

**Survivors' Self-Expressed
Mental Health Needs
Following China's 2008
Szechuan Earthquake**

Authors

• Ian M. Newman • Duane F. Shell
Nebraska Prevention Center for Alcohol and Drug
Abuse, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

• Qian Ling • Meng Xianpeng • Zhang Jibin
• Li Yinghua • Ma Yu • Tao Maoxuan
National Institute for Health Education (NIHE), China
Center for Disease Control

Presenter Disclosures

Duane F. Shell

(1) The following personal financial relationships with
commercial interests relevant to this presentation
existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

Study Purpose

The present study sought to describe

- the psychological needs of Sichuan Earthquake disaster area residents,
- provide guidance for the provision of immediate psychological services
- guidance for the development of policies and programs to address future disasters.

Specific Objectives

- Determine the extent that survivors' immediate physical needs were met
- Identify survivors' self-expressed needs for assistance
- Identify survivors' emotional and physical reactions
- Identify how survivors were getting relief from emotional and physical reactions

Sample

673 residents from 5 temporary shelters in Mianyang City, Sichuan province.

- An county Huangtu town
- Anzhou driving school
- Yong'an town
- Beichuan County Leigu town
- Mianyang High-tech area

Procedures Focus Groups

- 50 residents from four temporary settlements,
- 4 groups each of males and females,
- in-depth focus group interviews led by trained professionals from the National Health Education Institute (NIHE), China CDC

Procedures Focus Groups

Focus Group discussions addressed:

- 1) Participants' assessment of their temporary residences,
- 2) Participants' mental health status
- 3) Participants' expressed mental health needs.

Procedures Interview Survey

Focus group results were used to develop an interview survey with the following sections:

- 1) basic demographic information,
- 2) emotional physical reactions to the earthquake (29 items)
- 3) suggested methods to relieve emotional and physical reactions (18 items)
- 4) perceived needs to confront the psychological crisis and provide adequate mental health education (19 items).

Procedures Interview Survey

- 639 survivors were interviewed
- 25 local university student volunteers conducted interviews
- Students trained and supervised by the NIHE team with assistance from the Chongqing Health Education Institute, Chongqing Jiulong district CDC, and the Mianyang Health Education Institute.
- 625 fully completed surveys were obtained.

Sample Characteristics

- 52.5% males and 47.5% females.
- Age:
 - 31.9% 18 or younger,
 - 18.5% 19–30 years,
 - 38.2% 31-50 years,
 - 11.4% over age 51.

Sample Characteristics

- Education:
 - 31.9% illiterate or primary school education,
 - 40.3% middle school education,
 - 18.9% senior high school or vocational education.
- 58.6% married with 97% having children.
- 90% had parents or parent living before the earthquake.

Sample Characteristics

- 8.1% of the participants were injured.
- 18.8% had a child either lost or injured.
- 3% had lost a parent or spouse.
- 6.8% reported a parent or spouse injured.
- 42.7% reported relatives injured.
- 95.4% reported the loss of their place of residence

Sample Characteristics

At the time of the study, survivors were living in government provided camps, mostly in tents.

Results: Immediate Physical Needs

- Survivors expressed "Satisfaction" with:
- drinking water supplies (95%)
 - domestic water supplies (91%)
 - communications (87%)
 - sanitation (83%)
 - accommodations (80%)
 - food supplies (77%)

Results: Expressed Needs for Assistance

High Need [3 on the 1-3 scale) was expressed for:

- timely contact with relatives and friends (75%)
- assurance that 'basic living needs will be guaranteed by government" (60.7%)
- timely reports on the local situation from mass media (51.7%)
- get away from the earthquake area (51.5%)

Results: Expressed Needs for Assistance

No or low need (1 and 2 on scale) was expressed for:

- get medicine to relieve anxiety (82.7%)
- receive "suggestions on how to solve emotional problems" (74.6%)
- have someone (a professional) you can talk to about your feelings (73.2%).

Results: Emotional and Physical Reactions

The three reactions most cited as occurring "Frequently" were:

- worry 45%
- re-experiencing the earthquake 36%
- emotional reactions [anxiety/can't focus] 25%

Results: Emotional and Physical Reactions

The remaining reactions were cited as occurring less often:

- context avoidance [avoid talking/thinking/ reading about earthquake] 21%
- depression 21%
- stress 20%
- physical reactions [tired, headache, poor appetite] 16%.

Results: Relief from Emotional/ Physical Reactions

The methods "used frequently for relieving emotional/physical reactions" reported by the most survivors were:

- Mutual family encouragement 69%
- Keep informed through media 67%
- Tell oneself the future is positive 65%
- Tell oneself "I'm not alone, society is behind me" 63%

Results: Relief from Emotional/ Physical Reactions

The methods "used frequently" reported by fewer but still by more than half were:

- Regular rest/enough sleep 58%
- Keep regular diet 56%
- Imagine or plan future life 53%

**Results: Relief from Emotional/
Physical Reactions**

The methods “used frequently” for relieving emotional/physical reactions reported by the fewest survivors were:

- Relaxation/positive imagery 23%
- Prayer 22%
- Seek professional psychological help 17%
- Cry or shout 15%

**Conclusions: Meeting survivors’
immediate physical needs**

- Survivors generally reported that physical needs for food, water, shelter, and communication were being met.
- Survivors do not appear to be suffering from lack of basic necessities even though all were in temporary “refuge” settlements.

**Conclusions: Expressed Needs for
Assistance**

- Although survivors indicated that basic needs were currently being met, survivors expressed a desire for assurance that these needs would continue to be met.
- Survivors expressed needs for effective communication with family and for timely information on the situation at their home suggests a need to keep survivors informed and provide survivors access to communication technologies.

Conclusions: Expressed Needs for Assistance

- Survivors expressed lower need for professional psychological/ emotional support. This suggests that immediate basic living and communication needs are primarily what survivors are focusing on in the immediate post-quake setting.

Conclusions: Identify survivors' emotional and physical reactions

- General worry and reliving the earthquake were survivors' strongest emotional reactions.
- More "clinical" emotional reactions, like anxiety, depression, stress, and stress related physical reactions were less frequently reported, although 20-25% did experience these suggesting a need for services.

Conclusions: Relief from Emotional/Physical Reactions

Relief from emotional/physical problems seems focused around:

- Support from family and society
- Envisioning/planning for the future
- Keeping informed
- Keeping routines

**Conclusions: Relief from
Emotional/Physical Reactions**

- The percentage of survivors reporting seeking professional help (17%) was close to the percentage reporting “clinical” emotional and physical reactions (20-25%).
- Suggests that help was available and being used by those with these reactions.
- Indicates a possibly meaningful unmet need among those not getting professional help.

**Contact for further
information:**

Ian M. Newman
Nebraska Prevention Center for
Alcohol and Drug Abuse
P. O. Box 880345
Lincoln, NE 68588-0345 USA
inewman1@unl.edu
