TSUNAMI DISASTER
PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE FOR INDIVIDUALS / FAMILIES

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND NEURO SCIENCES
BANGALORE - 560 029.
TSUNAMI
PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE FOR INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

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FOREWORD

India woke up to one of the worst natural disasters on the 26th of December 2004 that the country has ever seen in the recent history. Tsunami the killer wave came in fraction of seconds lasting for few minutes taking away with it the lives, livelihood, destroying the fabric of life leaving behind a trail of destruction. The states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and the Union Territories of Pondicherry, Andaman and Nicobar Island were the worst affected. The official estimates issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs say that the death toll due to tsunami has crossed 10,000. According to the latest status report released by the Home Ministry, Tamilnadu accounted for the largest number of human casualty where 7,923 people lost their lives. The total loss accounting for the loss of houses, livelihood and other infrastructure estimated were Rs. 47 billion. Tamilnadu alone accounts for 50% of the total loss in South India followed by 13 billion in Kerala and Rs 5 billion in Pondicherry respectively. The loss in Andhra Pradesh was calculated to be Rs. 3.4 billion.

The worst affected by the tsunami were the fisherman community who lived a few meters away from the shore in order to make out their living. The sea was their world as that was their means of livelihood. The disaster not only affected the fisherman but also destroyed the lives and the livelihood of individuals who lived on the sea shore like the vendors, the mechanics who repaired the boats, shell gatherers who made a living by making pretty handicrafts etc., In the after math of the disaster among the worst affected it was found that women and children have taken the brunt of the tsunami.

As a premier National Institute with focus on mental health, NIMHANS was quick to reach out to those affected. NIMHANS accepted its assigned role to be the Nodal Agency to provide services and organize for effective, efficient and coordinated psychosocial care to all the regions and victims of tsunami. NIMHANS as lead government organization is working in cooperation with the State Government Departments of Health, Education and Social Welfare, other national institutes like AIIMS-New Delhi, PGI-Chandigarh, CIP-Ranchi and IBHAS-New Delhi. It is actively collaborating with international agencies and the professional bodies of mental health. Working in tandem with the district and local administration, an attempt is being made to evolve a comprehensive long-term plan of action.

Addressing the psychosocial impact of the disaster is an integral aspect in the relief and the rehabilitation process among the survivors. It enables them in their arduous journey to come back to their normal life. The process in returning to normalcy would be more meaningful when the community is strengthened by means of psychosocial care at the community level. This manual addresses the needs of the individuals and families who survived the tsunami disaster and present strategies that can be adopted to gain control over the experience.

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PREFACE

India is prone to various natural disasters and tsunami is an addition to this theatre of destruction. On 26th December of 2004, the world faced one of the worst disasters that crushed the life of mankind in 12 countries around the globe. India, especially the coastal areas of South India and Andaman Nichobar Islands were to face the cure bites of the giant waves. With huge destruction and loss of life and livelihood, the tsunami destroyed the basic fabric of the society. Looking at the needs of rehabilitation for bringing the normally in the life of the survivors the Government and Non-Government organizations took active steps to reach out to the people. Unlike in past disasters, this time the need to support the healing of mind was much recognized. CARE was sensitive to respond to the psychological sufferings of the survivors thought community based psychosocial care intervention with technical support from NIMHANS. Psychosocial care has been one of the prime focuses of CARE India’s Tsunami response program.

NIMHANS being the apex institution in mental health in the country came forward to join hands with CARE in providing support for psychosocial care of the disaster survivors. CARE and NIMHANS had a very meaningful engagement in the past while working with the disaster situation in Gujarat. The association with NIMHANS helped to integrate psychosocial care with other forms of rehabilitation intervention initiated by CARE for the tsunami survivors. The spontaneous response of the government and community based organizations helped to work on the issue of psychological care in a very intensive manner.

The survivors of any disaster undergo a lot of emotional turmoil. This may be reflected in terms of their behavior, interaction with others or through various physical or psychological reactions. This situation creates a considerable amount of distress and functional disability among the survivors. Therefore, basic psychosocial support to ensure self-initiative is most crucial after the disaster so as to restore normalization and ensure recovery in the life of the survivors. This manual is an effort to help the survivors to look beyond the satire of life and build up their own future of hope by taking initiatives within self, family and community. The psychosocial care is a process where we have to try help each individual to work for themselves so as to enable them to work for others at large. The process ensures creating an enhanced quality of life with better functionality and reduced stress. This is a process of self-realization and empowerment, where “you can help yourself”. It is still a long way to go to rebuild the human spirits and hopes in the despondent life of the survivors, to rebuild the eroded support system and to ensure rebuilding of a caring community. CARE-NIMHANS program is a major effort towards this goal.

The content of this manual is based on the experiences shared by the survivors in the initial phases of the assessment carried out in the field by the NIMHANS team in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Andhman Nicobar Islands. We acknowledge the contribution of people and organizations associated with this initiative. The Governmental, Non Governmental, Community Based Organizations, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Self-Help Group members and volunteers were the sources for this manual. My sincere thanks is due to all of them.
I on behalf of CARE India thank Dr. D. Nagaraja, Director, Vice Chancellor, NIMHANS, Bangalore, for his continued support to the psychosocial care initiatives in Tsunami affected areas. My sincere thanks to Dr. Shobha Srinath, Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatry; Dr. Satwant Pasricha, Professor and Head, Department of Clinical Psychology; Dr. R. Parthasarathy, Professor and Head of Psychiatric Social Work department; Prof. Mohan K. Isaac, Professor of Psychiatry, NIMHANS, Bangalore for their valuable suggestions and review of the material. Warm remembrances of Dr. R. Srinivasa Murthy, STP, Mental Health and rehabilitation of Psychiatric Services, WHO, EMRO, Egypt who initiated the Disaster Mental Health Care Services for Bhopal gas survivors and Psychosocial care initiatives for disaster survivors in Orissa Gujarat. CARE Gujarat Harmony Project greatly benefitted from his passion to support the mental health activities in disasters.

