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Mental Condition of Youth Flood Victims in Southern Thailand

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Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate the mental condition of youth flood victims in southern Thailand. The subjects included 500 youths purposively selected from those who had suffered flood disaster in southern Thailand in 2011. The instruments used in the study consisted of a researcher-created four-point rating-scale questionnaire on mental condition of youth flood victims in southern Thailand. The data were analyzed using such statistics as percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation. The study revealed that, as a whole, the youth flood victims in southern Thailand had experienced stress, anxiety, and fear. They were easily frightened and not brave enough to face even with a minor stimulant. They showed symptom, but their daily life was not affected. When each of the four aspects was examined, it was found that the physical effect was at a normal level, and the self-conception showed symptom, but their daily life was not affected. Role and mission was at a normal level whereas sense of reliance was affected at a slightly high level while their daily life was slightly affected.

Keywords: Mental condition of the youths, flood disaster

1. Introduction

Social and environment changes taking place in the world today, either natural or man-made, have become the threats that cause disasters and considerable losses of lives and property [1]. Disasters the world is currently facing include earthquakes, floods, landslides, storms, tsunamis, epidemic diseases, threats from terrorists and wars. These disasters make the people in many countries around the world feel threatened, scared and unsafe in their daily activities. The direct impacts from such disasters are danger and loss of lives and property, sicknesses, injuries, inadequate food nutrients and violence. Besides, disasters can affect mental condition of the survivors, the effect which is incalculable in terms of economic value [2]. A case in point is the flood disaster that hit the area of the four provinces of southern Thailand during March-April 2011, considered to be the most severe flooding during the past 50 years. The area worst hit by the flood is Nopphitam District in Surat Thani Province, where villages, roads and bridges were swept away by landslide, heavy rainfalls and sea of mud causing damage to the lives and properties of the villagers. Hundreds of homes, rubber plantations and fruit orchards were totally destroyed [3].

Natural disasters bring about bad physical conditions such as body injuries, chronic sicknesses, loss of loved ones, loss of property, loss of careers, and mental conditions such as feeling unsafe, sleep disorder, being irritated, miserable, desperate, discouraged, scared, afraid of dying and feeling horrible about the traumatic situations. These conditions may lead to stresses, and severe stresses can cause sadness or PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). An impact on family can be seen in the loss of property, increase in money spent on medical treatments and loss of time in career. In general, family members are affected by the events in the form of loss of family members. The reactions emerging from mental conditions will gradually diminish with passing time [4], depending on self-adjustment of the victims who can accept the reality and problems and find ways to solve them either by themselves or with assistance from other people. When the problems are lessened, they will get better. Generally, those who experience disasters will adjust themselves to a normal state within 4-6 weeks [5].

Floods occurring in southern Thailand had substantially affected environment causing a great number of injuries and loss of lives. It had critical impacts on mental condition of disaster survivors [6]. One significant problem after the disaster which cannot be clearly observed or is overlooked is the mental condition. Although a person may look normally healthy during the post-disaster stage, it is undeniable that mental sickness problems after the disaster occur undetectably. The symptoms of mental sickness are classified into 4 types depending on severity of the problem and duration of anxiety [7]. Anxiety disorder is a state when a person is affected directly by simultaneous fright caused by the disaster and is associated mainly with loss. Depression is a short-term feeling, emerging subsequently one month after the occurrence of the disaster [8]. Such a feeling occurs due to loss of everything in the disaster such as homes, cars, loved ones and family members. Having learned of the losses, disaster survivors struggle for their better world, but still feel desperate and unable to resettle, thus causing depression. Substance abuse is a problematic state after depression. When stress and depression cumulatively increase, some victims try to heal themselves by taking drugs or consuming alcoholic drinks. This phenomenon is a high risk for their health. Finally, the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an unusual state of mind most likely to occur when a victim is unable to revert to his normal pre-disaster state [9] due to inability to solve problems or the lack of supporters. There is a tendency for a person with long exposure to crisis without getting help or training to cope with stress to develop neurological symptom and inappropriate social behaviors, a condition where

urgent assistance is needed [10]. In some other cases, severe situation exists, making it difficult to deal with, eventually leading to substance abuse, self-harming and injuring others.

Moreover, such a mental sickness inevitably affects family members, career and social life. On the contrary, if a person who is under the crisis can cope with the problems by recognizing realities, knowing how to face difficulties, and being able to find social support, he will be able to overcome it successfully [11]. These abilities will help him develop more mental strength ready for the next encounter with the problem. Based on the issues mentioned above, the researchers were interested in conducting an investigation into the mental condition of flood victims among the youths in southern Thailand.

2. Research Objectives

To investigate mental condition of flood victims among the youths in southern Thailand

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Population and Sample

The population for the study consisted of 1,050 students studying in secondary schools (grade 7 to grade 12) in four provinces in southern Thailand, namely SuratThani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phattalung, and Songkhla, who were affected by the flood disaster. The sample subjects, drawn according to the purposive sampling, included 500 students from these flood-hit provinces in 2011.

3.2. Research Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a four-point rating scale questionnaire on the mental condition of flood victims among the youths in southern Thailand, adapted from the format of the Department of Mental Health of Thailand [6]. The internal consistency of the instrument was between 0.67 – 1.00 and the reliability of the questionnaire was .834.

