
UNIT 9 PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE

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9.0 Learning Outcome

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss about human behaviour during and after disaster;
- highlight the psyche of providers and sufferers; and
- provide to manage the stressful situations and physiological problems effectively faced by providers and sufferers during the disaster.

9.1 Introduction

Every individual has unique way to respond over the situation. Psychologist explain that behind every response to individual there is some demand of the body, which may either be physical or psychological. Each individual faces a unique pattern of adjustable demands.

This demand is the drive, that activate the individual, but understanding human behaviour is very difficult. Nor two people will behave in the same way over a situation on stimulus. One person might be mild in his response, while the

other might be very aggressive. Psychologists explain it as existence of 'individual differences' which separates the personality of one individual from another. Each individual faces a unique pattern of adjustable demands. Any two people would not be faced with exactly the same pattern of demands. Each individual's age, sex, occupation, economic status help to determine the demands made on him.

In this unit we shall discuss about the human behaviour during and after disaster. In this regard it is very important to know the psyche of providers and sufferers. In disaster situation, both providers as well as sufferers face several psychological problems, which makes their behaviour to become abnormal in such traumatic situation (at the time and post disaster period). To bring their life back to normalcy it becomes our duty to manage these stressful situations effectively.

9.2 The Concept of Human Behaviour

In this age of science, the individual is facing different types of hazards. Disaster either natural or man-made is a natural occurrence in man's life. It leaves an immense effect on individual's behaviour and psyche. Sufferer loses his mental peace, equilibrium, confidence and the result is his whole personality get disturbed. They may suffer from different psychological reactions like – shock, anger, disbelief etc. In a disaster having same condition, say during an earthquake, reactions of different people will be different. These differences in response are quite natural because the personality of two individuals is not same. According to his own capacities or potentials individual responds in a specific manner. People interpret the same situation in different ways. Each individual's age, sex occupation, economic status, personality make-up and other factors help to determine the demands made on him. It is observed that the more stable and better integrated a personality is, the more the person will adjust in a stressful situation. The time of disaster and the post disaster situation both are very stressful and traumatic. In such situations people loses his equilibrium and their behaviour becomes abnormal.

At the time and after disaster, the sufferers normally experience a range of psychological and physiological reactions, the strength and type of which depends upon several factors as given below:

- prior experience with the same or similar event;
- intensity of the disruptions;
- length of time that has elapsed after the occurrence of the event;
- individual feelings that there is no escape, that sets the stage for panic; and
- emotional strength of the individual.

Sufferer’s reactions may become more intense as the amount of disruption to their lives increases, that is, the more the sufferer's life is disrupted, the greater psychological reactions will take place. Emotional strength of victim also directs the behaviour of individual. Emotionally stable individuals handle the stressful situations more efficiently and their adjustment becomes better. Researches studies show that victims go through distinct emotional phases following a disaster, there being:

- **The impact phase** — In this phase victims do not panic and may, in fact, show no emotion. They do what they must to keep themselves and their families alive.
- **The inventory phase** — This phase immediately follows the event; victims assess damage and try to locate other survivor.
- **The rescue phase** — In rescue phase emergency services providers are responding and victims are willing to take direction from these agencies without protest.
- **The recovery phase** — In this phase victims may be tense and apprehensive. They believe that rescue efforts are not proceeding quickly enough, but gradually they regain psychological equilibrium. In an abnormally stressful event such as a disaster, people normally experience a range of psychological and physiological reactions and the intensity, timing and duration of such responses may vary from person to person. Following are some common responses:

Anger	Loss of appetite
Self blame, blaming others	Hyperactivity

Fear of occurrence feeling stunned, numbed or overwhelmed Helplessness Concentration and memory problems Depression Mood swing	Nausea, stomach pain, increase in alcohol or drug consumption Nightmares Inability to sleep
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Children and their Response to Disaster

Children depend on daily routines - they wake-up, eat breakfast, go to school, play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children may become anxious or frightened. They become confused as how to behave in this situation. In a disaster, children expect help or support from their parents and other adults. How the adults react to emergencies gives them clues on how to act. If adults react with alarm, a child may become more scared. They see our fear as proof that the danger is real. If adults seem overcome with a sense of loss, a child may feel their losses more strongly.

