

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID AND ITS IMPLICATION TO NURSING

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Abstract:

The necessity for psychological first aid (PFA) in crisis response and developmental initiatives has been increasingly evident in recent years, as the nation experiences several emergencies, natural catastrophes, and pandemics such as COVID-19. Health services are among the most commonly sought services during catastrophes, and there is an expectation for high quality provision. Preparedness for calamities is an essential imperative. Psychological first aid is the preferred acute intervention for addressing the psychological needs of children, adults, and families impacted by disasters and pandemics. The most effective method to conceptualise PFA is as the psychological equivalent of physical first aid.

Key words: Psychological first aid, Disaster, Nursing

INTRODUCTION:

The World Health Organisation (WHO) characterises a disaster as any anthropogenic or natural occurrence that results in infrastructural destruction, significant economic losses, casualties, worsening of human health, and adverse conditions in social health services. Significant advancements have occurred in the domain of mental health and psychosocial assistance at both global and regional levels in recent years.

The necessity for psychological first aid (PFA) in crisis response and developmental initiatives has been increasingly evident in recent years, as the nation experiences multiple crises, emergency situations, natural catastrophes, and pandemics such as COVID-19. A disaster is a significant event that impacts entire communities, resulting in extensive, pervasive stress and human suffering that necessitates aid for recovery. Primary categories of disaster encompass:

- Naturally occurring (earthquake, hurricane, tornado, flooding, bushfire)
- Human-caused (war, genocide, terror, etc.)
- Pandemic / disease (COVID-19, Swine Flu, etc.)
- Accident (car accident, airplane crash, building collapsed, etc.).

Stress is a typical response to a threat or a disruptive alteration in the environment (stressor) that elicits both physiological and psychological reactions. Disaster nursing is the application of professional nursing expertise, competencies, and disposition to identify and address the medical and emotional requirements of disaster victims. The nurse's role in a disaster is crucial and transformative. Due to their healthcare expertise, they are positioned to give frontline support. Health services are among the most commonly requested during catastrophes, and there is an expectation for high-quality provision. Preparedness for calamities is an essential imperative.

Consequently, it is imperative for all healthcare practitioners to be acquainted with relevant activities and possess sufficient knowledge regarding disasters. Despite the extensive experience and training of most health personnel in interventions like first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and basic life support, they lack the training and experience necessary to recognise psychological responses and implement appropriate interventions for disaster victims. Identifying psychological reactions positively influences the psychology of survivors. The primary emphasis in disasters is delivering physical and psychological assistance while victims' needs are urgent. Nurses are an essential component of these efficient emergency responses.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID:

According to the definition from Psychological First Aid for All, WHO; PFA is a humane and supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support.

It is an acute intervention of choice when responding to the psychosocial needs of children, adults and families affected by disaster and pandemic. Perhaps best way to conceptualize PFA is as the mental health analogue to physical first aid. PFA may be simply defined as a supportive and compassionate presence designed to stabilize and mitigate acute distress, as well as facilitate access to continued care. PFA does not entail diagnosis, nor does it entail treatment.

THE SEVEN AREAS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID:

- Assess needs and concerns
- Help with basic needs
- Comfort them and help them feel calm ➤ Provide practical care and support ➤ Listen, but don't pressure them to talk
- Protect people from further harm
- Connect them to information, services and social support.

PFA is not:

- Not something only professionals can do
- Not psychological debriefing
- Not professional counselling or therapy
- Not encouraging a detailed discussion of the event that has caused the distress, traumatic experiences and losses
- Not asking someone to analyse what has happened to them
- Not pressing someone to talk for details on what happened
- Not pressuring people to share their feelings and reactions to an event.
- Not something that everybody who has been affected by an emergency will need.

CORE ACTIONS OF PFA:

Contact and Engagement

2. Safety and comfort
3. Stabilization
4. Information gathering
5. Practical Assistance
6. Connection with social support
7. Information on coping
8. Linkage with collaborative services

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF 'DO NO HARM:

Safety: Avoid putting people at further risk as a result of your action. Make sure to the best of your ability that the people you help are safe and protect them from physical or psychological harm.

