

Psychosocial Impacts of Disasters

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Abstract

The world population today is touching 7.6 billion; [1]. It concludes the fully developed, developing and under developed countries. Those which have made significant development and had the little awareness about the disasters have surfeited lesser impacts of disasters than those which are still developing or under developed. Actually, the disasters also vary with respect to their nature and extent with regards to the losses these cause, to the infrastructure, population and the area covered. The related severity is also measured in the same context irrespective, the disaster was manmade or natural. Well familiar disasters at the global level had been the Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004), Earth Quake-EQ Pakistan (2005), US Katrina (2005), Myanmar Cyclone Nargis (2008), Pakistan's Flood (2010), North American EQ Haiti (2010), most recently The Indian Ocean Tsunami Nelofer (2014) and very importantly the Global War on terror since 2001 till date. Very recently the "School Terrorism" incident of Peshawar, Pakistan on 16th December 2016 has almost shaken the entire world. All such disasters have various vulnerabilities attached to it but worth mentionable are the socioeconomic, geostrategic, politico military, psychosocial and attitudinal vulnerabilities. Each one of it has a vital role to play while finding out its impact. Among all the least preferred but most lethal and disastrous is the psychosocial vulnerability. The study at length is suggestive to discuss and highlight in detail the psychosocial impacts of the disasters while recommending certain measures to mitigate such vulnerabilities. A holistic approach had been used to view the psychosocial impacts of Nowshera, Pakistan Floods (2010) and Muzaffarabad EQ (2005). "School Terrorism" incident of Peshawar, December 2016 on the affected communities settled at Nowshera, Peshawar and surroundings.

Keywords

Disasters, Impacts, Psychosocial, Communities, Vulnerabilities

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1. Introduction

In the annals of global history, it has been the point of serious concern that the disasters had been on the upsurge since last one decade or so at a fast pace. These have not only caused the environmental dilapidation but also the serious disruption to the livelihood and the property. Amongst all this, the most precious thing is the human life which has no substitute for his/her family, friends, relatives and other relational associations. Besides many other impacts associated with the loss of human life in the disasters, the most serious and the one carrying long span are psychosocial impacts which

seldom heal.

Pakistani community had been ignorant about the disasters and their impacts, what to talk of only psychosocial impacts, it was only Hyogo Frame Work for Action (2005) that we became aware of the impacts of the disasters and also getting the lesson from the EQ 2005 and the Floods 2010.

Psychosocial issues differ from one culture to another, from one society to another and from one country to another and most importantly from one gender to another because the disasters do not discriminate the gender. Imagine the death of a male member in a disaster; the female suffers the burden of economy of whole family alone with all the psychological

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issues attached to it. Similarly the death of a female member creates long impacted psychosocial effects associated with the second marriage and the alcohol addiction of male member. The miseries and the agonies of life that the children suffer are separate and unaccounted.

This paper dilates upon these aspects in totality to produce a noteworthy familiarization about the psychosocial impacts of the disasters.

1.1. Problem Statement

Since the disaster occurs with or without caveat, so blaming anyone is useless that so and so caused the disasters as these just happen. What matters is the mental preparedness at the individual, societal as well as community level initially and then physically in tangible terms to reduce these impacts. Remember that psychosocial preparation leads to physical preparation in order to deal with disasters. Unfortunately, this very aspect is most neglected which needs to be looked into in a manner to realign human mental and physical capabilities before the happening of disasters and regain the momentum post disasters while knitting the psychosocial fabric of the community faster and faster because human life is said to be nothing but “An Agility” both mental and physical.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study focuses at the:-

- i Identification of most vulnerable groups in disasters.
- ii Psychosocial analysis of the impacts of the disasters.
- iii Penalties pertaining to post disaster grief and its remediation.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Post EQ 2005 and Floods 2010 it was revealed that physical, social, and economic considerations had been of much value by raising the organizations like Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority (ERRA) and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) which took all the tangible measures for rehabilitation and recovery of the affected but no significant measures could be taken for their psychosocial build up especially the children who lost their parents, women who lost their men and all those who lost their entire family. In such a situation, psychological as well as the sociocultural counseling becomes inevitable for all those vulnerable groups who are affected by the disasters on one pretext or the other, directly or indirectly.