A study among the adolescent population, 6-8 months after the earthquake in Kutch, reported that they showed symptoms such as getting easily started, forgetfulness, child like behaviour and saw recurrent images of the disaster, and they avoided painful feelings and reminders. Also 20% of the respondents suffered from post-trauma stress disorder, according to a study carried out by Ahmedabad Medical College in 2002.

In one of the studies conducted after the devastating earthquake on 26th January 2001 at Bhuj in Gujarat, G. Ramappa and S. Bhadra found that the most vulnerable group i.e. children, have reported some psychological problems. They found that many of the children who were sharp had started behaving differently after the event. A few of the children totally lost interest in their studies. The children would be alarmed by sounds such as those due to falling of any material, or starting of a car just near their classrooms.

In different studies it has also been observed that men and women are affected differently by natural hazards. Disasters tend to multiply existing

vulnerabilities and exacerbate gender differences. The combination of poor health and low educational and economic status is affecting more women than men worldwide. It tends to increase women's vulnerability to natural hazards. This vulnerability to natural hazards increases even more when women are the heads of households. Women's earnings from agriculture, crop processing, weaving, poultry or cattle rearing are a significant portion of the family income. In order to protect vital economic resources, women may decide against evacuating or taking shelter, as was observed during the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh.

Post disaster period are also very difficult times for men. Loss of employment, physical inability, loss of property makes them stressful. Life changes drastically sometimes, people have to live in the relief camps. Usually they have to spend their time sitting idle, without any productive output. There is no work to keep them occupied so all this given them a feeling of greater distress.

9.3 Psyche of Provider and Suffer

In disaster, the behaviour of individual depends upon his mental condition. People have to face different types of psychological, social or emotional problems. The kind of loss suffered affects the behaviour of the sufferers. Economic loss and death of close persons are the losses which have a major adverse effect on their behaviour. Along with the sufferers, situation is also very difficult for the providers. Providers have to spend long hours working with sufferers. Continuous work with physically ill and disabled people makes them stressful.

Let us first understand the meaning of sufferer and provider. Sufferer are the victims, who are directly or indirectly being affected in a disaster situation, whereas, providers are the person who come out to help the people affected in a disaster and may be the members of a voluntary organisations, government officials or any one else. The psychology of providers and sufferers play a very important role in disaster management. Besides sufferers and providers, another important agency who serve during disaster are responders (community). At the time of disaster, responders are the only persons who come first to save the victims and have a critical role in disaster management. Responders are the common masses living in the area or nearby come first to serve the victims when disaster took place. As these people have the first hand knowledge of the local conditions and topography, they are more competent in

handling the situation. For example, in any disaster like flood, the community may be the best rescue worker because they are fully aware of the local topography. They know the strategic location of important installation like – health centre, hospitals etc. Community is fully aware of the safe and high places for relief camp, so that they can easily guide the sufferer to shift to such places. Local residents or community have the skill to develop indigenous rafts with banana stem and bamboos, which can be used for transporting sufferers to the right places.

Different type of loss suffered also affects the behaviour of the sufferers. During disaster or post disaster period, the sufferer exhibits different types of abnormal responses. They may show their apprehension for the provider. Sometimes sufferer becomes more demanding. It has been observed that the sufferer expect the NGOs and government agencies to compensate for all the losses incurred by them which is usually not possible. These adverse situations may generate different symptoms in the sufferer. It is quite common for rescue workers involved in a disaster situation to develop various psycho-social consequences. Providers may develop high level of stress as traumatic situations make the providers stressful. Studies have show that exposure to dead bodies can be particularly stressful for them. Sometimes disaster events may be so adverse that even the rescuer's mental state is badly affected in such situations. Death of people, loss and damages because of a particular disaster may develop abnormal symptoms. Providers should be alert to symptoms of disaster trauma in themselves. By continuously working with dead bodies, handicapped people and such sad experiences, they may develop some psychological reaction like – anxiety, depression, fear etc.