Dignity: Treat people with respect and in accordance with their cultural and social norms

Right:

- Make sure people can access help fairly and without discrimination.
- Help people to claim their rights and access available support.
- Act only in the best interest of any person you encounter

BENEFICIARIES OF PFA:

- Very distressed people who were recently exposed to a serious stressful event.
- Can be provided to adults and children, adolescents, parents/caretakers, families who have recently experienced a crisis event and are distressed.
- Not everyone who experiences a crisis event will need or want PFA.
- Don't force help on those who don't want it but make yourself available and easily accessible to those who may want support.

TIME TO PROVIDE PFA:

Upon first contact with very distressed people, usually immediately following an event, or sometimes a few days or weeks later depend on situation, resource available and approval of the relevant government authority.

PLACE TO PROVIDE PFA:

PFA can be provided anywhere or place where it is safe and had some privacy for you and affected people when appropriate. (Shelters, temporary housing, assistance centre, crisis and emergency hotline, etc.)

Privacy is essential for confidentiality and to respect the person's dignity, for those who have been exposed to certain types of crisis events such as sexual violence

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION FOR PROVIDING PFA:**Do's**

- Be honest and trustworthy.
- Respect people's right to make their own decisions.
- Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices.
- Make it clear to people that even if they refuse help now, they can still access help in the future.
- Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate.
- Behave appropriately by considering the person's culture, age and gender.

Don'ts

- Don't exploit your relationship as a helper.
- Don't ask the person for any money or favour for helping them.
- Don't make false promises or give false information.
- Don't exaggerate your skills.
- Don't force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy.
- Don't pressure people to tell their story.
- Don't share the person's story with others.
- Don't judge the person for their actions or feelings.

PREPARING TO DELIVER PFA:

- Learn about the situation: Learn about crisis event.
- Learn about available services and supports.
- Learn about safety and security concerns.
- Learn about what affected people might needs.
- Whenever possible in responding to a crisis situation: Follow the direction of relevant authorities managing the crisis
- Learn what emergency responses are being organized and what resources are available to help people, if any
- Don't get in the way of search-and-rescue or emergency medical personnel; and
- Know your role and the limits of your role.

The crisis event:

- What happened?
- When and where did it take place?
- How many people are likely to be affected and who are they?

Available services and supports:

- Who is providing for basic needs like emergency medical care, food, water, and shelter or tracing family members?
- Where and how can people access those services?
- Who else is helping?
- Are community members involved in responding

Safety and security concerns

- Is the crisis event over or continuing, such as an aftershock from an earthquake or continuing conflict?
- What dangers may be in the environment, such as rebels, landmines or damaged infrastructure?

Are there areas to avoid entering because they are not secure (E.g. obvious physical dangers) or because you are

- allowed to be there?

WHAT AFFECTED PEOPLE MAY NEED:

People who have been through a crisis will often need:

- Practical things – like a blanket, food, water, shelter
- Medical care for injuries or a help with chronic medical conditions
- Safety and protection
- Information – about the event, loved ones, available services
- Someone who is willing to listen
- To be able to contact loved ones
- Specific support related to their culture or religion
- Being consulted and involved in decisions that affect them.

THREE BASIC ACTION PRINCIPLES OF PFA:**Look**

- Check for safety.
- Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs.
- Check for people with serious distress reactions.

Listen

- Approach people who may need support.
- Ask about people's needs and concerns.
- Listen to people and help them to feel calm.

Link

- Help people address basic needs and access services.
- Help people cope with problems.
- Give information.
- Connect people with loved ones and social support.

SUMMARY:

Psychological first aid (PFA) is a crisis intervention strategy that assists individuals in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The objective is to alleviate individuals' primary stress and diminish the likelihood of long-term issues by supplying resources, addressing trauma, imparting coping strategies, linking survivors with a social network, and fostering long-term hope. PFA is a fundamental ability that almost everyone can acquire. Nonetheless, it is vital for first responders, healthcare professionals, and disaster relief personnel. Numerous organisations provide PFA training.

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