2. Literature Review

The interface of domestic / biological forces and peripheral

cultural pressures result into social development; [2]. A disaster's reaction is subservient to the destruction experienced during or after its occurrence. It may be tsunami, typhoon, hurricane, flood, earthquake or epidemics in which the deaths seem to be very traumatic initially and loss of house causes the destruction of home and the family too, destruction of school, colleges and the universities break the hope of students and their parents to education, death / loss of pets take away the emotions of love and affection. It means the destruction of something that could be seen. All such things impact psychosocially to a miserable extent to the people in a community. Moreover, the degree of psychosocial impact is worsened by the print or electronic media reports; [3].

Human emotional unsteadiness is somehow related to the psychosocial tribulations as well because the crisis of life starts from here. The confronting problems are financial burdens and worries, problems related to the widowhood, disadvantages of retirement, improper family budgeting and the poor health leading to disability. These problems collectively attack the sensory neurons thus affecting the human adaptability to the changed scenarios of life. Then it further compounds to the psychosocial compatibility of a person to live and adjust in a society. The start point of negative outcomes of individuals in a society is initiated when he/she resorts to attempt negative techniques to cope with the newly generated psychosocial issues by the disasters just happened; [4].

Another issue of psychosocial problems is the depression which is expressed in the variety of forms associated with the mental disorders ranging from the galaxy of cognitive manifestation to the effective or ineffective physiological boundaries. The array of its symptoms include absence of interests in the surroundings, feeling happiness or being sad in the routine affairs, feeling of getting tired, power loss, feeling of triviality, self remorse feeling, dejectedness, suicide arousal and lack of deliberation potential to think rightly, correctly or positively; [5]. Following percentages will help indicate the jump off of different psychosocial issues before and after the disasters; [6]:-

- i Sever Psychosis, depression, disability and anxiety disorders are raised from 2-3 percent to 3-4 percent.
- ii Moderate / Mild mental disorder carrying depression or anxiety is increased from ten percent to fifteen / twenty present.
- iii Simple stresses without any disorder may suddenly jump from normal to high percentages which usually tend to reduce with time.

3. Study Design and Methodology

The study is basically qualitative in nature using the methodology of different types of interviews and the focus group discussions. Interview types included witting, unwitting, telephonic and one on one interviews with the respondents. A random sampling method of seventy-five respondents had been taken each from Nowshera area and Peshawar city representing all age groups from boyhood to youthhood and parenthood who had been subjected to the disasters trauma of floods, earthquake and terrorism. Separate questionnaires had been developed for each group and their families / friends. The questionnaire measuring the depth of psychosocial impacts of disasters had been adopted from the work of A.V. Robins; L Brickman et'al (1991). Out of one hundred fifty, only one hundred thirty-six expressed their willingness to talk about and discuss regarding their traumatic experience(s) of disasters. The response rate was 90.6 percent.

4. Discussion on Findings & Summary of Results

4.1. Psychosocial Circumstance

Surprisingly, the forty six percent of the respondents had still the psychosocial symptoms present on one pretext or the other stressing their mental ailment and unsteadiness. Students and the young-hood had been more vulnerable than the working and educated class [7]. Old age people had little effect of disasters but more prone to the old age problems. Educated and financially stable class had been emotionally resilient, objective, pragmatic and confident. Psychosocial issues among the flood affected of 2010 floods had matches with varying degrees from low to medium and high. Frequency of distress was high from during the disaster to the end and then from immediately from post disaster stage to the long past disaster i.e. from the tactical level to the strategic level. It has been observed that support of family and friends who lived beyond the impact zone of disasters as well as the NGOs had been quite instrumental in mitigating their psychosocial stresses. In nutshell, time has been found to be the best healer, a natural recourse.

