

The Mental Health Consequences of the WTC Attacks

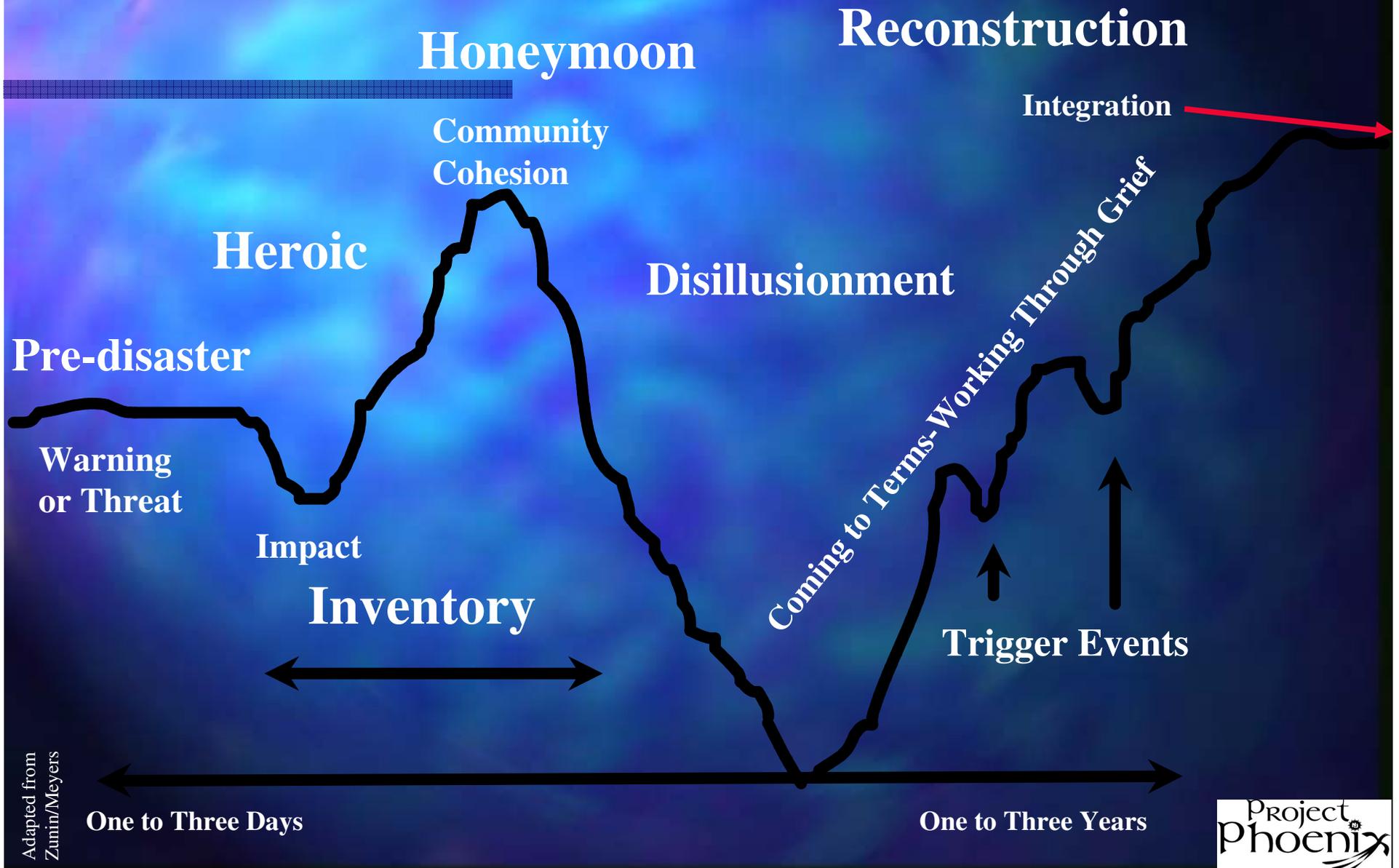


The NJ Division of
Mental Health Services

Types of Traumatic Events

- Natural Disasters
- Technological Disasters
- Disasters of Human Intention
- Other Interpersonal Violence
- Sudden Traumatic Loss
- Serious Medical Illness

Typical Phases of a Disaster



Adapted from
Zumin/Meyers

Project
Phoenix

What is Traumatic Stress/Disaster Stress?