9.4 Factors that affect Human Behaviour in Disaster Management

In disasters the victims and rescue workers both suffer from great emotional disturbances. There are various factors which directly or indirectly affects the behaviour of people in disaster.

The most important factor that affects the victim is the death of close relatives or friends. It leaves immense effect on the sufferer. In such traumatic condition victims are under so much of stress and pain that at this stage they are not ready to accept any suggestion.

Economic loss is also a major set back in the sufferer's life during disaster. Earthquake, flood, fire, landslides and such others are the forms of disaster that

disrupts the life of victims and the economic condition of the sufferer plays a major role during disaster. The impact of disaster on economically weaker group especially labourers, rickshaw-pullers, shop-keepers, is found to be great. Their savings may be completely wiped out by disaster and it leads them into further from poverty to starvation stage.

The time period of disaster is also an important factor that affects human behaviour. Sometimes the time period of disaster is long as in droughts. This is called continuing disaster. In such type of disaster people react in slightly more practical and stabilised manner. Earthquake, cyclone, landslides are the cataclysmic disaster. These disasters are sudden and immediate destruction becomes imminently evident. Continual fear and insecurity also affects human behaviour in disaster. The affected community feel unsafe and uncomfortable in disaster. Their constant fears and insecurities is a hindrance to normalisation.

The family has a major role to play in helping the survivor to adjust with the changed situation; where family is not supportive, the recovery becomes more complex. Sometimes family members impose restrictions on single woman and may not give her the power to take independent decisions or financial freedom. Such situation affects the individual's behaviour too where by the psychological suffering increases.

The role of rescue worker is very important and difficult too. It is a very tough job for the rescue workers because victims are under stress, so their mental conditions are not very normal. It is also stressful for rescue workers and sometimes they may develop some psychological symptoms as they would not have expected to see such amount of deaths or loss and damages of property. Many times, in such traumatic condition provider may develop depression and anxiety.

9.5 Management of Human Behaviour and Response in Disaster Situation

Disaster is such an unwanted happening which never informs in advance before coming. In any abnormally stressful event such as a disaster, people normally experience a range of psychological and physiological reactions. These feelings may not last long, but it very common to have disturbing reactions for many months after the event. The important point is that emotional responses apply to both disaster victims and rescue workers. For the survivors it is very difficult to cope with the feeling of the death of close person, loss of wealth and homes, due to a disaster.

The rescue operation might be more effective if the psychological needs of survivors and providers are recognised. Psychologists suggest that open, honest expression of emotions as a self-protection mechanism is very useful in coping with the stress or trauma. To avoid emotional-overload survivor and rescuer should be allowed to express their feelings openly.

In the aftermath of a disaster, the most sensitive population are the children. The adverse situation affects them very badly that they become anxious confused or frightened. During post disaster period the children are most afraid with the fear that the event will happen again, a hidden fear always remain with them that they may be left alone or they may be separated from the family. As an adult it is the duty of parents or others to cope with the disaster in a way that will help children avoid developing a permanent sense of loses. It is very important to give children the guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

Immediately after the disaster, children's fear and anxiety should be reduced by:

- All the family members should live together as much as possible.
- Let children talk about the disaster and they should be encouraged to ask questions as much as they want.
- Elders should explain children what they know about the disaster and also adults must tell them what is expected to happen next. They should handle the situation very calmly and firmly.
- Each member of the family should also know important family information, and where to meet in case of an emergency.