Special thanks to the members of CARE and NIMHANS team in Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanniyakumari for their continuous support and effort in materializing the programme. Thanks to Mr. Balamurugan and his team at Vizhigal Publishers who deserve special mention for the effort and time devoted to this work. My special thanks to Dr. Sekar and his most spirited and dedicated team to have made this possible today.

I sincerely appreciate the contribution and hard work of the authors of this manual who have committed for this great effort of ‘healing the minds’ of the tsunami affected people. I am sure this will be an important toolkit for disaster management professionals and humanitarian workers in the world.

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TSUNAMI AND SURVIVORS

The states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and union territories of Pondicherry and Andaman and Nicobar Islands witnessed massive destruction following the huge surging tsunami waves hitting the coastal land on 26th of December 2004. Tsunamis are high tidal waves caused due to the sea water entering into the coastal land areas. It is the first of its nature in our country. The tsunami took away the lives of thousands, destroyed houses and disrupted the entire fabric of the fisher folk and others living in the coastal areas.

Official estimates issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, says that death toll due to tsunami is 9995, with Tamilnadu accounting for 7923 death alone. The number of missing people was put at 6011 after thirteen days of the tsunami disaster. The total loss accounting for the loss of houses, means of livelihood and other infrastructures estimated were Rs 47 billion in Tamilnadu, which is alone 50% of the total loss in South India, followed by Rs 13 billion in Kerala and Rs 5 billion in Pondicherry respectively. The loss in Andhra Pradesh was calculated to be Rs 3.4 billion.

In all the four states it was the fishermen and others living in coastal areas like you who were badly affected by the tsunami disaster. You lost your family members, near and dear ones, fishing nets, boats and other means of livelihood, houses, thereby leaving your lives shattered and destroyed. You have spent your lives living near the seashore for generations together, worshipping the Sea Goddess who has nurtured and protected you and your families, enabled you to fish and feed your family. We do understand your feeling that the same sea all of a sudden became angry and furious and caused this massive destruction to your life.

In the past you and your families have survived floods, storms and cyclones, which have caused severe damage to your houses and living conditions. You have also tackled the dangerous sea conditions, putting your lives to risk while you went for fishing in the deep sea. But the recent tsunami has caused a severe damage to your means of livelihood and has taken away the lives of your near and dear ones. The huge magnitude of loss caused by the tsunami disaster has brought your life to a standstill. This has had a devastating effect on you and your family members.
The monumental loss and pain caused during the tsunami has left a deep scar in your minds that will take time to heal. Mastering changes in life situations is a part of human existence. However, life never prepares people to face such severe adversities most of the time. Whenever an individual faces an overwhelming event that is perceived as dangerous and beyond normal coping capacity, the ability to respond adequately is limited temporarily. At that point of time people react in ways, which are different from the usual behaviour that is characterized by disturbing memories of the event, avoidance of experiences that remind of the event, withdrawal, fear and hyper arousal. It is important to understand that these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.

As a survivor you and your family might have experienced loss and suffering like:

- Severe stress and trauma due to the loss of near and dear ones
- Sudden displacement and separation from the family and community
- Suffering due to physical injuries and other health problems
- Difficulties of living in the temporary shelters after the tsunami disaster
- Loss of livelihood and uncertainty about the future
- Demands of rebuilding personal, family and community life.

All these have resulted in feelings of sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness, frustration and anger. Like tsunami in any disaster situation the social support system breaks down because everyone is affected by the disaster.

You as a survivor of tsunami need to understand:

> These reactions are normal
> Most people experience them
> They can master these reactions so that the path to recovery and rehabilitation after the tsunami disaster becomes much easier.
By understanding this, you will not feel overwhelmed by emotions and reactions; rather, you will be able to work towards adopting effective coping techniques to master the situations.

Having relatives and friends who could help through a crisis may not be possible as they would also have been affected by the tsunami disaster. It therefore becomes necessary to rebuild the support system around you and the family. This booklet presents information to enable you and your families to understand the reactions that you might have experienced after the tsunami. The information given will provide you a better understanding of the difficulties that you could face in future in reorganizing and rebuilding your own life and that of your family.

IMMEDIATE PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE

Anything that exceeds one’s personal ability to cope with a stressful event becomes a crisis. Crisis affects everyone, and every individual reacts to a crisis situation differently. It depends on the individual how he/she manages through a crisis situation and remains positive making the best out of the situation.

Some among you in the community would have provided psychosocial care immediately after the tsunami. This care was of great help during the rescue and relief phases of tsunami. The activities that were carried out by you were:

- Meeting the immediate needs of food, water, clothing, shelter and medications of the tsunami survivors
- Facilitating the last rites of the deceased
- Facilitating to contact other family and community members
- Helping to get relief materials
- Attending to the medical needs of the tsunami survivor
- Listening to his/her personal experiences of the tsunami disaster.

During the tsunami situation, apart from the emotional reactions that you experienced, you also faced several stresses that arose from the living conditions that you were subjected to subsequent to the tsunami, posing a major crisis. Different people of different age groups experienced stress in different ways. For e.g., a child who was regularly attending the school prior to the tsunami, found it stressful
to see that his/her school was washed away. Similarly, it was stressful for women to live in a temporary shelter where there was lack of privacy in their day-to-day living in terms of bathing, changing, washing, etc.

To all these day-to-day stressors, survivors reacted in varied ways, which ranged from anger to feelings of helpless. It should be recognized and understood that many emotional reactions of tsunami survivors arose from the problems of living conditions caused by the tsunami disaster. So it was not the tsunami alone that disrupted your daily life but also the subsequent living situations that forced you to face the adversities. It was absolutely normal for you to feel helpless and hopeless subsequent to the tsunami and you would need assistance from others at such a time. In order to help yourself to get back to normal life, you need to focus on three basic things:

- **Understand the changes that you experience in the body and mind as a result of the disaster. This will enable you to cope better**

When people face any traumatic event like tsunami, they experience both emotional and physical reactions. These reactions and feelings are normal responses and occur in most people who face an event that overwhelm them. Acknowledging this will help you understand better, the changes experienced and be more comfortable in dealing with what you are experiencing.