- “Traumatic stress refers to the emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological experiences of individuals who are exposed to, or who witness, events that overwhelm their coping and problem solving abilities”

(Lerner & Shelton, 2001)

What is Traumatic Stress/Disaster Stress?

- “Traumatic stress disables people, causes disease, precipitates mental disorders, leads to substance abuse, and destroys relationships and families. Additionally, traumatic stress reactions may lead to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

(Lerner & Shelton, 2001)

Typical Response Patterns

- Physical

- Shock symptoms
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Headaches
- Muscle weakness
- Elevated vital signs

- Affective

- Depressed, anxious
- Numbing
- Constricted affect
- Guilt, shame, fear
- Intolerance of fear response
- Global pessimism

- Cognitive

- Distractibility
- Duration/Sequence distortion
- Declining school work
- Recurrent intrusive recollections
- Flashbacks, Nightmares

- Behavioral

- Clinging, isolation
- Thrill seeking, counterphobic beh.
- Re-enactments of the trauma
- Increased substance abuse
- Hypervigilance
- Elevated startle reflex

Potential Long-Term Effects

- Free-floating anxiety and hypervigilance
- Underlying anger and resentment
- Uncertainty about the future
- Prolonged mourning/inability to resolve losses
- Diminished capacity for problem solving
- Isolation, depression, hopelessness
- Health problems
- Significant lifestyle changes

Factors Influencing Response to Trauma

Pre-trauma Factors

- Multiple traumatic exposures
- History of mental illness
- Low Social Economic Status (SES)
- Intensity and Duration of Traumatic Exposure
- Age

Post-trauma Factors

- On-going support
- Opportunity to share their story
- Sense of closure
- Media exposure
- Substance Abuse
- Re-exposure or re-victimization

Interventions Are...

- Therapeutic
- Psychological First Aid
- A preventative measure
- Psycho-educational
- Supported by empirical evidence

Interventions Are *Not*...

- Psychotherapy
- To alleviate immediate pain
- A critique of the response to the disaster
- Necessarily one-time sessions

The FEMA Crisis Counseling Model

- Helps people understand what they are experiencing
- Helps people explore ways to cope
- Can prevent longer-term mental health problems by returning people to pre-disaster levels of functioning more quickly
- Normalizes people's reactions
- Validates and affirms people's reactions
- Offers practical assistance

The Purpose of Crisis Counseling

- Normalize feelings and reactions
- Help define and prioritize needs
- Help design strategies for addressing needs
- Helping to adapt coping skills
- Preventing future mental health issues

The Main Goal:

*Empowerment- countering feelings
of fear and helplessness*

Exert care not to foster dependency!

Service Delivery Methods

- Outreach
- Consultation & Training
- Individual, group and public education
- Hot Lines
- Bi-lingual and Bi-cultural staff

Lessons Learned

- Symbols, rituals and spirituality are important in coping and healing process
- People have an enormous capacity to heal through natural support systems-don't get in the way
- We need to overcome the stigma that surround mental health services
- We need to trust in the resilience of the human spirit!

Techniques for Managing Stress and Anxiety

- Limit exposure to graphic news stories
- Get accurate, timely information from credible sources
- Educate victims about the chemical or biological hazard
- Get back to routine as soon as possible
- Stay busy, mentally and physically
- Communicate with friends, supporters and family
- Use spirituality, and personal beliefs
- Keep a sense of humor
- Express feelings through writing, poetry, art, etc.
- Talk and share feelings with others

For more information

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