4. Research Findings

The study revealed that, as a whole, youth flood victims in southern Thailand had experienced stress, anxiety and fear. They were easily frightened and not brave enough to face with even a minor stimulant. They showed symptom, but their daily life was not affected. When each of the four aspects was examined, it was found that the physical effect was at a normal level, and the self-conception showed the symptom, but their daily life was not affected. Role and responsibility was at a normal level, whereas sense of reliance was affected at a slightly high level and their daily life was a little affected. Details were as follows.

500 subjects under study were classified in ratio for females (70.4 %) and males (29.6%). Their age ranges were the following: 13–15 years old (47.4 %); 16–18 years of old (47.4%) and other age groups (6.5%). Their household monthly incomes were found in the following categories: 3,000 baht [USD93.75] or below (6.6%); between 3,000– 6,000 baht [USD93.75-187.5] (21.2%); between 6,001–9,000 baht [USD187.53-281.25] (24.6%); between 9,001 – 12,000 baht [USD281.28-375] (23.4%); and more than 12,000 baht [USD375] (21.8%). For the congenital disease, it was found that the victims had no congenital diseases (89.8%) and those with congenital diseases (10.2%). For the severity of the disaster, the study showed that the victims experienced severe level of disaster (33.6%); a moderate level of disaster (49.2%); and disaster a less severe level (17.2%). For the loss, the study revealed that the victims lost their homes and residences (34.2%); and land or places where they earned incomes (40.8%). For stress and anxiety variable, it was found that victims lost their properties (19.2%); family members (3.4%) and lost 'others' (2.4%). For social support when facing disasters, it was found that the victims received supports from family members (30.2%), from relatives (34.2%); from communities (19.0%); from government agencies and organizations (10.6%); and from 'others' (6.0%).

Based on mean scores, standard deviation and an interpretation of scores regarding reactions and symptoms after the disaster, the study revealed that, overall, the victims had experienced stress, anxiety and fear. They were easily frightened and not brave enough to face with even a slight stimulant; they showed symptom, but their daily life was not affected ($\bar{X} = .834$). When each of the four aspects was considered, it was found that the physical effect was at a normal level ($\bar{X} = .617$). They indicated a symptom in self-conception, but their daily life was not affected ($\bar{X} = .978$). The victims showed a normal level in their role and responsibility ($\bar{X} = .570$). Finally, they indicated a slightly high level of symptom ($\bar{X} = 1.170$), but their daily life was a little affected.

5. Discussions

The study revealed that the flood victims in southern Thailand had experienced stress, anxiety, and fear. They were easily frightened and not brave enough to face with even small stimulant. When each of the four aspects was examined, it was found that the physical effect was at a normal level, and the self-conception showed symptom, but their daily life was not affected. The role and mission was at a normal level, whereas the sense of reliance was affected at a slightly high level, and their daily life was a little affected. This could be further discussed in details below.

1. The mental condition of flood victims in southern Thailand, as a whole, was at a symptom level, but it did not affect their daily life, with the mean scores of ($\bar{X} = .834$). This was due to the fact that the flood disaster occurred annually and had become a normal phenomenon for the local people. The youths had to adjust themselves to face with changes in order to lead their life in such environment and maintain the state of balance. This finding was relevant to the study conducted by Roy and Andrews [11], which found that the people were less stressful and anxious in one year and four months after the flood [13].
2. The mental condition of the flood victims in southern Thailand as discussed in each individual aspect.
 - a. The physical effect aspect showed the mean scores of ($\bar{X} = .617$) indicating a normal level. This was because naturally the flood victims might be alert, physically thus causing such difficulties as sleep disorder, fatigue, and physical injury. It was also found that they lacked food and other necessities [14]. At this stage the flood victims received supports in terms of their basic needs such as places to stay, food and clothing. When the crisis was over, they were able to adjust themselves and were not affected physically.

- b. The self-conception aspect indicated a symptom level ($\bar{X} = .978$), but no impact on their daily life. This phenomenon could be explained by the fact that the flood victims realized they would be able to survive by having concentration and strengthening their mind. Such actions also reflected their view regarding self-respect [4].
- c. The role and responsibility aspect showed a normal level of mental condition ($\bar{X} = .570$). The flood victims played the role and showed the responsibility in accordance with the expectations of society, such as responsibility in finding jobs, role of being the youths, and being parents. The flood victims learned that as time passed, the mind would return to its normal state and they had the roles to play. One study disclosed that nine months after the earthquake, disaster the victims began to review their roles and responsibility [14]. For example, as parents, they realized that they had the responsibility in looking after children and began taking care of their health so that they would be able to work and earn income to support families.
- d. The sense of reliance aspect showed the symptom at a slightly higher level and a little effect on daily life ($\bar{X} = 1.170$). This was because of the societal characteristics in which the communities shared. The flood disaster was widespread and the victims shared the same catastrophic experience, making them feel sympathetic to others. This context was inconsistent with a previous study which found that in the communities where people had experienced crises together, they did their best to help one another [1]. They expressed true sympathy to and loved one another. Roy and Andrews described that social support was one key factor that affected the sense of reliance [11].

6. Suggestions

6.1. Suggestions for Implementation

A mental condition assessment form used with the flood victims in southern Thailand could be introduced as a tool to assess mental condition of other groups of flood victims among the youths that have similar characteristics with the subjects under this study. In so doing, the user should study the details of the assessment form to grasp a full understanding before the implementation. The study also provides guidelines to further develop an appropriate form in giving assistance on mental healing to flood victims in southern Thailand.

6.2. Suggestion for Further Research

There should be a study on the mental condition of other groups of flood victims in southern Thailand such as among primary students, students with learning disability, adult group and elderly group.

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