Monday, September 12, 2016

**Articles Summarised**

» Comorbidity of PTSD, major depression, and substance use disorder among adolescent victims
» The role of anger and ongoing stressors in mental health following a natural disaster
» Post-traumatic stress disorder and depression prevalence and associated risk factors among local disaster relief and reconstruction workers fourteen months after the Great East Japan earthquake: A cross-sectional study
» Drinking behavior and mental illness among evacuees in Fukushima following the Great East Japan Earthquake: The Fukushima health management survey
» Prevalence and predictors of somatic symptoms among child and adolescents with probable post-traumatic stress disorder: A cross-sectional study conducted in 21 primary and secondary schools after an earthquake

**Introduction**

This newsletter provides a brief summary of some of the latest research and publications that may be of interest to practitioners in the field of addiction and mental health. Each newsletter will cover one of the themes of the Alberta Addiction and Mental Health Research Partnership Program and provides structured accounts of research on a given topic, based on a limited search of the literature for recent publications. We do not thoroughly assess the quality of the research identified so this publication acts as a signpost for further reading and assessment, rather than as a definitive account of what should be included in clinical practice.

This month’s edition focuses on Natural Disasters.

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**Comorbidity of PTSD, major depression, and substance use disorder among adolescent victims**


**Study Design:** Cross-sectional study

**Focus of the Study:** Previous research has shown that victims of natural disasters can develop
psychiatric problems. There is, however, a paucity of research focusing on prevalence and predictors of co-occurring psychiatric problems following disasters, especially among adolescents. This study examined the prevalence of comorbid posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive episode (MDE), and substance use disorder (SUD) among a sample of 2,000 adolescents exposed to tornadoes in Alabama and Joplin, Missouri during 2011. It also assessed the risk factors for different patterns of comorbid disorders.

Key Findings:
» Overall, 4% of adolescents in this study met criteria for two or more psychiatric disorders; 3.5% met diagnostic criteria for PTSD only, 3.2% for MDE only, and 0.9% for SUD only.
» Comorbid PTSD and MDE was the most common pattern of comorbidity followed by PTSD and SUD.
» Among adolescents who met criteria for PTSD or MDE, nearly a quarter also met the threshold for probable SUD.
» Among adolescents 12 to 15 years of age, girls were much more likely than boys to have PTSD + MDE and MDE + SUD. No gender differences were observed for 16 to 17 year-olds.
» Adolescents with parents injured in the tornado were at higher risk of PTSD + MDE.
» Prior trauma exposure (e.g., natural disaster, physical assault, domestic violence), persistent loss of services (e.g., water, food, electricity), and female gender were associated with increased risk of comorbid problems.

Implications for Practice: Adolescent victims of natural disasters should be screened and assessed for comorbid psychiatric problems, including SUD. Practitioners screening at-risk adolescents may want to focus on demographic characteristics, namely gender, prior trauma exposure, and impact of the disaster on the family. The authors suggest that therapies, such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, may be effective in addressing comorbid post-disaster psychiatric problems in adolescents.


The role of anger and ongoing stressors in mental health following a natural disaster

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Focus of the Study: Recent studies have consistently demonstrated that natural disasters can have a serious impact on the mental health of victims; however, researchers are still investigating the various factors that can influence the development of psychiatric disorders after natural disaster events. This study examined the influence of anger, alcohol use, and ongoing life stressors on mediating the relationship between exposure to a natural disaster and mental health problems (i.e., PTSD, depression symptoms). Data from 1,017 adult residents affected by the Black Saturday bushfires in Australia were analyzed.

Key Findings:
» There was an association between exposure to bushfire and self reports of mental health problems.
» Anger and major life stressors (e.g., job loss, divorce) were independently associated with mental health problems, outside of any factors associated with the fire.
» Gender analysis showed that there was an association between bushfire and mental health problems for women but not for men. Conversely, there was an association between anger and major life stressors and mental health problems for both women and men.
» The effect of anger and major life stressors on mental health problems remained significant for both women and men.
» Self-reported alcohol consumption was not associated with mental health problems in the affected
Implications for Practice: Practitioners should consider measuring levels of anger when screening and assessing victims of natural disasters. Targeted anger-focused interventions could be considered part of treatment planning for victims with mental health problems.

