Psychological Triage

EDS 246b
Preventive Psychological Interventions
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Meeting Agenda

- Definition of, and Rationale for, Psychological Triage
- Psychological Trauma Risk Factors and Warning Signs
  1. Crisis Exposure
  2. Personal Vulnerabilities
  3. Threat Perceptions
  4. Crisis Reactions
- Conducting Psychological Triage

The PREPaRE Model

Prevent and Prepare for Psychological Trauma
Reaffirm Health and Safety
Evaluate Psychological Trauma
  - Rationale for Assessing Psychological Trauma
  - Assessment Variables
    1. Risk Factors
    2. Warning Signs
  - Conducting Psychological Triage
Provide Interventions and Respond to Student Psychological Needs
Examine the Effectiveness of Crisis Prevention and Intervention
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Rationale for Assessing Psychological Trauma

1) Idiosyncratic Consequences of Crisis Exposure.
   - Not all individuals will be equally effected
   - Recovery is the norm
   - Crisis intervention should be offered in response to demonstrated need.
   - “Not everyone exposed to trauma either needs or wants professional help.”

EXCEPTION: Students with pre-existing psychopathology.

Sources: Brock et al., 2009; Cohen et al. (2010); McNally et al. (2003, p. 73)

2) Idiosyncratic Consequences of Crisis Intervention.
   - Crisis intervention may cause harm if not truly needed.
     a) It may increase crisis exposure.
     b) It may reduce perceptions of independent problem solving.
     c) It may generate self-fulfilling prophecies.

Sources: Berkowitz (2003), Everly (1999)

Source: Brock et al. (2009)
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 1: Crisis Exposure Risk Factors*

- a) Physical proximity
- b) Emotional proximity

*Risk factors increase the probability of psychological trauma and, as such, should result in increased vigilance for symptoms of traumatic stress (or warning signs).

Source: Brock (2002d)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 1: Crisis Exposure Physical Proximity Risk Factor

- Where were students when the crisis occurred (i.e., how close were they to the traumatic event)?
  - The closer they were (i.e., the more direct their exposure) the greater the risk of psychological trauma.
  - The more physically distant they were, the lower the risk of psychological trauma.

Source: Brock (2002d)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 1: Crisis Exposure Physical Proximity Risk Factor

- Residents between 110th St. and Canal St.
  - 6.8% report PTSD symptoms.
- Residents south of Canal St (ground zero)
  - 20% report PTSD symptoms.
- Those who did not witness the event
  - 5.5% had PTSD symptoms.
- Those who witnessed the event
  - 10.4% had PTSD symptoms.

Source: Galea et al. (2002)
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables
Variable 1a: Crisis Exposure Physical Proximity Risk Factor

Source: Pynoos et al. (1987)

Note: Off track refers to students who were on vacation from school
Source: Pynoos et al. (1987)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Variable 1b: Crisis Exposure Emotional Proximity Risk Factor

- Individuals who have/had close relationships with crisis victims should be made crisis intervention treatment priorities.
- May include having a friend who knew someone killed or injured.

Sources: Galea et al. (2002); Kolatis et al. (2003)
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables
Variable 1b: Crisis Exposure Emotional Proximity Risk Factor
PTSD and Relationship to Victim X Outcome (i.e., injury or death)

Sources: Applied Research and Consulting et al. (2002, p. 34)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables
Variable 2: Personal Vulnerability Risk Factors*
  - Internal vulnerability factors
  - External vulnerability factors

*Risk factors increase the probability of psychological trauma and, as such, should result in increased vigilance for symptoms of traumatic stress (or warning signs).

Sources: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables
Variable 2a: Internal Vulnerability Risk Factors
  a) Avoidance coping style
  b) Pre-crisis psychiatric challenges
  c) Poor ability to regulate emotions
  d) Low developmental level and poor problem solving
  e) History of prior psychological trauma

Sources: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009)
### Evaluate Psychological Trauma
#### Assessment Variables

**Variable 2b: External Vulnerability Risk Factors**

- **Family resources**
  - a) Not living with nuclear family
  - b) Family dysfunction (e.g., alcoholism, violence, child maltreatment, mental illness)
  - c) Parental PTSD/maladaptive coping with the stressor
  - d) Ineffective & uncaring parenting
  - e) Poverty/financial Stress

- **Extra-familial Social resources**
  - a) Social isolation
  - b) Lack of perceived social support

Source: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009)

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### Evaluate Psychological Trauma
#### Assessment Variables

**Variable 3: Threat Perception Risk Factor**

- Subjective impressions can be more important than actual crisis exposure.
- Adult reactions are important influences on student threat perceptions.

* A risk factor increase the probability of psychological trauma and, as such, should result in increased vigilance for symptoms of traumatic stress (or warning signs).

Sources: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009)

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### Evaluate Psychological Trauma
#### Assessment Variables

**Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs**

- **Early Warning Signs**
- **Enduring Warning Signs**
- **Developmental Variations**
- **Cultural Variations**

*Warning signs are symptoms of traumatic stress.

