

Trauma & Disaster



BY: HIRA HASHMI

What is trauma?



Trauma is the emotional, psychological and physiological residue left over from heightened stress that accompanies experience of threat, violence and life changing events

(Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

A more overwhelming event than a person would ordinarily be expected to encounter

How do children react following trauma?



- Every child reacts to trauma differently
- Reaction will depend on:
 - Developmental level
 - Premorbid functioning
 - Previous life experiences
 - Level of exposure to the trauma
 - Parental reactions
 - Subsequent changes in living situation
- The majority of children are resilient

Types of trauma



- Family violence
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters
- Community and school violence
- Terrorism
- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Traumatic grief
- Refugee and war zone trauma

Complex trauma



- Exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events
- Typically involves simultaneous or sequential occurrence of child maltreatment, including psychological maltreatment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse and family violence, that is chronic and begins in early childhood and occurs within the primary caregiving system

Family violence



- Actual or threatened physical or sexual violence or emotional abuse

Medical Trauma

- Reactions to pain, injury and serious illness or to invasive medical procedures (such as surgery) or treatments (such as burn care)

Natural disasters



- Situations where local, state and/or national agencies and disaster relief services are called into action e.g. fires, floods, earthquakes

Community and school violence trauma

- Examples:
 - Predatory violence (robbery) and violence that comes from personal conflicts between people who are not known to the child (shootings, stabbings, beatings)
 - Fights at school, threats to or injury of child

Refugee or war zone trauma



- Exposure to war, political violence or torture
- Can be the result of living in a region affected by bombing, shooting or looting as well as forced displacement to a new home due to political reasons

Traumatic grief



- Death of a family member or someone important to the child
- May be sudden and unexpected (e.g. accident) or anticipated (e.g. illness or other natural causes)

Responses During Trauma

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✓ Emotional

- Shock
- Emotional numbing
- Denial
- Dissociation/unreality
- Panic/fear
- Hopeless/helpless
- Guilt

✓ Physiological

- Elevated BP, HR
- Fatigue,
- Hyperventilation
- Headache

✓ Cognitive

- Poor concentration
- Difficulty making decisions
- Perseveration

✓ Behavioral

- Withdrawal
- Pacing,
- Exaggerated startle
- Regressive behaviors