- **Decrease the physical and emotional effects so that you start feeling better**

It is well established that sharing of experiences and seeking support decreases emotional stress. Meeting with others and the Community Level Workers (Teachers, Anganwadi workers, Nurses, Panchayat members, revenue inspectors, temple priest, NGO/CBO workers, women's group members, volunteers, and local community leaders) regularly, relating to them what you have experienced and how you are currently feeling, will decrease the pressure of the strong emotions within you. The CLWs will help you by listening to your problems, teaching you to relax and guiding you about some of the effective coping strategies.
• Get support to rebuild your life so that you can resume normal life routines as soon as possible.

The important task of rebuilding the life should start at the earliest and this could be in terms of housing, livelihood, health, etc. For e.g., you may want help with compensation, assistance in legal work, practical help like getting forms, someone to accompany you to the offices or help you open a bank account or you may need some assistance with medical problems, etc. Giving attention to these needs and taking action will help in rebuilding your life. The CLWs can assist you and your family members with information and support in all these areas.

The diagram that follows captures the recovery process after a disaster and what you can do for yourself to hasten the recovery process.

**STRATEGIES TO HANDLE THE EFFECTS OF DISASTER ON YOU**

**DISASTER**

**DISTRESS AND DISABILITY**

**HELP YOURSELF TO RECOVER**

**Understand changes in your body and mind:**
- Share your feelings and fears with others
- Be with people who care for you
- Accept support from others

**Support and rebuild your life by getting help for:**
- Housing
- Compensation
- Legal aid/advice
- Education

**Decrease the physical and emotional effects**
- Relax
- Pursue your interest
- Get social support
- Practice spirituality

**ADJUSTMENT OR MASTERY OVER EMOTIONAL DISTRESS**

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*TSUNAMI PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE FOR INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES*
Remember

- All people are emotionally affected by the disaster
- Survivors react to this unexpected event in different ways, which are normal reactions to an abnormal situation
- Most people experience emotional reactions
- Survivors can master these reactions and move ahead towards rebuilding their lives
- It should be recognised and understood here that many emotional reactions of the disaster survivors, arise from the problems of living conditions caused by the disaster.
Traumatic experiences cause stress, which is often beyond the coping capacity of an individual. In such situations, body and mind react by measures of 'fight' or 'flight'. These reactions manifest in the form of changes in behaviour, bodily experiences and emotional reactions. This section helps you to understand some of these experiences. Understanding these reactions will help you feel more comfortable in dealing with these changes.

**Remember**

- These emotional reactions are normal responses to an abnormal experience
- The reactions are common and experienced by everyone
- Everybody who has experienced the tsunami disaster is affected by it
- The reactions will manifest differently at different periods of time after the tsunami disaster
- Rehabilitation and rebuilding are slow processes and take time.

**TSUNAMI DISASTER**

**NORMAL REACTIONS**

- **OUTCRY (immediate)** (fear, sadness, grief, and anger)
- **DENIAL (one to two weeks)** (refusing to face the memory of the disaster)
- **INTRUSION (six months)** (unstoppable thoughts of the events)

**WORKING THROUGH (six months onwards)** (facing the reality of what has happened)

**ADJUSTMENT** (going on with life)
It is important to recognize and understand these stages of emotional responses so that in course of time you would be able to overcome these intense emotions that are being experienced. For instance, if you have constant thoughts about what happened, you may worry about losing control over your mind or developing some mental breakdown. However, what will make you feel more comfortable with these thoughts is knowing:

- That it is normal to have such thoughts
- It happens to most people who have had a traumatic experience
- You will soon feel better.

You may experience a range of reactions at various phases of the tsunami disaster. It is better to understand various reactions that you experienced as a survivor at different points of time. This will help to understand your emotions, behaviour and the recovery methods adopted by you. The main aim of this understanding is to help you to recover in a healthy and positive manner. During the tsunami disaster you experienced the massive loss of either human life in your family, property, shelter, cattle, or all. The emotional reactions to the tsunami disaster and the loss are often unrecognized and understood by many as being natural and expected. Let us now examine the reactions of people to the tsunami disaster.

Immediate (at the time of tsunami disaster)

Shock and/or Disbelief
Disaster strikes at the most unexpected hour when you are not prepared. You could find yourself to be in a state of shock and show decreased activity. Another common emotional reaction is to feel that the whole event was not real but a bad dream, i.e. one of total disbelief.

A number of people were shocked by the fact that the tsunami had caused massive destruction in just a matter of a few seconds. 30 year old M stares vacantly into space, does not communicate with anyone and holds on to her two year old son after witnessing her 4 year old daughter being washed away by the tsunami waves.

35 year-old P was unable to find her daughter when she tried to escape with her son. She frantically searched for her daughter, but was not able to find her. She refused to believe that her daughter would be dead and felt that she might have been washed away to a different part of the shore. She continued her search until they found her daughter’s dead body stuck in a thorny bush on the next day after the tsunami.

Numbness/feeling empty
You might be in a state of numbness and feeling of emptiness. You may fail to feel anything, even the loss of a near and dear one. You might withdraw yourself totally. You might not eat or sleep for many days.
When 27 year-old S was standing on the bridge along with his three friends, it broke down and they fell into the surging waters. He was washed away to the shore, but he saw one of his friends being drowned. He is currently silent and his reactions are numb. He is unable to sleep properly and walks aimlessly the whole day.

**Tension and anxiety**

The event happens so suddenly that there is no time to think as to what is happening. The immediate reaction is to run for safety. Fear is the predominant feature seen. You might have palpitation, tremors of the hands and at times profuse sweating of the palms.