Link to abstract: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25586750

Post-traumatic stress disorder and depression prevalence and associated risk factors among local disaster relief and reconstruction workers fourteen months after the Great East Japan earthquake: A cross-sectional study

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Focus of the Study: Local government (municipality) workers, medical services personnel, and health care workers play an important role in relief and reconstruction efforts following natural or manmade disasters. These workers face many stressors in their relief and reconstruction roles, while often being survivors of the disaster themselves. Compared to the studies focusing on mental health of traditional first responders (e.g., firefighters, police officers, emergency medical technicians), fewer studies have examined mental health of this vitally important group of relief workers. Using self-administered questionnaires, this study assessed mental health conditions and risk factors among the local disaster relief workers, in the coastal area of the Miyagi prefecture, 14 months after the Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE).

A total of 1,294 participants, consisting of firefighters (n=327), local municipality workers (n=610), and hospital medical workers (n=357) completed the questionnaires 14 months after the GEJE. The questionnaires assessed the prevalence of probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), probable depression, high psychological distress, as well as, personal and work-related risk factors.

Key Findings:
» The prevalence of probable PTSD, probable depression and high general psychological distress was significantly higher among municipality workers and medical workers than firefighters.
» Lack of rest was associated with depression in all occupations. Involvement in disaster-related work was linked to depression in municipal workers, while lack of communication appeared to increase the risk for depression in both the municipal and medical workers.
» Lack of rest appeared to increase the risk of PTSD in both the municipal and medical workers. Lack of communication increased the risk for PTSD in firefighters and medical workers, while involvement in disaster-related efforts appeared to increase the PTSD risk in municipal workers.

Implications for Practice: Considering the length of time often needed for relief and rebuilding efforts, interventions to promote workplace communication and rest may improve the working conditions and risks faced by local workers assigned to these duties.

Link to abstract: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25879546

Drinking behavior and mental illness among evacuees in Fukushima following the Great East Japan Earthquake: The Fukushima health management survey
Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Focus of the Study: Research has shown that disasters are associated with increased consumption and abuse of alcohol and increased prevalence of mental illnesses. Few studies, however, have examined the association between alcohol consumption and mental illness following a compound disaster (i.e., more than one disaster occurring simultaneously).

This study examined the relationship between drinking behaviours and risk for mental illness following the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent radiation leak at Fukushima nuclear plant. Data was collected from the 2012 Mental Health and Lifestyle survey conducted with over 56,000 evacuees.

Key Findings:
» Compared to participants who used alcohol, those who were non-drinkers pre-disaster were at higher risk of serious mental illness.
» Participants who were non-drinkers before the disaster and then became light drinkers after the disaster were at increased risk of developing serious mental illness (19.8%). Non-drinkers who became heavy drinkers after the disaster were at the highest risk of developing serious mental illness (40.6%).
» Participants who were consumers of alcohol pre-disaster, and then abstained from alcohol consumption post-disaster were also at risk of serious mental illness (20.2%).

Implications for Practice: Intervention plans for post-disaster care should be developed with attention to screening for alcohol use. Health care professionals should be aware of changes in alcohol use following compound disasters in order to help reduce the risk of onset of mental illness.

Link to full abstract: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26895603

Prevalence and predictors of somatic symptoms among child and adolescents with probable posttraumatic stress disorder: A cross-sectional study conducted in 21 primary and secondary schools after an earthquake

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Focus of the Study: Many survivors of disasters go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and are likely to experience comorbid somatic symptoms (e.g., dizziness or fainting, blurred vision, tinnitus, headaches) in wake of the disaster. Previous studies have shown that those with PTSD are more likely to experience somatic symptoms than psychiatric disorders. Children can be greatly impacted by traumatic events; however, limited research on prevalence rates of somatic symptoms in children or adolescents with PTSD has been conducted.

This study focused on rates of various somatic symptoms in child and adolescent earthquake survivors who had probable PTSD. A survey of 3,053 students was completed three months following an earthquake in China, and included scales measuring PTSD and somatic symptoms, and earthquake-related experiences.

Key Findings:
» Prevalence rates for all somatic symptoms measured were higher in the group with probable PTSD compared to the control group.
» The most frequently reported somatic symptoms among those with probable PTSD were trouble sleeping (83.2%), feeling tired or having low energy (74.4%), stomach pain (63.2%), dizziness (58.1%),
and headaches (57.5%).
» Older children were more likely to experience somatic symptoms compared to younger children.
» After controlling for the effects of PTSD symptoms, predictors of somatic symptoms included being an older child, having lost family members, having witnessed someone get seriously injured and having witnessed someone get buried.

Implications for Practice: Health care professionals should be aware that children suffering from PTSD are likely to experience comorbid somatic symptoms. Screening tools or interventions aimed at child or adolescent earthquake survivors should take into account effects of both PTSD and somatic symptoms.


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