Facilitating Hope In the Wake of Fear

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Surviving a natural disaster can cause on-going emotional trauma, which can perpetuate for months or even years after the event.
People in impoverished Latin American and Caribbean communities experience excruciating personal and family losses.
Studies reveal that 60% of disaster survivors are affected *emotionally* as a consequence of a catastrophic event.

(Rank 1999)
Longitudinal studies have begun to address the long term effects of disaster experiences, stress symptomatology and coping strategies. (Echterling, 1993)
A Comparative Study of Trauma Survivors

- Nicaragua
- Dominican Republic
- South Florida

Conducted in 2000 to explore the experiences of 750 trauma survivors in Central America, the Caribbean, and South Florida.
Questions Explored

- Beneficial experiences after the tragedy?
- Frustrations in Coping?
- What services should professionals focus upon after the traumatic event?
Findings

• Survivors suffer from emotional distress long after the event.
• On-going feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and despair prevalent.
• Basic mental health services in impoverished countries are scarce.
• Culturally-sensitive intervention models are needed.

The Next Step.....
Facilitating Hope Study
Objectives…

• Develop an intervention that would respect needs of trauma survivors
• Implement and field test the use of positive health techniques
• Develop protocols easily disseminated to survivors by professionals and non-professionals alike
• Integrate techniques of relaxation and debriefing strategies to reduce stress levels

A follow-up study was initiated in August 2001 to develop a culturally-sensitive intervention model to reduce stress, anxiety, fear
Collaborative effort of three University research and training centers

• The Center for Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (CDMHA), College of Public Health

• The Center for Positive Health (CPH), College of Public Health

• The International Institute of Traumatology

School of Social Work

Principal Investigators:
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Consultants:
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Research Design: Quasi-Experimental using non-control groups.

Selected Beneficiaries

Assigned to one of three intervention groups using different intervention strategies

Protocol #1
Relaxation

Protocol #2
Metaphor

Protocol #3
Relax & Metaphor
Intervention Protocol

1. **Relaxation**
2. Methapor/Los Duendes
3. Combination

**OBJECTIVES**

Develop skills that control and prevent emotional arousal, alleviate tension and anxiety, and reduce the physiological reactivity of the sympathetic nervous system.
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OBJECTIVES
Promote catharsis and facilitate three main functions: remembrance, teaching, and motivation. Use of healing metaphors to help survivors normalize their traumatic experience.

Intervention Protocol
1. Relaxation
2. Methapor/Los Duendes
3. Combination
Intervention Protocol

1. Relaxation
2. Methapor/Los Duendes
3. Combination

OBJECTIVES
Facilitate the sharing of traumatic experiences and teach relaxation skills to reduce emotional arousal
In addition, the study explored the following:
- Interventions services provided by mental health professionals (psychiatric residents)
- Intervention services provided by natural community leaders
Training and Implementation of Intervention Protocols

Nicaragua
Community Leaders

1 2 3

Communities
Beneficiaries N=59

Dominican Republic
Psychiatric Residents

1

Community
Beneficiaries N=57

Total Sample N=116
Preliminary Findings

After 4th group session:
- Faces of beneficiaries looked calm, relaxed, happier
- Metaphor provoked sharing of experiences previously guarded
- Many reported relieved from stress symptoms
- Nightmares greatly reduced
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Leadership Skills

Leaders:
- More confident of skills
- Desire to continue facilitating groups
- Interest in reaching out to children
- Unconditional disposition to serve their community

“I’ve touched others and that makes me feel responsible to learn more and get better so I can continue to teach others.”
The Next Step
- Dissemination of model
- Study effectiveness of training models
- Train many more trainees throughout Latin America & Caribbean

“Teach a hungry man how to fish……and he will eat for a lifetime”