A 65 year-old lady recalled her experience about the tsunami: “I was surrounded by water till my neck. I was holding my two young grand children in both my hands. I thought all of us would die immediately in the gushing water. I am very nervous, my heart beats faster and I am still fearful when I think about it”

**Panic**

At the time of undergoing severe stress panic is a common and normal reaction. Hence, for people to panic at the time of tsunami is normal. Imagine a large number of people shouting and running towards the north for safety. It is natural that all of them will panic and try to get out at the same time making the situation confusing and chaotic.

A 35 year-old P was taking bath, when the surging waves came in. P being inside was unable to understand as to what happened. She could hear the roar of the people in her surrounding. She covered her body with a pavada (skirt) and came out to see what happened. Seeing the water gushing and people running she was not in a position to think or act. She was pulled by a neighbour and started running for safety.

A 40 year old man recalls, “When I saw the huge sea waves coming, I thought I would die. I was extremely scared, and ran for about 2 kilometers for safety. I was panting”.

**After the tsunami disaster:**

**Vigilance**

You might find yourself being hyper alert – responding to each and every sound in the surrounding, receding or rising of the waves, constantly on vigil for signs of further tsunami. Due to this, you find difficulty in sleeping. Sometimes you also become irritable and angry. *This is a very normal phenomenon. It is only a protective behaviour, which decreases gradually over a period of time.*
10 year old K on hearing the sound of pressure cooker, aircraft or the sound of the waves becomes fearful. Sometimes on hearing the word ‘thanni’ (water) he starts running northwards for safety.

**Despair**

You might feel helpless, abandoned and anticipate for some help. Even in a crowd you might feel lonely. This is characterized by feeling sad and hopeless. You will experience a great sense of loss, feeling of loneliness, emptiness, hopelessness, worthlessness and ideas of death might also occur.

40 year old M and her aged mother were alone when the tsunami struck. The mother was bed ridden due to old age and fever. She wanted someone to help lift her mother and run but all were running. When water came in she tried closing the door but failed. Finally she went and hugged her mother thinking that both of them would die in the surging waves.

**Guilt**

Feelings of repeatedly blaming oneself for having survived keeps coming back, especially if you have lost your near and dear ones. The fact that you have survived may cause distress and discomfort to you.

36 years old T was giving bath to her children when she saw the waves coming. She pulled her children back. She started running towards the shore to save herself and her children. Yet the waves washed away her children. She repeatedly keeps saying, “I would have saved my children if I had held more tightly. I am responsible for their death”.

**Anger**

After the tsunami, you might have felt angry due to the loss and pain that you have experienced. This anger could be towards the Sea Goddess, accompanied with a feeling of betrayal that the Sea Goddess whom you worshipped and depended on has, taken lives of thousands, washed away your houses and boats, thereby destroying your life.

60-year-old J who lost her grand children says,

“Why did this happen to me? What wrong have I done? I worship God everyday, and yet God punished me in this way.”

A forty-year-old man who lost his family members, fishing boat and nets in the tsunami says to a volunteer,

“Why do you come everyday and ask me about what I have lost. Will you be able to get back my children, my boat and nets? I have lost everything. I don’t have anything of my own”
except this torn shirt. I don’t want your clothes, food. I am happy with what I have, at least that’s my own belonging. Leave me alone, I don’t want to talk to you.”

Avoidance:
Many of us tend to avoid going near the sea or the shore. We consciously ask the children not to play near the sea shore.

“Our friend was washed away when we were playing on the sea shore. Now we feel scared to go near the sea. We stay back here in our new place and play.” Stated 12 year old N.

Blame
Many of you might be blaming/criticizing each other for the loss that has occurred. This is very common and a natural reaction that you might be undergoing.

30-year-old M was holding her children in her arms while she ran to save her life during tsunami, yet lost all her three children in the tsunami disaster. She now sits quiet, with a blank look on her face. She is withdrawn, refuses to eat and is unable to sleep. Her husband blames her for not being able to take adequate care of her children at the time when the waves struck. He holds her responsible for the death of the children.

Reliving the experience and flashbacks
Several times one would remember or re-live the experience of the tsunami disaster repeatedly. Small incidents may trigger these experiences. This can happen more during nights. Being involved in relief work can also trigger off ‘these attacks’. Having to remove dead bodies or identifying dead bodies might put you through a state of panic.

After the tsunami, a forty-year-old man was constantly engaged in helping to retrieve the dead bodies in his village Primary Health Centre (PHC). After seeing so many dead bodies, now he feels haunted by the images of the dead bodies. He cannot sleep as these images keep on coming in front of his eyes. He constantly talks about it and has become irritable.

Poor physical health
It is common for people to feel physically weak, become easily exhausted, have symptoms like headache, vomiting, chest pain, rapid heart beating, sweating, and poor appetite for a few weeks/months after the tsunami disaster.

15 year old G vomited mud and sand four times after being rescued. Subsequently she used to cough and spit sand from her throat. She has fever on and off and has become very weak. She has lost weight and is not able to sleep and eat properly now a days.
Substance Abuse

Within a few weeks of the tsunami disaster, it was found that there was an increase in consumption of addictive substances, especially country liquor among the survivors. This was mostly seen among men who used to spend all the money that they got during the relief phase. Addiction to tobacco and gutkha was also widely prevalent.

42-year-old C who lost his two children, fishing boat and nets in the tsunami says,

"I have nothing to do here in the relief camp. I sit idle all the time. If I sit idle, it reminds me of my children whom I lost. If I drink, I can atleast forget my sorrows for sometime and get relief."

Bodily complaints

Many of you might experience bodily pains like headache, feeling weak, giddiness, body aches, head reeling, etc. However few might experience these pains to be persisting even after the tsunami.

In one of the medical camps in Nagapattinam district it was found that S consulted the doctor frequently with complaints of body aches and pains. However, there were no bruises or obvious injuries, to explain such pain.

Different other reactions

A few may withdraw into themselves totally. They may not eat or sleep for many days. Very few can have a more severe reaction – feeling excited, confused, wandering, repeatedly doing or saying something.

