In the Philippine educational setting, an elementary school teacher facilitates 35- 40 students per class who need a psychosocial intervention after Super Typhoon Yolanda (ChildFund, 2013). Since teachers are not trained to handle such crises, training teachers to become psychosocial workers will be very helpful (Gagliardi et al., 1994; Wolmer, 2011; Wolmer et al., 2005). After witnessing the destruction and death (BBC, 2013; JTWC, 2013; NDRRMC, 2014; The Daily Telegraph, 2013), children may develop PTSD (Lonigan et al., 1994; Shannon et al., 1994) and will seek recuperation in schools as they consider their teachers as second parents. Nonetheless, when disaster struck a place such as typhoons, everybody is affected including teachers. Subjecting them to psychosocial first aid will be beneficial to attain posttraumatic growth and equip them in handling crises. Exposing teachers to training such as CISM and spiritual and emotional care had increased their self- esteem, self- efficacy, ease, patience, improved relationship with others and deeper faith in God. These are positive experiences leading to changes as a result of a struggle after life crises (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Hence, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, and a richer existential and spiritual life are manifestations of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Since teachers are trained to different modalities, they could adapt methods and techniques in the module for them to become psychosocial first aiders to their students and among themselves.

Conclusion

Teachers are exposed to PTSD after disasters manifesting in physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual. Psychosocial first aid should be given to them so that they may attain posttraumatic growth. Exposing to different modalities will equip them to become psychosocial first aiders to their students and among themselves.

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