

Relationships between Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Coping Strategies in Children's Post Disaster Adjustment

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Background of the Study

Epidemiological studies show that natural disasters can have widespread and devastating impact on health, national, and community stability even if only a few individuals are primarily affected. Tsunami waves struck 12 countries in South East Asia. Among the affected countries Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand were the hardest hit, given the extent of widespread destruction suffered, the number of lives lost, and number of individuals displaced. However, at least five million people were affected in South-Asian countries.

Recent advancements in the general child disaster literature underscore the important role of coping in children's post disaster adjustment. Hence, a number of studies examining children who have been exposed to disasters indicates that a significant percent of them experience psychological distress, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and somatic complaints shortly and long-term after the disaster (e.g., Dollinger, 1986; McFarlane, 1987). Both the life threatening experience and loss aspects of the trauma exposure have been found to be associated with children's post disaster distress (e.g., La Greca et al., 1996; Shannon, et al., 1991), where as others do not display such maladaptive responses (Compas & Epping, 1993). Many researchers attribute this differential outcome to coping as it is widely believed that the ability to cope effectively plays an important role in determining adjustment following disaster (Matheny, et al., 1986).

Several studies have examined the role of children's coping efforts in post disaster functioning, extant research has shown that children's coping efforts are positively associated with their PTSD symptoms (La Greca et al., 1996; Vernberg et al., 1996). In particular, negative coping strategies (e.g., blame and anger) have been found to have unique contributions to initial PTSD symptoms (La Greca et al., 1996). Similarly, other several community studies also have found that children and adolescents with more

negative coping strategies for dealing with stress show higher levels of PTSD symptoms in response to natural disaster (La Greca et al., 1996). Concerning the role of social support and auto regulation treatment methods, other researchers have also suggested that social support and treatment methods help the individuals to cope more effectively with life stressors (Compas & Epping, 1993).

Children with multiple losses and greater environmental chaos are in greater need of intervention (Russoniello et al., 2002). Understanding the coping strategies that have helped or delayed adjustment is important in direct intervention to work with children. Children who used ineffective coping preferences such as social withdrawal, self criticism and blaming others showed significant levels of PTSD. Many research findings have shown that in the absence of effective coping, the meaning and impact of traumatic events may continue to play a role in the personality and psychological development of children (Huzziff & Ronan, 1999; Russoniello et al., 2002). In spite of psychosocial problems, intervention for psychological adjustment or well-being for children in Sri Lanka is negligible. This study therefore intended to contribute to narrow this wider gap by investigating long-term effect of PTSD of children affected by the tsunami and to identify and implement appropriate psychological intervention to change negative coping strategies and facilitate psychological well-being. Further exploration of the appearance of relationship between post traumatic stress and coping strategies within Sri Lankan cultural context was the interest of the present study. Further, coping prediction with PTSD interested to find within three measurement times of the intervention study in EG contrast to the CG.

Methodology

To study the effect of the intervention, a quasi- experimental two groups pretest and posttest control group study design was conducted. The sample as this study consisted of 80 children from the Southern Province affected by the tsunami were divided into two groups, i.e. experimental group (EG, n= 40) and control group (CG, n= 40). Pretest and posttest were administered to both groups. The Childhood Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale, four subscales: effortful disengagement, emotion- focused, problem -focused, and support -seeking in the coping test and children's psychological well-being (Kurz-Skala-Stimmung/Aktivierung [mood, fearlessness, activation, and relaxation] [KUSTA]) scale were employed for the affected children.

Outcomes of the Study

The intervention findings supported the view that auto regulation treatment methods helped to change the overall coping strategies in EG in contrast to the CG. A two-way ANOVAs with three measurement times revealed that there was overall significant change of coping effort of effortful disengagement and emotional –focused sub scales in EG compared to the CG. Problem focused and support seeking sub scales only presented short-term differences within the groups. Prior to the intervention, affected children have showed significant relationship with coping and PTSD in both groups. Further, it was found that during the treatment period it could be predicted that in EG children they were not required effort of coping with PTSD in contrast to the CG. Psychological process variables such as mood, fear Vs fearlessness, tried Vs activation and not relax Vs easily relax were found to change after intervention on children in the EG.

Conclusion

Further therapeutic intervention is essential for the tsunami affected children to change negative coping strategies. It would be crucial to establish auto regulative treatment methods for all children in tsunami affected areas along the costal belt especially in the northeast part of Sri Lanka where the people are most severely affected by the tsunami. Accordingly, the child may benefit from these endeavors to develop academic performance, prevention social relationship difficulties, decrease the PTSD symptoms, to from of a new cognition and regulate the behavior.

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Effectiveness of year end achievement tests to assess the achievement level of the students

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Background of the Study

Though the school based assessment was introduced in 1998, term tests play an important role in assessing the achievement level of the students. To judge the achievement levels of the students correctly, these tests should be valid, reliable and practicable.

Methodology