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Bereavement and Disasters: Clinical Interventions

Disasters are a universal phenomenon that affect individuals, families and communities. They can be due to political problems, wars, epidemic diseases, industrial problems, social turmoil, and other causes. Among their consequences, there are losses of lives and possessions, social and economic changes. Those affected by a disaster go through a process of grief and reconstruction of the assumptive world. As disasters occur in different situations, with the most varied consequences, actions need to be initiated previously in order to empower communities in primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

A disaster facilitates the development of psychological trauma, with risk factors that may impact the life of the individual, depending on vulnerability to external factors: type, duration and severity. Significant loss of assets, existence of systems of social and psychological support, subsequent judicial process play a role in the scenario. They also weigh individual factors such as coping capacity, previous traumatic events, health condition, perception and interpretation of the disaster, low socioeconomic level.

Grief and bereavement are also in the focus of attention in disasters and require assessment to provide appropriate intervention. Grief triggered by disasters has specific consequences, based on their nature, with defined contours and it points out the need for psychosocial support to those affected, not only in the initial moments. Visiting the disaster site, receiving correct information, participating in celebrations are therapeutic actions among those that approach traditional ones, always remembering that a new setting is built for each disaster.

Conventional therapeutic techniques are less adequate than crisis intervention methods, which seek to identify immediate problems and needs, for the development of effective coping strategies. This approach also applies to loss and grief, aiming to empower the affected population and to promote adaptation, to strengthen the use of local resources beyond pre-disaster conditions and to focus on local and sustainable solutions. It is preferable to carry out community-based interventions, rather than individual follow-ups, to enable more efficient and effective use of resources, improve the relationship between services provided and local resources, and reduce the stigma associated with psychosocial care. It seeks to engage and sensitize local leaders and peers to understand the benefits and values of psychosocial activities for their populations/communities, with the expectation that they feel included and seek resources to cope with their losses.

In this workshop we will present and discuss possibilities of intervention with bereaved individuals and communities following disasters, also taking into consideration the necessary measures for self-care of the professional or volunteer.



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