Source: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009)
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs

Early Warning Signs
- Most are common reactions to unusual circumstances and are not signs of mental illness.
- Some are pathological and require mental health referrals
  a) Interfere with daily functioning
  b) Acute (involve panic, dissociation, extreme fright)
  c) Increased arousal (exaggerated startle, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance)
  d) Maladaptive coping (suicidal or homicidal thoughts and behaviors)

Source: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009); Cohen et al. (2010)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs

Enduring Warning Signs
- Do not remit or worsen after a week or more
- Acute Stress Disorder
- Acute Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Source: Brock (2002d); Brock et al. (2009); Nickerson et al. (2008)

Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs

- Developmental variations: Preschoolers
  - Reactions not as clearly connected to the crisis event as observed among older students.
  - Reactions tend to be expressed nonverbally.
  - Given equal levels of distress and impairment, may not display as many PTSD symptoms as older children.
  - Temporary loss of recently achieved developmental milestones.
  - Trauma related play.

Sources: American Psychiatric Association (2000); Berkowitz (2003); Cook-Cottone (2004); Dulmus (2003); Joshi & Lewin (2004); Yorbik et al. (2004)
Evaluating Psychological Trauma

Assessment Variables

Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs

- Developmental variations: School-age children
  - Reactions tend to be more directly connected to crisis event.
  - Event-specific fears may be displayed.
  - Reactions are often expressed behaviorally.
  - Feelings associated with the traumatic stress are often expressed via physical symptoms.
  - Trauma-related play (becomes more complex and elaborate).
  - Repetitive verbal descriptions of the event.
  - Problems paying attention.

Sources: American Psychiatric Association (2000); Berkowitz (2003); Cook-Cottone (2004); Dulmus (2003); Joshi & Lewin (2004); Yorlik et al. (2004)

Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs

- Developmental variations: Preadolescents and adolescents
  - More adult-like reactions
  - Sense of foreshortened future
  - Oppositional/aggressive behaviors
  - School avoidance
  - Self-injurious behavior and thinking
  - Revenge fantasies
  - Substance abuse
  - Learning problems

Sources: American Psychiatric Association (2000); Berkowitz (2003); Cook-Cottone (2004); Dulmus (2003); Joshi & Lewin (2004); Yorlik et al. (2004)

Variable 4: Crisis Reaction Warning Signs

- Cultural considerations
  - Other important determinants of crisis reactions in general, and grief in particular, are family, cultural and religious beliefs.
  - Providers of crisis intervention assistance should inform themselves about cultural norms with the assistance of community cultural leaders who best understand local customs.

Sources: Sandoval & Lewis (2002)
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Conducting Psychological Triage
Levels of Triage

Table: Levels of Triage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Variables Considered</th>
<th>Goals</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Primary  | Before immediate Crisis intervention | Selected risk factors early warning signs | 1. Establish initial intervention priorities  
2. Make initial decisions about intervention needs |
| Secondary | During the provision of crisis intervention | Risk factors and warning signs | 1. Refine intervention priorities  
2. Match interventions to individual needs  
3. Begin to consider mental health referrals |
| Tertiary | As crisis intervention concludes | Risk factors and warning signs | 1. Identify individuals who need mental health referrals  
2. Making appropriate referrals |

Source: Brock et al. (2009)

Conducting Psychological Triage
Levels of Triage

Table: Levels of Triage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle Phase</th>
<th>Risk Impact</th>
<th>Risk Impact 2</th>
<th>Impaired Functions</th>
<th>Intermediate Post Traumatic Stress</th>
<th>Post Traumatic Stress</th>
<th>Complex Trauma</th>
<th>Effective Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Crisis</td>
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<td>Crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Crisis</td>
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</table>

*Immediate mental health referrals should be made for students who during any crisis phase manifested grossly maladaptive coping (e.g., suicidal or homicidal ideation).

Source: Adapted from Conolly-Wilson (2008)
Conducting Psychological Triage

**Preparation**
1) Identify school- and community-based mental-health resources.
2) Identify community-based support resources
3) Develop/obtain psychological assessment screening tools and crisis intervention referral forms.
4) Understand/learn about culture specific crisis reactions.

**Primary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma**

1. Begins as soon as possible/appropriate and before individual students and/or staff are offered any school crisis intervention.
2. Designed to identify those who are considered at risk for becoming psychological trauma victims and to help making initial school crisis intervention treatment decisions.
3. Typically includes assessment of the following variables.
   - crisis exposure (physical and emotional proximity)
   - personal vulnerabilities

Refer to book for the Psychological Trauma Risk Checklist form
Refer to book for the Primary Risk Screening form
Conducting Psychological Triage

Secondary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma

1. Typically includes assessment of the following risk factors and warning signs:
   - Crisis exposure (physical and emotional proximity)
   - Personal vulnerabilities
   - Crisis reactions

2. Typically involves the following strategies:
   - Use of parent, teacher, peer, and self-referral procedures/forms
   - Administering individual and/or group screening measures

Elements of a Referral From

- Parent, teacher, and self-referral procedures/forms
  - Elements of a referral form
    - Identifying information
    - Physical proximity
    - Emotional proximity
    - Vulnerabilities
      - Personal history
      - Resources
      - Mental health
Conducting Psychological Triage

Secondary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma

Elements of a referral form (continued)

- Crisis Reactions
  - Dissociation
  - Hyperarousal
  - Re-experiencing
  - Avoidance
  - Depression
  - Psychosis
  - Dangerous coping efforts (i.e., behaviors that involve any degree of lethality)

Refer to book for a sample referral form.