People living in disaster prone area should be educated about the likelihood of a disaster and, the ways to cope with such a situation. They should know the significance of cooperating with rescue-workers and communicate positively with them. For management of this traumatic situation more carefully, we should adopt different approach towards survivors and rescue workers. To assist disaster victims in dealing with the effects of disaster-related stress we should follow the following approaches:

- **Establish Rapport:** Victims should be encouraged to freely express their feelings as well as their physical needs. Expression of these feelings will lighten their stress.
- **Listen:** If the victims have something to say we should take the time to listen to them. With our responses we should show our concerns with them.
- **Provide confidentiality:** We should respect the victim's confidence and should try not to disclose the information to other people.

Using these techniques we should be able to provide the survivor with the initial comfort and support required for taking the first step toward recovery.

In disaster, rescue workers may experience psychological and physiological symptoms related to the trauma. These symptoms range from depression to sleep disorders and they may also suffer from such type of problems. Therefore, they should be alert to symptoms of disaster trauma in themselves. To assist rescue workers in dealing with the effects of disaster-related stress, the authority who deal with them should approach as follows:

- **Brief Personnel:** Before the rescue it is necessary to explain rescue workers, operation begins about what they can expect to see and what they can expect in terms of emotional responses for themselves and others.
- **Emphasize Teamwork:** It is a must to distribute the job or workload among rescue workers as this will help the team members to defuse the emotional load and pent-up emotions.
- **Rotate Personnel:** This is very important for rescuers to give them some rest after a tiring job. Their schedule should be rotational to avoid personnel becoming overtired and to break monetary.
- **Encourage Breaks:** Rescues workers should be encouraged for to take breaks away from the incident area. It will provide some relief to rescuers.

- **Provide for proper nutrition:** Adequate food should be provided for rescue workers. They should be encouraged to taking food, water etc. in between the work.
- **Phase out workers gradually:** It will be harmful to remove rescuers form their duties abruptly as abrupt removal may cause additional stress to rescuers.

Apart from the above, one of the most determinant factors in any disaster management response is the level of advanced preparedness of any community. Different agencies working in the field of disaster management have observed that advanced preparedness programme should be started from the home only. Parents should educate their children about disaster and integrate in the advanced preparedness programme. A family disaster plan can be created by taking four simple steps.

- First, every member of the family must have the knowledge, about what hazards exist in their community and how to prepare for each of these. It should be discussed what they would do, as a group, in each situation.
- Children should be taught how to recognize danger signals and what they do first after recognising it.
- Members of the family must know how and when to call for help. For their convenience pasting emergency phone members on common wall will be a good effort.

Some other measures like mock exercises, drill, practices of the rescue workers and giving the people adequate information proves helpful in getting a positive response from people. Exercises specific to likely disasters should be conducted regularly. During disaster, concept of community kitchen may play on effective role for involving the affected people and diverting their minds from trauma. It will help them to return early to their normal mental status.

Handling disaster situation is not an easy job, but the combined effort of government agencies, NGOs and the public can make it easy. Training programmes related to disaster management should be organised off and on to create awareness among people and specific emphasis on psychological response be incorporated.

9.6 Conclusion

In this unit we have discussed human behaviour in disaster situations. In disaster situation survivor and rescuers both play important role so we have discussed about the psyche of the provider and the survivor. There are some important factors that affect the human behaviour which must be known to the responders. Management of human behaviour in disaster is very important so that we can minimize their stress and trauma and assure them for an early return to normal living.

9.7 Key Concepts

- Psyche** - The mind, mental condition
- Trauma** - Severe psychological or physiological stresses.
- Topography** - The physical features of an area of land, especially the position of its rivers, mountain etc.

9.8 Responses and Further Reading

- Coleman, James C., fourth edition Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life, D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Pvt. Ltd.
- Diaz, J.O. Prewitt, Murthy S.R., Lakshminarayana R, 2004, Indian Red Cross Society, Voluntary Health Association of India.

9.9 Activities

- 1) Write some common physical and psychological reactions in disaster.
- 2) What are the factors that affect survivor's behaviour?
- 3) Mention some other techniques to handle survivors which are useful in disaster management.