Future (one year after the tsunami disaster)

Although some of the following reactions/difficulties might be seen during the later phase of the tsunami, some of these reactions were found to appear in the early phase of tsunami disaster in its rudimentary form:

Dissociative Convulsions

Some might be seen to have fits characterized by jerky movements of hands and legs which occur, at specific places or when meeting specific persons. They want their unfulfilled wishes to be fulfilled.

Sadness and crying

Even a year after the tsunami, some people might be sad and crying, often remembering their near and dear ones whom they had lost in the tsunami.

Issues related to the ex gratia compensation

After the tsunami, families were supposed to receive one lakh of rupees as an ex gratia compensation
for a single death that occurred during the disaster. Many children who lost both their parents would thus get a lumpsum amount of compensation money. It was noticed that many orphan children, who otherwise did not have any near relatives were all of a sudden adopted/looked after by people who falsely claimed to be their distant relatives, just to grab the compensation money.

**Difficulties in rebuilding the livelihood**

Many have lost their livelihood subsequent to disaster. It is difficult to rebuild the livelihood once again, as almost all have lost their fishing boats and nets. Procuring these boats and nets is difficult, as they are expensive. Moreover, most of these fishermen are not skilled to do any other activities other than fishing; as a result engaging in other income generative program is also not possible. All these factors have posed a great difficulty in restarting their livelihood once again.

Apart from the large chunk of fishermen population, it is also the blacksmith, boat repairers, chisel makers and tourist hawkers who have been badly affected by the tsunami disaster. The tourist hawkers who otherwise used to hawk on the beach (which were tourist spots) are no more able to do so, as a result of which their livelihood is badly affected.

48-year-old V who lost his fishing boats and nets in the tsunami says, "I don't know how I will get back my boat and nets. If Government doesn't provide any support for this it will be very difficult. In other situation, whenever we were in need of money we usually borrowed from our other community people, but now they have also lost their boat, nets and other property. So they won't be able to help me."

**Difficulties in getting social security benefits**

Women who became widows subsequent to the tsunami disaster are finding it difficult to get the widow pension, ex gratia compensation money etc. due to the long tedious process at the governmental level. Moreover, women are unaware of these Governmental procedures of filling the appropriate form, meeting the right Government official etc., to get the entitlements.

In the initial days of relief distribution it was seen that the women headed households without a male child had problems in getting them enrolled for the benefits.

**Remember**

- All people are affected emotionally by the tsunami disaster
- Emotional reactions are different for every individual at different phases of the tsunami disaster
- These reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal situation
- Usually the distress will start decreasing after few weeks of the disaster
- Survivors might face different challenges in rebuilding their lives and the community.
RECOVERY MECHANISMS FOR THE TSUNAMI SURVIVORS

Emotional reactions triggered by the tsunami disaster will start decreasing in most people in a few weeks when they initiate some actions to reorganize and rebuild their lives. After a few weeks/months, even though the memories of the tsunami disaster remain, they will not stop you from going ahead with your life. There are many things that you can do for yourself and others around you to hasten the recovery process. These can be at the personal level, with other family members or at the community level. Here we look at all three levels:

HOW CAN YOU RECOVER?

To promote recovery we suggest the following to be done:

**Individual initiatives**

- **Accept the changes that are taking place around**
  Following an event like tsunami, it is very common for survivors to deny that something serious has happened in each one’s life and they are now different from what they were before the disaster. It is at times helpful to deny the losses and changes. However, without acceptance, healing and rebuilding can get delayed. For example, a person with a broken bone has to accept that he/she needs help. Only this acceptance will lead the person to take medical help and subsequently follow physical exercises to recover the normal movement. Denial can lead to abnormal union of the bone and long-term disability. **One of the first steps in recovery is acceptance of the event and how it has changed your life.** This will help to start the rebuilding process.

- **Ventilate your feelings**
  Share your feelings and experiences about the tsunami with others, if possible with your family members. This will help you express/release your feelings. Once you have understood the way you feel, it is good to be able to share your experiences, feelings and thoughts with someone you trust. This helps you to decrease whatever you are experiencing and will help you to get relief from the emotional stress. Understanding your reactions, as weakness and avoiding seeking support can be detrimental.

  *For instance, in a pressure cooker, the safety valve is very important. The safety valve helps the extra pressure to be released, failing which the whole cooker could burst. It systematically and periodically takes the extra pressure out slowly and helps in getting the food cooked. Similarly ventilating your painful experiences of tsunami disaster will help you to release your grief and pent up emotions.*
It is important to slowly and repeatedly give expression to tensions, pain, or other emotions that you are experiencing. We often do not spend time thinking about emotions because they are invisible when compared to death, damage to physical health, property and loss of livelihood. But it is important to remember that emotional reactions occur commonly. No one who witnesses a disaster is untouched by it. It is important to realize that rebuilding your life and reconstruction of the entire community following the tsunami would depend upon your ability to accept the losses as early as possible. It will help you understand and emotionally accept the current situation and thereby work towards reconstruction of life at individual, family and community level.

Let us take an example of a man with an injury. An injury to any part of the body will heal over a period of time because the body has the ability to repair damage. The natural repair process takes sometime. However, if he gets immediate first aid for his injury (e.g., cleaning the wound with clean water and covering the wound with a sterile or clean cloth) the healing will be hastened; thereby the pain and discomfort will gradually reduce. But on the other hand, if the wound is unattended, it is likely to get infected and healing will be delayed, leaving a bad scar. This might even cause some limitation in the normal functioning of that part of the body. It is important to note that in both cases the scar remains but in the former situation the scar is limited and does not produce a limitation in function. In the latter case, the scar is extensive and can produce a limitation in functioning.