Source: Brock et al. (2001)

Conducting Psychological Triage

Secondary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma

- Refer to book for traumatic stress screening tools
- Must be administered to caregivers when screening children younger than age 7 years.

Sources: Cohen et al. (2010); Ohan et al. (2002); Strand et al. (2005)

Conducting Psychological Triage

Tertiary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma

1. Takes place as school-based crisis intervention concludes
2. Continues to evaluated crisis facts, and individual risk factors and warning signs.
3. Primary goals
   a) Identification of students who require mental health treatment
   b) Making appropriate community-based referrals
Conducting Psychological Triage

Tertiary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma
- Refer to book for the Triage Summary Sheet.
- "Survivors of traumatic events who do not manifest symptoms after approximately two months generally do not require follow-up" (NIMH, 2002, p. 9).

Source: Brock et al. (2001)

Conducting Psychological Triage

Practice Activity: Primary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma
- Break into small groups.
- Refer to Handout, "Primary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma," and discuss the crisis situation provided.
- Answer the questions regarding the level of crisis intervention response and the primary assessment of psychological risk.
- Record your thoughts and be prepared to share your responses with the entire group.

Source: Brock et al. (2001)

Conducting Psychological Triage

Crisis Situation 1
A local gang, in response to the physical beating of a fellow gang member by a student at your high school, has come on campus. A fight breaks out in the student parking lot between the gang and the student's friends. A 15-year-old gang member is hospitalized with a stab wound, and one of your students is killed by a gunshot wound to the head. The principal was in the immediate area and tried to intervene; she was hospitalized with serious stab wounds and is not expected to live.

Source: Brock et al. (2001)
Conducting Psychological Triage

Crisis Situation 2
A very popular sixth-grade teacher at an elementary school was supervising his students on a field trip to a local lake. He tragically drowns after hitting his head on a rock while trying to rescue a student who had fallen into the lake.

Source: Brock et al. (2001)

Conducting Psychological Triage

Crisis Situation 3
An irate father comes to your elementary school at 8:30 a.m., a half hour after school has started. He heads to his kindergarten-age daughter’s classroom without checking in with the office. The father enters the classroom and begins to hit his daughter. As the astounded class and the teacher watch, he severely beats her. Leaving the girl unconscious, he storms out the door and drives off in his car. The event took place in less than 5 minutes.

Source: Brock et al. (2001)

Conducting Psychological Triage

Crisis Situation 4
A third-grade teacher is presenting a lesson to her students. She has just soundly reprimanded students for continuing to talk out; in fact, she is still very upset. Suddenly, she turns pale, clutches her chest and keels over in front of 29 horrified children. Two frightened children run to the office, sobbing the news. The teacher is taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital, where it is discovered that she has suffered a massive heart attack. She never regains consciousness and succumbs the next morning.

Source: Brock et al. (2001)
Evaluate Psychological Trauma

Concluding Comment

“With the effects of teacher expectations in mind, we should note that teacher assistance, while often a valuable source of scaffolding on difficult tasks, may be counter productive if students don’t really need it. When students struggle temporarily with a task, the unsolicited help of their teacher may communicate the message that they have low ability and little control regarding their own successes and failures. In contrast, allowing students to struggle on their own for a reasonable period of time conveys the belief that students do have the ability to succeed on their own.” (p. 451)

Source: Ormrod (1999)

Linking the Evaluation of Psychological Trauma to School Crisis interventions

- A Crisis Event Occurs
- Reaffirm Physical Health
- Ensure Perceptions of Safety & Security
- Evaluate Psychological Trauma
- Low Risk for Psychological Trauma
  - Re-establish Social Support
    - Psycho-education (Caregiver Training)
- Moderate Risk for Psychological Trauma
  - Re-establish Social Support
    - Psycho-education (Caregiver Training & Psycho-educational Groups)
    - Immediate Psychological First Aid
- High Risk for Psychological Trauma
  - Re-establish Social Support
    - Psycho-education (Caregiver Training & Psycho-educational Groups)
    - Immediate Psychological First Aid
    - Longer Term Psychotherapy

Levels of School Crisis interventions

- Indicated
  - Psycho-therapy
- Selected
  - Psycho-educational Groups
  - Psychological First Aid
- Universal
  - Prevention Psychological Trauma
  - Re-establish Social Support Systems
  - Caregiver Trainings
  - Re-affirm Physical Health
  - Ensure Perceptions of Safety & Security
  - Evaluate Psychological Trauma
Next Meeting

- Saturday April 1, 8:30 to 4:30
- EUR 223
- Topics: Crisis Intervention 3 & 4
- Turn in: Psychological First Aid Script
- Activity: Psychological First Aid Role Plays

Exam Questions

- ????????