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Training Disaster Workers in the Management of Post-Disaster Emotional Disturbances

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Objective: The authors draw upon the findings of their earlier studies on victims of two different disasters, and suggest material for use in training of disaster relief workers (DRW). The contention is that, if the DRWs are trained in the management of expected emotional problems, the process of emotional recuperation for the disaster victims can begin early, and the long-term perpetuation of the distress symptoms can be prevented.

Method: The data include the initial and follow-up screening of victims. They highlight the commonality of symptoms and a narrow range of psychiatric diagnoses exhibited by these individuals, although they have had different exposure to and different impact of disaster. The factors associated with continued presence of psychopathology over a long period also have been presented.

Results: Using this information, a schemata of training material is identified. This includes learning: 1) to administer and score the screening questionnaire; 2) to isolate cases to be referred to specialty mental-health sector; 3) to counsel the remaining distressed individuals; and 4) the areas in the post disaster circumstances of the individuals that need to be prioritized and addressed.

Conclusion: This brief training package easily can be used in disaster preparedness training of disaster relief worker.

SEA DISASTERS

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Injuries Caused by Grounding of the High-Speed Passenger Vessel "Sea Cat," Norway, 1991

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Objective: To describe the accident and the injuries caused by the grounding of the high-speed passenger vessel "Sea Cat" with 131 persons on board. The incident occurred November 1991, on the west coast of Norway.

Method: Retrospective case analysis.

Results: The boat hit a small island at a speed of 38 knots (70 km/h). The bow was pressed in, but the casualties were caused by disintegration of the seat-rows and detachment of loose objects due to the sudden deceleration. Two passengers died from severe head trauma at the scene of the accident. Helicopters and nearby vessels transported 74 people to Haukeland Hospital. The injuries consisted of 27 head injuries (two fatal, none to major surgery); 10 cervical spine injuries (none serious); 14 face injuries; one carotid artery injury; two blunt abdominal trauma (one to major surgery); 19 upper-extremity injuries; and 29 lower-extremity injuries; totalling 50 blunt traumas and 23 fractures.

Conclusion: As far as we know, this is the first publication of the panorama of injuries caused by grounding of a high-speed passenger vessel. The accident was comparable to a large bus accident. Fortunate circumstances contributed to the limited number of severe injuries and deaths—there was no fire; the boat did not sink or take in water; and passengers did not suffer from hypothermia as they were brought to safety in a building on a nearby island.

High-speed passenger vessels will certainly become more common in sea transportation. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is working out codes for such passenger vessels carrying up to 400 people.

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The Sinking of the Marchioness Pleasure Boat on the Thames

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In August 1989, a pleasure boat with more than 200 passengers on board was hit from behind by a dredger. Within minutes, it was sinking and some passengers were trapped within the vessel while others were swept or jumped into the river.

There were several unusual features of this marine accident. The tidal nature of the Thames meant passengers were swept up river and rescuers were spread along the banks and