The Mental Health Impact of Violent Tragedies

Dr. Sara Garrido
Nicoletti-Flater Associates
July 20, 2012 at 12:40am-Century 16 Theater

• Largest Mass Shooting in Colorado’s History
• Emotional/Mental Impact:
  • Emergency responders: Carried victims from the theater and rushed them to local hospitals
  • Crime Lab Personnel: sifted through blood and debris while processing the scene
  • Homicide Detectives: 3 years of trial prep.
Psychological Incident Commander

• Ensure responders are being provided mental health support as they process through the command center

• Provision of Psychological First Aid
  • Active listening; monitor for signs of acute distress
  • Focus on safety and immediate needs
  • Discussion of essential coping strategies
  • Provide a plan for ongoing psychological support for any high-risk individuals or groups
  • Proactive Outreach is essential
Prior to an Event

• Stress Inoculation Training
  • What to Expect
  • How to Recover

• Peer Support Teams
  • Lethal Response Team
  • Trauma Response Team

• Employee Assistance Programs
During and After an Event

• Senses are contaminated
• Feeling helpless
  • Distress of victims’ physical and emotional trauma vs. responders own
  • Unable to utilize humor, often a “go to” coping strategy for emergency responders
• Post-incident interventions-focus on education of “normal responses” rather than tactical debriefings-give folks a chance to prepare themselves of discussing/learning from the event
AJ DeAndrea
Sergeant, Arvada PD, Colorado
April 20th, 1999

Columbine High School
That Evening
California Group
Counseling
Anniversary
Anniversary
Relationships
The Impact of a Mass Casualty Incident on the Community: Planning

- Mental Health Recovery Plan
  - Schools
  - Community
  - 1st Responders
  - Business Community
  - Government

- Mental Health Incident Manager
The Impact of a Mass Casualty Incident on the Community: Media

ABC News, Fox News Channel, CBS, NBC News, Univision, CNN, BBC
Media, continued
Media
Bereavement Events
Community Responses and Memorials
Unanticipated Impact Events

- Victims’ families
- Area schools
- Hospitals
- Churches
- Visiting dignitaries

- Hate groups
- Conspirators
- Internet
- Phone
- Mail
- Blood donorship
Management & Coordination of Donations

- 63,000 stuffed animals
- 575 boxes of toys
- 2,075 boxes of school supplies
- 4 Pallets of tissue/paper towels
- 8+ Pallets of books
- 7+ Pallets of backpacks
- 54 Bicycles
- 19,000 sq. feet of warehouse
- 150,000 to 200,000 pieces
- of mail - Cash
Managing Volunteers

- 600+ volunteers
- 3800+ Hours
- Answered phones
- Opened and responded to mail
- Systems logistics
- Long term v. short term
Investigations
Reports
Anniversaries
Permanent Memorials
6 Degrees of Separation
Future use of mass casualty property
Possible reduction of population
Other mass casualty events