Similarly pain due to loss and death leads to certain emotional reactions. You need to share your feelings with others so as to decrease the pain that you are experiencing. This expression of feelings and talking to others, works like the sterile cloth over the opening of the wound, preventing infection, allowing the body to work and heal. Non-availability of such help to release or share these emotions can leave a deep scar in the mind. Therefore, it is very important to share your pain, feelings and thoughts about personal losses with others. It is always better to share the feelings with family members if possible.

Get support
You feel better with emotional support that comes from others around you. Social supports are extremely important for feeling secured and being cared for. In a disaster situation, this support system gets disrupted, so it is essential to build up this support system again.
One way is to reach out to your Community Level Workers, who will be there providing this support to you. Take time to sit with them and share your feelings, thoughts and experiences. The more you share the less will be the pain of your experiences. You will slowly build up a bond with them which would help you to master the difficulties that would come across in the rebuilding process. It is important to form networks with other people in your own area as well as get in touch with relatives and people in other localities and towns. Try to be a part of groups of similar age members, and encourage others to do so together.

- **Externalize your interests**

  *It is very important to make constructive use of your time.* The more you engage in activities or recreation, the greater will be the normalization in your life. It is important to take control of your mind and let it get involved in non-tense situations and experiences in order to recover fast. This will help you to get back to your routine also. *Getting back to a routine* is a great way of dealing with stress and emotional reactions.

  **Following the Tsunami, when relief camps were set up B, a 40-year old lady from an affected area volunteered to help in the cleaning work in the relief shelter. B was interested in this activity and she used to keep the surrounding clean. This helped B to overcome her grief.

  Similarly, in another instance, young men from the area began involving themselves in sorting out and distributing relief materials in the camps. Other activities that can be arranged in the community include involving older women as caretakers of orphaned children, involving people in cleaning up the camp surroundings, cleaning up plates and vessels, filling up water, organizing games for children, etc.

- **Practice your own religious activities**

  Religious belief or belief in a higher power greater than human beings is an integral part of our selves. It can provide great relief and support during trying times. Initiate and participate in rituals like collective/group grieving and prayer meetings. This will help you to come to terms with the loss due to the disaster. It is important to practice whatever spiritual belief you have as it has tremendous power to heal.

- **Take time to relax everyday**

  Relaxation is the opposite of tension. Make time to undertake relaxation exercises regularly twice a day. Given below is a simple technique of relaxation.
**Instruction**

The person should sit in a squatting position and place his/her hands on the knees. Then take a deep breathe, hold it for a few seconds and slowly exhale. Encourage him/her to do it for 5/10 minutes steadily and slowly. Repeat this at least twice a day.

It is important to take sufficient rest, if possible take rest during daytime too. Make some time for recreational activities like playing, reading, listening to music, singing devotional songs, and reading scriptures.

Engaging in recreational activities is also very beneficial to help in the recovery process.

**Community Level Workers can engage the survivors in the relief camps in various recreational activities like playing ludo/carom, singing songs, etc. Children can also be engaged in various playful activities like drawing, dancing, singing, clay modeling.**

- **Choose positive lifestyles**

It is important that you adopt a positive lifestyle to rebuild your daily life. This means you need to:

- Make sure that you have regular meals
- Take at least 8 hours of sleep; take rest during the day if you feel like
- Avoid smoking, alcohol or other intoxicants to overcome your misery and unhappiness
- Make time everyday to relax and have a good time by gathering together at a central place, playing games, reading, listening to music, singing, performing prayers.

**Acknowledge and admit that you will not be always functioning at your usual level of efficiency for a few weeks/months.** Try and follow a regular routine and get involved in some activities, whether home keeping or rebuilding activities, to engage your mind productively

**You can use the above initiatives to help get back to your normal way of living again.**

Given below are some examples of what to do if:

**You have a problem in falling asleep at night:**

- Practice the relaxation techniques before going to bed
- Make sure you talk to your family members everyday by sharing good things that happened that day
- Follow any rituals you used to practice earlier
- If something is bothering you, discuss it with someone
- Go for a walk in the evening
- Read some books
- Pray before sleeping.
You find that you are constantly feeling tired
- Get enough sleep at night
- Take rest in the afternoon after lunch
- Structure your day and follow a regular routine
- Do some physical exercise
- Eat well especially your morning breakfast
- Drink enough water during the day
- Include an enjoyable event in your routine - listen to music, play a game.

Family Initiatives
The family is the primary unit of care and support for all individuals. In stressful situations, the role of a family as a caregiver becomes even more critical. They are the best people to give support and comfort.

Steps to help your family to recover
- Be together as a family. Separation of family members especially women and children can cause anxiety to them and to you. Take time to sit together and share the experience of losses. Touch and comfort your parents, children, spouse, etc. It will make you as well as the other person feel good. It is a good idea to contact other relatives.
- If you have lost a family member then participate in rituals like prayers, placing the dead person’s photographs in front of you, etc. It will help you gain strength.
- Make time for family recreation like, visiting religious places, playing with children and engaging in meaningful activities.
- Resume normal activities of the pre-tsunami days with the family. Restart activities that are special to your family like, having meals together, praying, playing games, etc. All this will help get a sense of normalcy back to your life.

Initiatives taken at a Community Level
Handling issues like compensation
Settling claims for compensation can be an exhausting process, both physically and emotionally. You will find the process of getting compensation very tedious, especially if you have to do all this alone. You need to have patience and wait for the money and other assistance to come; it may often take longer time than it really should. This might make you feel frustrated. Share your feelings with the Community Level Workers (CLWs). They will understand and support you. Remember that you are not alone in this. Often, you might not get the compensation, which you are supposed to get. All these issues can cause anger and make you feel upset. Understand this is a normal feeling that anyone would go through. It is important to seek out to the CLWs at these times and share your feelings and thoughts with them. Sharing your feelings will help you feel much better and also others will be able to help.

Participate in rescue and relief activities. This would help in healing, as work is a good tonic for healing. Involve people who are not physically injured in rescue operations like removing the debris, shifting people to safer places, helping the aged and disabled people, taking care of their medical needs, removing the dead bodies, etc.
Initiate and participate in rituals
Initiate and involve in collective grieving and group mourning with others. This would help you to come to terms with the loss that has occurred in the tsunami.

