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A coping and resilience curriculum for high risk children: Part of comprehensive disaster preparedness

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Building psychologically resilient communities is an integral part of disaster preparedness and post-disaster intervention. Survey research found that concern about safety and fear of another terror attack were pervasive after 9/11/01, and that these concerns are ongoing. Especially likely to be affected are racial-ethnic and low income children and families. Studies show that among inner city children, prior exposure to violence increases the risk of posttraumatic stress reactions, which may be associated with impaired cognitive functioning. Among recently arrived immigrant children, exposure to violence was associated with posttraumatic stress disorder. However, some inner city youth exposed to violence develop coping mechanisms that help insulate them against depression and other post-traumatic reactions. Coping self-efficacy may mediate the adverse psychological impact of traumatic events and may be promoted by methods including opportunities to master experiences, validation and support, and modeling. Because self-efficacy beliefs and emotional competence can be learned, cognitive skills can be developed to strengthen problem-solving and coping skills. As part of their post-9/11 mental health program, The Children's Health Fund and National Center for Disaster Preparedness designed a twelve session curriculum for elementary school children designed to build coping and resilience. The target groups were high-risk children with prior exposure to trauma including inner city exposure to crime and violence and recent immigrants. The curriculum covers affective communication, coping, problem solving, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills. This presentation will review the elements of the curriculum and their basis in trauma literature, presenting a replicable model as the threat of terrorism continues.

Learning Objectives:

- * At the end of this presentation, participants will: be better able to understand the integral role of mental health services in comprehensive disaster planning;

- * identify populations at high risk for problematic posttraumatic stress reactions;

* know the elements of a coping and resilience curriculum so that this model may be replicated in other communities

Keywords: Disasters, Risk Factors

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

I do not have any significant financial interest/arrangement or affiliation with any organization/institution whose products or services are being discussed in this session.

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