

# The Forgotten Many

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*The mind is like a sheet of white paper in this, that the impressions it receives the oftenest, and retains the longest, are black ones.*

JC and AW Hare, *Guesses at Truth*

*Anxious minds quake with both hope and fear.*

Ovid, *Fasti*; Bk iii, 1.361

*A mental stain can neither be blotted out by the passage of time nor washed away by any waters.*

Cicero, *De Legibus*, Bk ii, ch 10, sec 24

At some time in our life, each of us has experienced an event that drastically changed our life. Although the precipitating event may have produced a negative and stressful impact upon us, it was not the event, itself, that was important; it was the change in our life that the event provoked that resulted in long-lasting effects. The impact of the event penetrated deep into our psyche; we became disturbed when we perceived our life to be out of our control. Depending upon the perceived severity, the disturbance likely produced a series of reactions; the event may cause us to become dysfunctional, or because it interfered with our normal state of being, it may have disrupted our social interactions. If our coping mechanisms were insufficient to deal with the trauma, we may have needed outside assistance.

Similar reactions are likely to result from exposure to events associated with a disaster. However, in these circumstances, the numbers of persons so affected are enormous, and often, most of those affected go unrecognized.

It has become increasingly clear that the psychosocial aspects of a disaster constitute a major part of its impact on the affected population. Often, the morbidity associated with these disturbances far outweighs the physical morbidity and mortality. Usually, such effects appear latently, and therefore, they begin to appear "after everyone has left." Furthermore, the resultant disturbances may persist for the

rest of the lives of those directly or indirectly affected by the event and even may persist for generations.

This entire issue is devoted to the psychosocial implications of disasters and major life-changing events. In November 1994, Gloria R. Leon, PhD, Guest Editor of this issue, and Victor S. Koscheyev, MD, PhD, ScD at the University of Minnesota, organized the first conference that attempted to explore the psychosocial effects of disasters. The Conference was entitled: "After Everyone Leaves," and many of the papers presented at the conference were published in *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine (PDM)* in 1996 (Volume 11, Number 2, April–June 1996). Subsequently, in 2003, Gloria Leon was appointed as co-chair of the WADEM Task Force on the Psychosocial Aspects of Disasters. In this issue, she has assembled a remarkable set of papers that explore most of the aspects of this important problem and the stresses associated with such events. These papers not only explore the probable causes of the psychosocial manifestations that result from such experiences, but also highlight the symptoms and signs of these manifestations. In addition, they critically review the currently available therapies for treating them. Together, these works seek to dispel many of the myths associated with these problems.

I applaud each of the authors who took the time and made the effort to share their experiences in order to help us understand the very important aspects of disasters. Each contribution to this hallmark issue of PDM sets a standard for future work in this aspect of Disaster Medicine. I thank each of them for you, the readers, and especially, commend Gloria Leon for her vision and persistence.

*The natural fog of the good man's mind.*

Robert Browning, *Christmas Eve*, sec 4

*There are but two powers in the world, the sword and the mind. In the long run, the sword always is beaten by the mind.*

Napoleon (*Frederiks, Maxims of Napoleon*)