Group Meetings
Take part in-group meetings and discuss various measures/initiatives for rebuilding the community. This stimulates you to think. It helps the community to come to terms with the reality of loss and emptiness that has been created by the tsunami and helps to initiate collective action and rebuild lives.

Listen and believe in authentic information about the tsunami disaster
Soon after the tsunami disaster there were a number of rumors that were widespread in the community causing enormous panic and anxiety among the survivors. Rumors were spread on the fourth day of the tsunami that another wave like tsunami would hit again and would kill the eldest male member of the family. In order to overcome this several prayers were organized wherein people lit lamps with various types of oil. There were rumors that, since the fire tragedy in Kumbokonnam happened on 26th June 2004, followed by the tsunami disaster on 26th December, on 26th of January 2005, some unforeseen event would occur which would take away lives of millions. These rumors triggered anxiety, fear and tension among the survivors.

There was a strong rumor that fishes in the sea were infected and that ear rings, fingers were found in them. It was hinted that fishes ate the dead bodies. Such rumors gave a strong blow to the fish market with a sudden decline in the demand for the fish. This hit hard on the livelihood of the fisher men. It is important to curb the spread of such rumors that usually trigger panic and tension among the survivors. There is a need to disseminate authentic information about the tsunami either by going around or using posters, placards and loudspeakers.

Creating a caring family/neighborhood
At the community level attempts should be made by you to involve each and every family member. Individuals need to build up a neighborhood wherein each and every member would be supportive to each other and involved in one another’s well-being.

Remember
- After few weeks/months of the disaster, even though the emotional reactions remain, they do not stop one from going ahead in life
- It’s always desirable to talk about the disaster experiences and share your feelings
- Restart activities and get back to the routine
- Initiate and participate in rituals like collective grieving, prayer meetings, etc
- Take time everyday to relax and engage in recreational activities
- Organise others to participate in relief and reconstruction activities
- Attempt to create a caring family/neighborhood.
SPECIAL GROUPS

In the aftermath of the tsunami there are some groups of people who have become more vulnerable due to the loss. Children, women, old people and the disabled are special groups of people who need specific attention and care.

CHILDREN

• Young children
The child’s mind and emotional state are not developed enough to solve problems as an adult. A child needs to discuss and sort out his/her fears with an adult because he/she probably does not realise that there are other options. He/she becomes dependent on adults physically and emotionally. Often the child cannot comprehend the consequences of any stressful event - leave alone the tsunami. There is a sense of losing his/her identity. However, events that took place during the tsunami, like loud noises, commotion, loss of shelter, separation from caring persons like mother, father and siblings, deprivation of food and drink, experiencing the cold, and so on, impact the child much more than it does to an adult.

• Very young pre-school children react by:
  • Crying
  • Refusing food
  • Poor sleep
  • Clinging to known people

A mother says,
“My three year old son, who was otherwise playful, has become very quiet since the waves hit and destroyed our lives. He always clings to me, and I need to carry him all the time. But this was not so before. He is also not eating properly and becomes scared and starts crying, if left alone”.

Later, often they were known to:
  • Cry and excessively cling on to some family member due to the fear of once again losing whatever security they have
  • Become listless and apathetic, especially if they do not get warmth and feelings of security from the surviving adults. After the tsunami disaster a mother reports,

“My four year old child has become very aggressive. For very trivial reasons he becomes irritated, where as this was not there earlier. He becomes so angry that he has started biting me.
I do not know how I will take care of him”.

- Have disturbed sleep and unhealthy eating problems
- Behave like a smaller child much younger than his/her age.

For example, a child of three years may stop talking, insist on being carried and being fed like a one-year-old child or an eight year-old may restart wetting the bed at night.

- **School going older children experience**
  - Nightmares or talk about the tsunami repeatedly.
  - Develop behaviours like bed-wetting or thumb sucking.
  - Refusal to attend school
  - Afraid to be separate for a short while from the remaining family members for fear of losing them.

8 year old S, who otherwise was a very lively child, refuses to leave his parents, especially mother after the tsunami. He always clings to his mother, not allowing her to carry out her household chores. He is fearful to go near the sea shore and does not go out to play with his fellow mates.

These children would also show
- Decline in scholastic performance
- Preoccupation with and reliving constantly the tsunami scenes
- Physical symptoms like abdominal pain, headache which is one way of communicating distress
- Guilt — feel responsible for the death of the near and dear one(s)
- Sadness, withdrawn behaviour with reduced sleep and appetite
- Disturbance and anger over what has happened
- Retaliate with difficult behavior, like irritability, quarrels, lying, disobedience and at times stealing.

**How to help?**

Often the child does not understand why he/she is behaving in a particular manner and hence is unable to articulate the reasons for his/her behavior clearly. It is necessary for the parents/adults to understand these changes and take certain measures to help the child to get over stress. The goal is to ensure and improve the feelings of security and bonding between the children and parents.

**They can be helped by:**
- Allowing the child to be with familiar people like parents, siblings, and neighbours
- Engaging the child in playful and recreational activities like drawing, story telling, singing, clay modeling, etc.
Children in relief camps, were engaged in various play activities like games, singing, dancing, story telling which helped them to distract themselves from their stress.

- Providing security to the child by touching him/her often, reassuring verbally, etc
- Getting the children back to their earlier routine of eating, sleeping, playing and going to school
- Allowing the child to talk about his/her feelings of the tsunami either in group situation or at an individual level.

After the tsunami disaster, orphans and semi orphans (single parent children) become more vulnerable. They have a greater sense of insecurity due to loss of near and dear ones. Children, whose parents get re-married, are also at risk of greater emotional reactions. This upsets the children and their daily routine.

