Are You Ready?  
Behavioral Health and Mass Casualty Events

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Definitions

• Mass Casualty – an incident where more deaths or injuries occur than can be handled by local resources.
  • Mass Violent Crimes may be under federal or state jurisdiction, but acts of terrorism are always federal crimes.
• Trauma – an event that overwhelms the individual’s traditional coping mechanism.

Key Concepts of Disasters

• No one who experiences a disaster is untouched by it.
• Disasters and mass casualty events involving trauma and loss affect both the individual and the community.
Key Concepts of Disasters

• Most survivors respond to active, genuine interest and concern. However, some will reject services of all kinds.

• Law enforcement procedures, medical examiner’s protocols, disaster relief requirements, and criminal justice proceedings often confuse and distress survivors.

Practical Considerations

• Locations
  ▫ Victims and Families
  ▫ Command Center
  ▫ Media

• Communication
  ▫ Victims and Families (Immediate and Extended)
  ▫ Media and Community
  ▫ Agencies

• Immediate Needs
  ▫ Medical Treatment, Financial Assistance, Transportation, Food, Identification, Shelter

Coordination and Prioritization

• Law Enforcement Requirements
  ▫ Preserve Evidence
  ▫ Investigate

• Victims/Families
  ▫ Counseling, Spiritual Needs
  ▫ Notifications

• Other Agencies
  ▫ Red Cross, Animal Response Teams/Humane Society, Etc.
  ▫ Government Agencies

• Media
Population Exposure Model

A: Community victims killed and seriously injured
   Bereaved family members, loved ones, close friends
B: Community victims exposed to the incident and disaster scene, but not
   injured
C: Bereaved extended family members and friends
   Residents in disaster zone whose homes were destroyed
   First responders, law enforcement, rescue and recovery workers
   Medical examiner’s office staff
   Service providers immediately involved with bereaved families, obtaining
   information for body identification and death notification
D: Mental health and crime victim assistance providers
   Clergy, chaplains
   Emergency health care providers
   Government officials
   Members of the media
E: Groups that identify with the target victim groups
   Businesses with financial impacts
   Community at large

Who Is Impacted?

- Individual
- Community
  - including identity
- Indirect Exposure
  - vicarious exposure
- Responders

Reactions

- Physical
- Behavioral
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Spiritual
General Adaptation Syndrome

Mass Violent Victimization

**Causation:**
- Include evil human intent, deliberate sociopolitical act, human cruelty, revenge, hate or bias against a group, mental illness versus an act of nature.

**Appraisal of the event:**
- Event seems incomprehensible, senseless.
- Some view as uncontrollable and unpredictable, others view as preventable.
- Social order has been violated versus expectations defined by the disaster.
Mass Violent Victimization

Subjective experience:
- Victims are suddenly caught unaware in a dangerous, life-threatening situation. May experience terror, fear, horror, helplessness, and sense of betrayal and violation.
- Resulting distrust, fear of people may cause withdrawal and isolation.
- Outrage, blaming the individual or group responsible, desire for revenge, and demand for justice are common.
- Versus separation, evacuation, loss, and anger at agencies that “should” have provided protection or relief.

Mass Violent Victimization

World View:
- Assumptions about humanity are shattered: individuals no longer feel that the world is secure, just, and orderly.
- Survivors confronted with the reality that evil things can happen to good people.
- People lose their illusion of invulnerability: anyone can be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mass Violent Victimization

Stigmatization:
- Some victims may come to feel humiliation, responsible for others’ deaths, survivor guilt, self-blame, and unworthy of assistance.
- The larger community may distance themselves to avoid confronting the idea that crime victimization can happen to anyone.
- Well-meaning loved ones may urge victims to “move on”, causing feelings of rejection and that it is wrong to continue to suffer.
- Versus disproportionate impact on those with fewer economic resources.
Mass Violent Victimization

**Media:**
- Media shows more interest in events of greater horror and psychological impact.
- Excessive and repeated media exposure puts people at risk for secondary traumatization.
- Risk of violations of privacy.
  Versus short-term media interest.

Mass Violent Victimization

**Secondary injury:**
- Victims’ needs may conflict with necessary steps in the criminal justice process.
- Steps required to obtain crime victim compensation and benefits can seem confusing and frustrating, triggering feelings of helplessness.
- Victims may feel that the remedy or punishment is inadequate in comparison to the crime and their losses.
  Versus what is seen as complicated, inefficient, and impersonal response that doesn’t “make whole” the person.

Risk Factors

- It is different from responding to a single death.
- Nature of the event – size, scope, duration, human-caused, probability of recurrence, politics, or exposure/proximity.
- Individual factors – experience, prior trauma history, circumstances (e.g., school shooting), responder role, handling personal effects, support system.
- Senses – each sense important, gross mutilation, no visible damage, child victims.
Response Considerations

- What priorities guide the response?
- Immediate, emergent response focusing on safety and security.
- Dealing with convergence of others, including families.
- Who is responsible for implementing the response? Is there a plan?

Response Considerations

For example, a Family Assistance Center -

- Consider privacy, protection from further trauma, support.
- Information is highly powerful but legal aspects of the event may require it to be measured.

Organizational Preparedness

- Clear chain of command.
- Plan for staffing levels, schedules, breaks (watch exposure).
- Available and accessible supervisors.
- Briefings.
- Promote a culture of tolerance.
- Team support – watch and care for each other.
- Assess workers’ stress regularly.
- Educate about the signs and symptoms of stress and positive coping strategies.
Personal Resilience

- Active coping style – problem-solving and managing emotions that accompany stress; learning to face fears.
- Physical exercise – engaging in physical activity to improve mood and health.
- Positive outlook – using cognitive-behavioral strategies to enhance optimism and decrease pessimism; embracing humor.

Personal Resilience

- Moral compass – developing and living by meaningful principles; putting them into action.
- Social Support – developing and nurturing friendships; seeking resilient role models and learning from them.
- Cognitive flexibility – finding good in adverse situations; remaining flexible in one’s approach to solving problems.

Resources

LOCAL:
- Community Mental Health Agencies
- Law Enforcement Agencies
- District or County Attorney’s Offices
- Faith Based Services
- American Red Cross
- Hospital Social Workers
- Other agencies and local resources will need to be developed over time
Resources

STATE:
• Kansas Attorney General’s Office—publication for statewide resources
  http://ag.ks.gov/docs/publications/victims-services-resource-directory
• Crime Victim Compensation
  http://ag.ks.gov/victim-services/victim-compensation
• Kansas Organization for Victim Assistance (KOVA)
  http://www.kovakansas.org/resources
• Numerous referrals available through the above groups

Resources - FEDERAL:
• Responding to Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence Crimes

• Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program
  http://www.ovc.gov/pdftxt/AEAP_Brochure.pdf
  The Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program provides federal funds to support crisis response, consequence management, criminal justice support, crime victim compensation, and training and technical assistance during the aftermath of an incident of terrorism and mass violence (domestic and international).

Resources - FEDERAL:
• Victim Assistance Rapid Deployment Teams (VARDT):
  The FBI’s VARDT provides guidance to state, local, tribal, and campus law enforcement partners assisting with establishing an effective response to victims and families as well as providing on the ground support for victims and families following acts of terrorism, criminal transportation disasters, hostage situations, mass casualty crimes, and natural disasters. The teams consist of highly trained Victim Specialists to include mental health clinicians, medical social workers, and a forensic operations manager. Special funds for assisting victims of terrorism and mass casualty crimes with emergency needs are available.
Contact Information

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