
Mental Health Research and Screening Methodologies

Howard J. Osofsky, M.D., Ph.D.

Department of Psychiatry

Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

Institute of Medicine Conference, New Orleans

June 23, 2010

Research Designs

- Based on studies following natural and technological disasters
- Based on data obtained in impacted parishes in Louisiana since Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav
- Based on collaboration with local stakeholders, relationships and trust of the LSUHSC trauma team
- Research is accompanied by reports to stakeholders and supportive interventions
- Research and interventions are designed to meet mental health needs and build resilience

Community Recovery Prior to the Deepwater Horizon Event

- Already vulnerable population
- Existing relationships in impacted parishes based on previous work
- Issue of cumulative trauma with prior loss and slow recovery
- Importance of training and consultation to support local community resources, responders, and infrastructure

Recovery, Relationships and Research

- One of the most important lessons learned from conducting Hurricane Katrina research is the importance of building relationships and trust with communities of interest
 - Improves culturally competent research
 - Decreases bias
 - Improves retention rates
 - Assists community buy in and the importance of learning about experiences

Qualitative Methodologies

- Comprehensive and in depth data gathered by qualitative methodologies (i.e. focus groups and case studies)
 - are an excellent way to personalize the researcher and begin relationship building
 - gather initial data and information used to plan larger quantitative studies
 - also prove useful in updating screenings and assessments overtime to ensure relevant material which coincides to specific recovery phases

Quantitative Methodologies

- Wealth of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies in impacted areas in the past 5 years
- Build on existing research activities, which will help to address many of the flaws in disaster research (i.e. lack of pre-existing data and control groups)
- Given the significant long term mental health consequences demonstrated by post-Valdez research findings, longitudinal methods should be given priority—especially for those directly effected (i.e. purposive sampling of employees of the fishing and oil industry)
- Adult, child/adolescent, family and community mental health assessments

Cumulative Trauma

- Psychological effects of the disastrous oil spill for an already vulnerable population supports a critical need for assistance to individuals from these communities.
- Continuation of existing research in areas effected will help to address and study the accumulation of traumas associated with:
 - Hurricane related losses and traumas
 - Hurricane recovery related stressors
 - Additional traumas and losses post hurricane
 - Retraumatization due to Deepwater Horizon Event

Adult Assessments

- Evidence-based needs assessment and mental health evaluation modified from those used following the hurricanes
- Screening includes measures of mental health, substance use, and family conflict
- Screening will be available for responders and all families in fishing communities
- Results will be used to guide interventions, services, and resource availability

Child and Adolescent Assessment

- One example of ongoing screenings is the adaptation of the LSUHSC and NCTSN mental health screening currently in its 5th year
- LSUHSC has screened over 23,000 children for post traumatic stress and depressive symptoms and reports are prepared for schools to guide interventions and services
- As part of the relationship building LSUHSC is currently working with NCTSN and stakeholders in impacted parishes including local officials, to adapt the child mental health screening assessments to include questions regarding the recent oil spill

Resilience

- Our longitudinal studies assess resilience in children following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Gustav
- Most children demonstrate normal patterns during response and recovery
- Proposed studies will focus on building resilience following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
- Additional psychoeducational interventions that are strength based will be implemented and assessed