Resilience in ourselves and our clients: Posttraumatic growth and lessons from the Canterbury earthquake sequence

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TIERED RESPONSE

Tier 1: Resilience

Tier 2: Normal Stress Reactions

Tier 3: Functional Impairment

Tier 4: Complex

Vulnerable Individuals

Specialist Mental Health

Mental Health Liaison

NGOs

Community Support Information
ASSETT
(Adult Specialist Services Earthquake Trauma Team)

Following the major earthquakes
• Recognised that anxiety responses common
• Anticipated most would improve without treatment
• Some would need psychological treatment
• Other pathways available for people primarily depressed
• Began planning dedicated treatment service for traumatised
• Collaboration Clinical Research Unit and Anxiety Disorders Service
OUR PATIENTS

- Fear
- Anxiety symptoms – racing heart, feeling shaky
- Worry about what might/could have happened
- Hyperarousal/exaggerated startle
- Reexperiencing
- Triggers – aftershocks, sounds, movements, smells
- Avoidance
- Anxiety about being separated from family/home
- Sleep disturbance - exhaustion
- Swings in emotions
- Feeling detached, numb
- Risk taking
- Overwhelmed
OUR PATIENTS

• Several hundred referrals to ASSETT
• Group and/or individual treatment
GAP FILLER WAS HERE

The gap filler office is now located at the pallet pavilion on the corner of Kilmore & Durham.

Thanks for having us Sydenham!
isn't it wonderful that nobody need waste a single moment to improve the World

ANNIE FRANK
EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT
Observing

- considerable earthquake exposure and experiences
- coping well
- thriving after trauma
Questions

• Why do some people cope well after adverse experiences and others not?

• Do some people thrive because of the adversity?
Groups

• 100+ referred patients
• 18-65 years
• Variable exposure to EQ-related events
• Psychological distress (DSM diagnoses; Referred to tertiary mental health service)
Groups

- 100+ referred patients
- 18-65 years
- Variable exposure to EQ-related events
- Psychological distress (DSM diagnoses; Referred to tertiary mental health service)

- 100+ self-referred “coping well”
- 18-65 years
- Moderate to high exposure to EQs
- Not distressed (No current diagnoses; No tertiary treatment)
The research team

• Caroline Bell
• Frances Carter
• Janet Carter
• Helen Colhoun
• Jenny Jordan
• Dianne LeCompte
• Gini McIntosh
• Alex Loughlin
• Bridget Kimber
• Leila Marie
• Rebekah Smith
• Anna Thorpe
• Julia Martin
• Wendy Mayes
Measures

- Demographic
- Structured diagnostic interview – MINI
- Narrative of earthquake experience – Exposure, coping, resilience, functioning, posttraumatic growth

Psychological
- Traumatic Exposure Severity Scale
- Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS)
- PTSD Checklist
- Work and Social Adjustment Scale
- Alcohol Use Disorders Inventory
- Reasons for Drinking Questionnaire
- Connor Davidson Resilience Scale
- Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

Neuropsychological
- Rey Auditory-Verbal Learning Test – Immediate + delayed recall
- Groton Maze Learning Test – Immediate + delayed recall
- Digit Symbol Substitution Test
- Harmer Facial emotion recognition task

Biological
- Salivary cortisol
- Heart rate variability
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• **Narrative of earthquake experience** – Exposure, coping, resilience, functioning, posttraumatic growth
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Posttraumatic growth

• Posttraumatic growth: the positive changes that can occur as a struggle with a potentially traumatic event (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998)
Facets of posttraumatic growth noted in research to date

• Growth in the domain of self
  • Boosted personal agency/strength
  • New possibilities for life

• Changes in life philosophy
  • Greater appreciation of life
  • Spiritual / existential growth

• Improvements in relating to others
• Resilience: the lack of pathology in the face of high-risk circumstances (Lepore & Revenson, 2009)
How is posttraumatic growth different from resilience?

• Posttraumatic growth suggests growing from traumatic experiences
• Posttraumatic growth can co-exist with ongoing distress (posttraumatic stress disorder, negative affect)
Comprehensive model of posttraumatic growth (simplified)

Person pre-trauma (with assumptive world beliefs)
Influenced by individual differences and own culture

Potentially disruptive event

Distress
Assumptive beliefs challenged

Coping efforts: ruminate, social support, revise narrative/schema

Posttraumatic growth
More complex narrative
Acceptance of changed world

Calhoun, Cann & Tedeschi (2010)
Does resilience preclude posttraumatic growth?
What did we find?

• Sample exhibited posttraumatic growth
• Resilience did not influence levels of posttraumatic growth
• Posttraumatic growth related to higher peritraumatic distress, distress associated with life events, and ongoing distress from earthquake-related events (EQC, insurance...)
• Women showed more posttraumatic growth than men overall
  • Appreciation of Life
  • Relating to Others
  • Personal Strength
• Women showed more peritraumatic distress than men
** = significant at p < .01, * = significant at p < .05
Thematic Analysis

- 100 interviews transcribed in full
- Data entered into database and examined for presence of themes. Coding scheme developed
- Interviews ‘tagged’ with codes where certain themes occurred
- Common themes noted and grouped together
Themes

• Balanced acknowledgement of positive and negative outcomes

• Positive appraisal
  • Self
  • Others
  • Silver linings, ‘lucky’
  • Earthquake as an opportunity
  • Downplay the negative

• Role
Themes related to posttraumatic growth

• Greater sense of community
• Greater appreciation of life, the little things
• Better relationships
• Self as stronger
• Spiritual / existential change
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CONNECT
TALK & LISTEN, BE THERE, FEEL CONNECTED

BE ACTIVE
DO WHAT YOU CAN, ENJOY WHAT YOU DO, MOVE YOUR MOOD

TAKE NOTICE
REMEMBER THE SIMPLE THINGS THAT GIVE YOU JOY

KEEP LEARNING
EMBRACE NEW EXPERIENCES, SEE OPPORTUNITIES, SURPRISE YOURSELF

Give
Your time, your words, your presence
Thematic analysis

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Your time, your words, your presence
TAKE A BREATHER...
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Talk & listen, be there, feel connected.

Be Active
Do what you can, enjoy what you do, move your mood.

Take Notice
Remember the simple things that give you joy.

Keep Learning
Embrace new experiences, see opportunities, surprise yourself.

Give
Your time, your words, your presence.