4.2. Psychotherapeutic Difficultie

It has been observed that the degree of emotional attachment with the place or with the relationship is a major hurdle in the psychotherapy of disaster affectees. High involvement increased the time to recover from the psychosocial impacts of the disasters.

4.3. Motivational Psychotherapy

Religious motivation e.g. "Allah is Great", "Allah is Kind", "All ownership is to Allah", "Allah's Will is eternal" and "All praise be The Almighty" had been the common comment to all the distressful questions and the feelings. Returning the religious values and norms had been biggest source of motivational psychotherapy and is the easiest healer [9, 8].

4.4. Age Confined Psychosocial Aspects

4.4.1. Adults

- i. Loss of hard earned property and assets to create severalty feelings.
- ii. Feeling of loneliness, hopelessness and helplessness as others think that older people have lived and enjoyed their life and they have low priority to live and rejoice.
- iii. Very fragile to the health related issues.
- iv. Always have an anxiety of someone who should live with them as they have high fear of death.

4.4.2. Children

- i Highly emotional about the surroundings and take effect ASP.
- ii Demand high ended response from the elders of the community.
- iii Variable age groups among the childhood have different perception about the disaster event e.g. a child (student of kindergarten) was interviewed by the TV anchor person on 16 December 2014 who expressed a terrorist like this:-
- iv TV Anchor Person: Son! Tell us what happened in your school; who sprayed bullets and killed all boys and girls?
- v Boy Child: Masha Allah, a bearded uncle in white dress who sprayed bullets and killed everyone.
- vi Great difficulty to express and understand the psychosocial impacts of disasters.

4.4.3. Females / Girls

- i Feeling of distress is high in girls as compared to boys.
- ii Tend to remain silent under stress and remain indisposed.
- iii Always remain socially distressed. Riding factors include age, feared response, feeling of insecurity and sexual assault, relocation issues, observing veils in Muslim culture mostly.
- iv Sometimes want to speak out emotions but don't pick up the courage to do it.
- v High vulnerability of by virtue of their attitude and

behaviour.

5. Conclusion

Psychosocial issues of disasters are difficult to understand as compared to other issues of the disasters. Especially, the psychosocial issues related to women and children are very peculiar in nature which requires a disaster manager to have a particular knack in handling. Adequate knowledge and community participation is considered essential to handle these issues. Each larger or smaller disaster is required to be investigated in the context of psychosocial management. Every individual with regards to his/her age and gender is needed to be identified, segregated and sorted out for the psychotherapy they need. In such a case, disaster management team requires a psychologist or a psychiatrist to handle the late reported individuals because the vulnerability defined class would definitely require specialized treatment. Formulation and implementation of psychosocial considerations at all tiers of disaster management cycle will help ensure the reduction of these vulnerabilities. One must understand that the emotional reaction normality and its regularization is a gigantic task in the psychosocial care of the survivors of the disasters; [10, 11].

Recommendations

In the backdrop of this research / study as a whole and the discussion above, few of the following pertinent recommendations with inbuilt suggestions are proffered:-

- i Carryout non-structural measures by organizing educational and awareness programmes at all tiers of the society. Remember, it's the only key to reduce psychosocial stresses before and after the disasters.
- ii While carrying out the vulnerability and capacity assessment of the vulnerable communities, their psychosocial vulnerabilities must also be highlighted and accordingly treated with true letter and spirit.

- iii Ensure psychosocial rehabilitation of the community through the revival of various cultural traditions in the main stream.
- iv Promote social cohesion through the implementation of cultural norms and traditions.
- v Never try to hijack the emotional feelings of the all those who had long been subject to disasters.
- vi Always corroborate with the community to understand and estimate the psychosocial vulnerabilities' to trace them accordingly.

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