New Strategies for Reducing Responder Risk: From Pre-Deployment Screening to Post-Deployment Support

American Red Cross
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Leadership is Critical
- Leaders must recognize responder risks and value efforts to reduce those risks

The False Disaster Dichotomy
- The goal of responder care is currently viewed within a false dichotomy: Either designate limited time and resources to serve disaster survivors…or provide support to responders.
Reframe Responder Support Strategies

- Translate “either/or” into a sequence that includes both
- We support our responders first, so they can then provide services to clients
- Words matter: “force health protection” vs. “self care”

Responder Support = Mission Success

- Sometimes slowing down can get us there faster
  - Spending minutes now to more carefully screen and assign responders can save hours and days later
- Healthier responders = improved client services
  - True in more traditional business (disaster research needed)

Disaster Work is Different

- It’s not easy being... a disaster responder
- Requires strategies different than business-as-usual
- Chaotic response environments influence worker behavior
- Screening and assignment tasks become critical
Disaster Work is Different (cont.)
- Does a former drill sergeant make a terrible therapist?
- Responder needs pale in comparison to client devastation
- Responder care falls off the work priority list

The Way Forward

Deployment Cycle
- Work-related risk factors –
  - Difficult living and working conditions
  - May lead to burnout and/or depression
- Trauma-related risk factors –
  - Exposure to serious or fatal injuries or vast community devastation
  - Can lead to compassion fatigue
Work-Related Risk Factors: Pre-Deployment
- Urgency to leave within 24 hours
- Notifying work and family
- Making travel arrangements
- Arranging for pet care
- Making financial arrangements
- Paperwork
- Worries about one’s own home
- Anticipation of the unknowns

Work-Related Risk Factors: During Deployment
- Hurry up and wait
- Paperwork
- Long hours
- Confusion and miscommunication
- Difficulties with coworkers
- Unfamiliar settings
- Environmental stressors
- Staff shelters
- Lack of appreciation
- Discouragement about mission
- Unclear prioritization

Work-Related Risk Factors: Post-Deployment
- Waiting to out-process
- Bureaucratic hassles and delays
- Paperwork
- Long travel times
- Saying goodbye to colleagues
- Reintegration with work and family
Trauma-Related Risk Factors: Pre-Deployment

- Previous history of trauma
- Exposure to scenes of disaster through media

Trauma-Related Risk Factors: During Deployment

- Cumulative stories from multiple people
- Ongoing media coverage
- Danger from possible recurring events
- Threat to self due to ongoing disaster
- Scenes of destruction
- Hearing about traumatic loss
- Working with grieving families
- Volunteers whose homes and families were impacted

Trauma-Related Risk Factors: Post-Deployment

- Continuing media coverage
- Return to effects of disaster at home
- Fear of long-term health effects
Principles for Worker Support

- Support across the deployment cycle
- Tools available at both chapter level and on national Disaster Relief Operations (DRO)
- Support always voluntary
- Transitions a typical stress point
- Consultation available to leadership to reduce stressors in environment

Tools

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Readiness-to-Deploy Self-Screening Tool

SAMPLE QUESTION:

Degree of personal support for doing volunteer disaster relief work.

4. Have strong/family and friend support
   Great! Remember these relationships continue to be an important support while on assignment.
   Neutral: Don't feel strongly about my family and friends' support for my deployment.
   Warning: Not enough support needed to improve support for you while on assignment.

5. Have little or no support from family and friends
   Warning: Little or no support from family and friends significantly increases the emotional burden of deployment.

- Developed in collaboration with VA DEMPS
- Will be hosted on their intranet website
- Will be available to all interested VA personnel
- Currently piloted by Greater NY & Atlanta chapters
- Post-deployment survey tracks participation and effectiveness
Coping with Disaster Brochures

On-the-Job Support

- Starts with DRO-specific orientation
- Match worker to assignment
- Psychological First Aid training
- Coordination with Staff Wellness
- Dedicated Staff Mental Health resources
- Force Health Protection strategies

More DMH workers Assigned to Middlesex
1.65 vs .73 risk factors
Rotation of Workers

- Supervisors able to monitor DMH worker exposure to high-risk clients - prioritized days off, rotated assignments
- 2011 Hurricane Irene: DMH workers assigned to counties with higher risk ratios
- 2008 Hurricane Ike: 2,916 unaffected residents return to Galveston too early and were sheltered near impact zone
- 2011 tornadoes town w/ no damage/injuries (near miss)

Post-Deployment Support

On the job
- Performance evaluations
- Mentoring
- Additional training
- Exit interviews

At home chapter
- Post-deployment support contact
- Post-deployment stress questionnaire
- NHQ Post-deployment support

Wrap-Up

- DMH activity began in 1992 to provide support to disaster response workers
- At least half of our job is to make sure that other disaster responders are able to do their jobs
- Tools and materials are available to other organizations who might benefit from them
Thanks To You!

For More Information

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