

Enhancing Childs Recovery after Earth Quake

Uprety K

Associate Professor, Maharajgunj Nursing Campus

Abstract

The article entitled on Enhancing Childs Recovery after Earth Quake aims to provide the information on responses of children after earthquake and measures to enhance their recovery. Earth quake is a natural disaster related to different types of impact on human beings particularly psychological sequelae. Natural disaster triggers the emergence of psycho pathological symptoms and problems in children, adolescent and adult survivors. As we know that children are the special individuals with special needs and their response to disaster is also different. Literature also has shown that child, teenagers and the elderly are particularly at risk of disaster. Children are scared of earthquakes and unlike adults; they have difficulty accepting them as a natural disaster beyond control. So this article tries to give the information on enhancing child's recovery after earthquake.

Keys: Earthquake, recovery

Introduction

A large number of children and adolescents in Nepal have been negatively impacted by the 7.8 MW earth quake of April 25, 2015 and its many aftershocks, particularly the 7.3 MW on May 12. Thousands of children and adolescents were affected and have been displaced from their routine life, lacking access to health care facilities and dealing with psychological trauma from the event.

Earthquakes are natural disasters that may cause casualties and widespread destruction (Basoglu *et al.*, 2002). The devastation caused by earthquakes is beyond the daily experiences of human beings. Their unpredictability and the desperation they cause exacerbate their already negative effects on humans. The psychology literature includes numerous resources which, maintain that natural disasters such as earthquakes are related to psychological sequelae. It is generally accepted that such natural disasters trigger the emergence of psychopathological symptoms and problems in children, adolescents and adult survivors (Miller and Basoglu, 1992; Rubonis

and Bickman, 1991). Studies have shown that children, teenagers and the elderly are particularly at risk. Children are scared of earthquakes and unlike adults; they have difficulty accepting them as a natural disaster beyond control. The extent to which, children are affected by earthquakes is determined by factors such as the reaction of the family, the extent of loss, age/gender, previous experiences, the indirect effects of the earthquake, daily life, separation, interfamily relationships, economic conditions and social support.

Children may react differently to an earthquake. While, some display behavioural change immediately following an earthquake, others may function normally for several days, weeks or even months as if nothing has happened and then display behavioural problems (Berument *et al.*, 1999). Similarly, following the trauma, children may also display concentration and memory problems, which has direct and indirect effects in learning new as well as also in retrieving the old one information. It has also been stated that preschool children display much more regression, behavior disorders and

aggression after a trauma (Erol and Oner, 1999).

Similarly, literature suggested that child's reactions during the event of trauma vary by age group. When, 1-5 years old preschool children experience a disaster, they mostly feel helpless, fearful and insecure. Not yet equipped fully with oral and conceptual skills, many of these children need intensive support to cope with this unexpected post traumatic stress by disaster. Further typical reactions to a trauma in preschool children include bedwetting, fear of dark or animals, over-reliance on parents, night terror, incontinence, constipation, speech difficulties (e.g., stuttering), overeating or under eating, crying for help or screaming, passivity, shivering and face-pulling, running towards an adult or aimless behaviour, fear of loneliness, fear of strangers and distraction (Pataki *et al.*, 2000).

While, it is accepted that disasters have a negative effect on children mental health and psychological functions. However, the examination of children post-disaster reactions is the first step in meeting children's needs and organizing prevention, treatment and enhancing their recovery. So, articles have focused on providing information to enhance child's recovery after earth quake disaster.

Children's Reactions to Earthquake

Children will react differently to an earthquake and its aftermath depending on their age, developmental level, and prior experiences. Some will withdraw, while others will have angry outbursts. Still others will become agitated or irritable. Parents should be sensitive to each child's coping style. The following are typical reactions children exhibit following an earthquake or other natural disaster:

Emotional Reactions

- Fear and worry about their safety and the safety of others, including pets
- Fear of separation from family members especially parents, siblings and grand's parents who loved them
- Clinging to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Angry outbursts or tantrums

- Aggression toward parents, siblings, or friends

Psychological Reactions

- Worry that another earthquake will come
- Increase in activity level and instability
- Trouble concentrating or paying attention that causes loss of school performance.
- Withdrawal from others
- Change in school performance
- Long-lasting focus on the earthquake, such as talking repeatedly about it or acting out the event in play
- Increased sensitivity to aftershocks, creaking sounds, things falling or crashing, buildings swaying slightly in the wind, or trembling that occurs when a big truck drives by
- Lack of interest in usual activities, even playing with friends
- Returning to earlier behaviours, such as baby talk, bedwetting, or tantrums
- Increase in teens' risky behaviours, such as drinking alcohol, using substances, harming themselves, or engaging in dangerous activities

Physical Reactions

- Increase in physical complaints, such as headaches, stomachaches and body-ache
- Nausea, vomiting ,diarrhoea, fever, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances etc.

Recovery (after an Earthquake)

Children's functioning and recovery will be influenced by how their parents and caregivers cope during and after the earthquake. Children often turn to adults for information, comfort, and help. Children do best when parents and teachers remain (or at least appear) calm, answer children's questions honestly, and respond as best they can to requests.