**WOMEN**

Generally women experience greater degree of emotional distress as compared to men. Due to various biological and socio-economic factors, **women experience more stress and thus feel vulnerable than men in any disaster situation.**

25-year-old D lost her four children in the tsunami disaster. She knows that she won’t have any child, as she has undergone tubeectomy. She sits in the relief camp, with a dazed look on her face, speechless, and withdrawn from others. She refuses to eat and has not been eating for the past few days. Her sleep is also disturbed.

After the tsunami disaster, women responded to stress differently from men, which were manifested in the following ways:

- Crying spells and feeling persistently sad
- Manifestation of emotional reactions like 'fainting'
- Experiencing multiple body aches and pains

Widows also underwent the following:

- A sense of emptiness over the loss of their husbands
- A sense of helplessness due to the loss of the support that they used to get from their husbands.

30 year old K lost her husband in the tsunami. She is survived by her two small children who
keep demanding for their father. She is unable to give them an answer as she herself has not come to terms with the loss.

They can be helped by:
- Retaining women together with other family members or familiar people rather than taking them away to far away places
- Disseminating information about the safety of their husbands, children and family members
- Involving them in routine activities like, taking care of other children and the aged, cleaning and washing activities, cooking, caring for the sick.
- Forming Self Help Groups to encourage in sharing their feelings about their loss, suffering and participation in rehabilitation activities.

AGED

When the elderly are faced with the death of their children and younger loved ones they become very sad and may take longer time and more effort to recover. After the tsunami disaster, they manifested reactions in the following manner:
- Withdraw, cry and groan for many months
- Experience sleeplessness and loss of appetite.
- Being susceptible to illness as a result of being emotionally disturbed
- Being agitated, feeling lonely, hopeless and having suicidal ideas

An old man reports, “At nights when I go to sleep, I get the images of waves coming and houses being washed away, children drowning. I cannot sleep at all. The more I want to sleep, the more I get these images in front of my eyes.”

They can be helped by:
- Keeping them with their family members or known ones
- Attending to their immediate medical needs
- Conveying to them positive news repeatedly
- Helping re-establish their routine at the earliest
- Encouraging them to express their feelings about the disaster and subsequent loss.
- Organizing and involving them in small group meetings.
PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Persons with disability were also equally affected by the tsunami just like everybody else. They also manifested many reactions as a response to the tsunami and loss that occurred subsequently. The disability may often hinder their progress to recovery.

12 year old V, who is physically disabled says, “Any slight noise of the waves makes me fearful, as to what if there is another huge wave coming. I’m scared; as to how will I escape if there is a similar wave. I don’t have one leg, so I cannot run as fast as others will”.

They can be helped by:

- Updating them about the situation and giving them a sense of being involved and not ignored
- Shifting them to a place which is safer for them to recover
- Taking initiative in getting them required aids and appliances in collaboration with the Vocational Rehabilitation Centres (VRCs)
- Helping them to receive social security benefits like disability pension, etc.
- Helping them obtain disability certificates, income certificates and identity card, which will help them avail the existing facilities.
- Taking cognizance of the fact that mentally challenged people, especially women and children are vulnerable to sexual abuse; they need to be given special attention, protection and care.
- Helping them overcome their feeling of insecurity in case of having lost their livelihood. The skills they were using prior to the tsunami need to be taken into account.

People who became disabled subsequent to tsunami disaster will require special attention and care. They can be helped in the following ways:

- Enabling them to accept and adjust to the changes that have taken place and help them to overcome their sense of insecurity and dependency.
- Helping them look into their existing strengths and capacities with which they can move ahead in their life.
- Building their capacities in terms of skills development to manage life with a disability. Apart from these all the above mentioned interventions are applicable to them too.

Remember

While working with disaster survivors one comes across special groups who need attention:

- Women/widows
- Children
- Aged
- Disabled.
Towards the end you need to be aware that rebuilding the shattered lives of the tsunami survivors is a life long process and will take time. In the process of rebuilding, you would need help and assistance from various outside agencies and organizations. This would be helpful in meeting your needs at different points of time.

Immediately after the tsunami you and your fellow beings required help in terms of food, shelter, clothing, medication, etc., for which you need to contact higher officials. Given below is a list of people whom you can contact to meet your needs at different phases of the tsunami disaster:

**When and whom to contact**

*Immediately at the time of tsunami disaster* you have to contact the following people for help to meet your immediate needs of food, clothing, shelter, medications, etc.

- Local administrative officers – District Commissioner, Thasildhar, Panchayat Members, Block Development Officers (BDO), Ward council members.
- Local health authorities – District Health Officers, Primary Health Centre Doctors, Nurses, Health Workers, Anganwadi Workers
- Police and Army
- Voluntary Organisations/ Community Based Organisations
- Media.

*After the tsunami disaster* you have to contact

- Public Works Department
- Local health authorities
- District Education Authorities
- Agricultural Officers
- Veterinary – Animal husbandry Officials
- Block Development Authorities
- Local administrative Authorities
- Non governmental agencies.

**Remember**

- Rebuilding the lives of the tsunami survivors is a life long process
- To meet the immediate needs after any disaster, contact local authorities.
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Disasters pose a monumental challenge to the total community. There has been a good acceptance on the need for psychosocial care by the policy makers, planners, help providers, and people. Experiences from Gujarat and Orissa have demonstrated the utility of individual psychosocial care in reduction of psychological distress, increasing functionality and quality of life and community life. Tsunami like all disasters pose the enormous challenge of REBUILDING LIFE OF PEOPLE, RECONSTRUCTING NOT ONLY SHELTERS AND LIVELIHOOD BUT ALSO THE HUMAN SPIRIT. This manual attempts to enable individuals, families and communities to cope with adverse psychological impact of tsunami. The manual clearly outlines things that individuals, families and communities should do during and after disasters to address problems related to the survival and psychological well-being brought about by the tsunami event.

This information manual is unique because:

1. It addresses the psychosocial issues and mental health of individual survivors.
2. It is user friendly
3. It is based on the learning from the community – the survivors and the concerned