

Editorial**Mental Health Problems on the Rise****Mohsin Masud Jan**

Editor

There is a great rise to the mental health problems within the past few years though the matter has not been given due attention as has been needed by any of the concerned authorities.

We have not planned any mental health policy on national level particularly in relation with impact of terrorism on general population including affected individuals. Also the impact on child and adolescent mental health has not been given attention in this context.

The Institute of Psychiatry organized the Clinico-Pathological Conference (CPC) at the New Teaching Block of Rawalpindi Medical College with an objective of apprising the medical students, psychologists, and various physicians and surgeons in attendance, about the mental health problems associated with the ever-growing problem of terrorism and natural disasters.

The pictorial representation of the 2005 earthquake brought back memories of how badly the nation was shaken. The pictures of the starving flood affectees lunging for packets of food moved the audience. Finally, the graphic depiction of the 16th December, 2014, terrorist attack on Army Public School in Peshawar, left most of the attendants in hall in tears. The pain the individuals unanimously felt on viewing the video clip reminded them of how much more horrifying it must have been for those who actually lived through those moments of terror.

There were two million people left homeless by the earthquake in 2005 with 87,000 deaths and over a hundred thousand left injured. The 2010 floods, he said, affected a flabbergasting 20 million people. Since 2001 the ceaseless wave of terrorism has taken the lives of over 45, 000 Pakistanis.

People inflicted with these disasters are twice likely to develop mental illness. Terrorists induce terror through violence against non combatant targets and exploit the media to magnify the impact of their actions and noble religious concepts are misconstrued and exploited for these evil ends.

The immediate aftermath of a disaster a raised interest can be seen in all concerned stakeholders.

National departments as well as international agencies come forward to offer their help in the form of financial aid, logistic support and technical assistance for the rehabilitation of the affected. However, this raised interest and concern proves to be short lived and quickly abates over the ensuing period.

The psycho-social rehabilitation of those affected by disasters is not a task of weeks and months but of years and so far our half hearted and misdirected efforts have not been able to achieve the desired results.

The psycho-social rehabilitation should be an essential component of our response to disasters and that the National Disaster Management Cell should incorporate a national task force of mental health professionals who are able to provide these services to the communities affected by disasters in a systemized and sustained fashion.

The internationally verified tools which are available to help with the psychological rehabilitation of the people affected by disasters. The first of these interventions is known as Psychological First Aid (PFA) was developed by the National Centre for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (NC-PTSD), a section of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. This tool provides a modular approach to help in the immediate aftermath of disaster or terrorism. It is designed to reduce initial distress and foster short and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. The components of PFA include protecting the individual from further harm, presenting him with an opportunity to talk without pressure using the principles of active listening and compassion.

The management of mental health issues related to disasters in our country which may be a multi tier model that extends from policy making at the national level, strengthening of existing mental health services and capacity building by training and incorporating non mental health professionals to deliver psychosocial rehabilitation modules in their communities.