Parent's Role to Enhance Child's Recovery

Parents should spend time talking to their children, letting them know that it is okay to ask questions and to share their worries. Although it will be hard finding time, parents can use regular family mealtimes or bedtimes to talk. Issues may come up more than once and parents should remain patient and open to answering questions and clarifying the situation. They should let children know, without overwhelming them with information, what is going in the family, with their school, and in the community. Parents should answer questions briefly and honestly and ask their children for their opinions and ideas. To help younger children feel safe and calm after talking about the earthquake, parents might tell a favourite story or have a relaxing family activity. Including this parent should:

- Be a role model; try to remain calm so that you can teach your child how to handle stressful situations.
- Monitor adult conversations. Be aware of what adults are saying about the earthquake or the damage. Children listen to adults' conversations and may misinterpret what they hear, becoming unnecessarily frightened.
- Limit media exposure. Protect your child from too many images and descriptions of the earthquake, including those on television, on the Internet, on radio, and in the newspaper.
- Reassure children that they are safe and may need to repeat this frequently even after the earthquake passes. Spend extra time with them, playing games outside, reading together indoors, or just cuddling. Be sure to tell them you love them.
- Replace lost or damaged toys as soon as you are able.
- Calm worries about their friends' safety. Even though phones may not be working, reassure your children that their friends' parents are taking care of them, just the way you are taking care of your children.
- Tell children about community recovery. Reassure them that the government is working hard to restore electricity, phone, water, removing debris and helping families find housing.
- Take care of your child's health. Help them get enough rest, exercise, and healthy food provide quiet environment and physical activities.
- Review the family preparedness plan. Particularly when there are aftershocks, so practicing the plan can help increase their sense of safety, also ask them necessity of aftershocks, for prevention of big Earthquake.
- Maintain regular daily life. In the midst of disruption and change, children feel more secure with structure and routine. As much as possible, have regular mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Maintain expectations. Stick to your family rules about good behaviour and respect for others. Continue family tasks, but keep in mind that children may need more reminding than usual.
- Encourage children to help others and involve in small tasks such as cleanup. That enhances coping better and recovers sooner. Afterward, provide activities unrelated to the earthquake, such as playing cards or reading.
- Do not criticize your children for changes in behaviour, such as clinging to parents, acting out the earthquake in play, or seeking reassurance frequently.
- Be extra patient as your children return to school. They may be more distracted and need extra help with homework for a while.
- Give support at bedtime. Spend a little more time than in usual in talking, cuddling, or reading. Start the bedtime routine earlier so children get the sleep they need. If younger children need to sleep with you, let them know it is a temporary plan, and that soon they will go back to sleeping in their own beds.

- Help with boredom. The earthquake may have disrupted the family's daily activities (watching television, playing on the computer, and having friends over) or caused the suspension of extracurricular activities (sports, youth groups, dances, or classes). Help children think of alternative activities, such as board games, card games, and arts and crafts. Try to find community programs; at the library, a park program, or a local with child-friendly activities.
- Keep things hopeful. Even in the most difficult situation, your positive outlook on the future will help your children see good things in the world around them, helping them through challenging times.
- Seek professional help if your child still has difficulties more than six weeks after the earthquake which include:
 - Suggest that school will review its crisis and emergency plans in order to better respond to future events.
 - For those schools heavily affected by an earthquake, consider a post disaster mental health recovery program for students and school personnel.

Conclusion

Disaster like earth has negative affects on child's. Their emotional, psychological, physical and social functioning will be greatly affected by earthquake. Children's reactions after disaster will depend on their age, developmental level, family /parents support prior experiences etc. Parents and teachers have important role to enhance child's recovery after earth quake.

References

- Basoglu, M., Salciglu, E. And Livanou, M. (2002). Traumatic stress response in earthquake survivors in Turkey. *Journal of Trauma Stress* 15:269-276.
- Berument, Sk., Sayil, M. And Ucanok, Z. (1999). How to help your earthquake survivor children? Parent guide book. *Turkey's Psychological news let.* 5:78-88.
- Bevington, J., et al. (2015). Working paper series. UNICEF Nepal. Author.
- Erkan, S. (2009). The effects of earthquake on the Behavioural and Emotional problems of preschoolers. *Journal of social science* volume 4, Issue 4, page: 347-354.
- Goenjina, AK. And Pynoos, RS. (1995). Psychiatric Co-morbidity in children after the 1988 earthquake. *Journal of Armenia Academic child and Adolescence Psychiatric*, 34(9).1174-1185.

Teacher's Role to Enhance Child's Recovery

- In a school with many students affected by an earthquake, teachers must plan shorter lessons, go at a slower pace, give less homework than usual, and expect a decline in performance for a short time.
- Identify students who had experience with the earthquake, particularly those who suffered losses or had to evacuate, as they are at increased risk for distress.
- Monitor conversations you and your colleagues have about the earthquake, as you may share perceptions, feelings, and memories in ways that make children feel more anxious.
- Encourage distressed students to meet with the school counsellors.
- Stay in touch with your students' parents and/or caregivers about academic performance and behaviours.