


# Ethics in Disaster Work and Cultural Competency

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## OBJECTIVES



- Outline how disaster resilience and ethics intersect
- Discuss the shared responsibility for resilience in disaster response
- Assess issues in disaster work to raise awareness and promote relevant ethical discussions
- Describe a useful framework for addressing ethical decisionmaking and promoting community resilience

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## Disaster Resilience & Ethics



- Disaster resilience is everyone's business and is a shared responsibility
- Increasing resilience to disasters requires decisions and actions that everyone needs to maintain to improve the speed and effectiveness of disaster response.
- The new path recognizes the commitment of a shared responsibility for resilience in the forefront public policies
- Resilience in disaster work also connects with the practice of ethics:
  - Understanding the differences between public and professional perspectives can identify communication gaps, especially regarding ethical dilemmas.

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QUICK POLL

- How many agencies are involved in a disaster response effort?
- 1 – 5
- 6 – 10
- 11 – 15
- 16 – 20



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DILEMMA

- Ethical questions and dilemmas associated with disasters and their management are numerous and are compounded when other entities are involved.
- Ethical dilemmas of disasters are present in almost all aspects of disaster management from pre-event planning until closing a mission
- Ethical dilemmas must be addressed - BUT
- What is ethical correct for different populations may not be correct for others
  - Religious beliefs
  - Ethnic customs and principles
  - Current ethical understanding

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Disasters and Ethical Uncertainty



- Disasters are complex and become natural breeding grounds for ethical uncertainty and dilemma.
- Studies show evidence of dissatisfaction on the part of survivors and responders - type, extent, and consistency of disaster relief
- Many times lack of preparation and training of emergency responders can influence the quality of services to survivors
- Disaster relief agency representatives have felt unable to respond adequately to survivors' needs, or felt compelled to act contrary to survivors' interests due to certain regulations and policies adopted by participating agencies
- National policies and responsible for disaster management have been assessed as "unclear, poorly explained, too rigid,
- Required a high level of middle-class financial management skills to comply with eligibility requirements

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### Ethical Decision Making



**Autonomy:** to promote self-determination

**Beneficence:** to do good for others and promote the well-being of clients

**Non-maleficence:** to avoid doing harm

**Justice:** to be fair by giving equally to others and to treat others justly

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### Too Many Helpers?



- Outside assistance is delivered by a range of entities:
  - Governmental
  - Non-for-profit
  - Profit entities
- Each operates under its own philosophical stance, assumptions, and values increasing the chances of
  - Inconsistency
  - Conflict
  - Lack of coordination in service delivery
- Some methods of interacting with survivors can be harmful or produce frustration, anger, desperation and disappointment among survivors
- Survivors may face a bewildering array of agencies and organizations that use different forms of communication, application requirements, time frameworks, and eligibility standards.
- Survivors' expectations, particularly in the immediate aftermath of disaster, may exceed the capacity of any organizational system to respond comprehensively.
- These problems and other administrative, interpersonal, and circumstantial barriers can undermine the delivery of services to survivors

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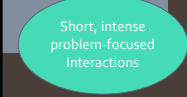
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### Ethical Issues in Disaster



- The ethical issues in DBH are not as clearly delineated in law or policy, yet they are the same as ethics of other health care service providers, including during disaster deployment (Call et al., 2012).
- Training
- Professional Practice
- Research
- Allocation of Resources

Emerge consistently in research and in the "gray" literature

- Subject to laws and ethical codes regarding:
  - Record keeping
  - Competence to Practice
  - Consent

Licensure is not always enough – practitioners need to understand the difference.  
BH responders need to be trained properly to provide specific disaster- or crisis-related BH services.

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### Ethical Dilemmas in Disaster Preparedness

- Dilemma - some controversy among researchers and practitioners about whether all models of psychological intervention are beneficial.
- So, the first ethical questions emergency planners must ask themselves are:
  - Are the BH professionals responding to disasters in my community trained in an appropriate, research-based model?
  - The local BH authority or other entity coordinating the BH response needs to assure this.
  - Appropriate services include more than just the right intervention; they include services that are culturally competent for the impacted community.
  - Cultural appropriateness encompasses language and national origin, but it also includes sensitivity to other issues.
  - Without training, some BH professionals may encourage first responders to express emotions during a response in a way that interferes with, rather than facilitates, their work.

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### HUMAN RIGHTS



- Each profession has an ethical code - that is amped up during disaster recovery.
- Emergency Management, Public Health, Behavioral Health, Federal Assistance etc.,
  - Who is entitled to assistance?
  - What if assistance is needed but refused?
  - How do immigration issues impact assistance?
  - What are cultural implications of the recovery effort?

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- Assessment defines a need which must be followed-up with appropriate assistance
- Lack of such appropriate action causes enormous frustration
- Assessments may indicate that assistance is best omitted, it yet it may not be understood by the victims.
- TWO Dilemmas in Assessment:
  - Unless you are in a position to provide assistance, it may be unethical to do an assessment
  - It could be equally unethical to provide assistance as a token act, purely as a psychological intervention

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**An Example....**

- Bad overall management
- Bureaucratic red tape
- Lack of accountability
- Lack of transparency
- Cover-up gone bad
- Continuing lead-water crisis



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## MEDIA



News media may present additional ethical problems:

- Media provide the eyes and the ears for the community – setting priorities for concern
- Only disasters covered excessively by the media receive proper attention
  - What happens when situations that merit assistance yet never receive media assistance?
- Should the media have a duty to cover all tragedies even if such reporting cannot be measured in their ratings?
- Some organizations may provide assistance primarily for the associated media coverage, and they perceive that their obligation terminates when the media attention is gone, since media attention and future funding seem so closely linked.

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## COMPETENCE



- What are the minimum standards of knowledge that should be required?
  - Nebraska has requirements for Behavioral Health, Public Health, MRC's and others before entering disaster sites
- What happens when unqualified workers in any field are dispatched?
  - There also are examples of aid workers dispatched to do specialist work for which they were not qualified, and who actually may have done more harm than good
- Preparation for Deployment
  - Exercises, conferences,
- "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."  
Alexander Pope (1688–1744):

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### VULNERABLE GROUPS



- Identifying vulnerable groups and ensuring that their needs are met during disasters is vital in preparedness planning.
- Developing preparedness strategies that are responsive to those at greatest risk is justified by the ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for autonomy.
- Individuals with preexisting mental disorders and newly emergent psychological symptoms are particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes during and after disasters.

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### Serious Mental Disorders



- People with serious mental disorders historically have been stigmatized
- Individuals with mental disorders represent a notable proportion of the overall population
- Many individuals with mental disorders may be unable to care for themselves
- Anticipating their needs is critical to comprehensive emergency planning and response efforts.

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### Serious Mental Disorders



Three categories of ethical issues that may be necessary to address during emergencies:

- Minimize the harm that may occur because of lapses in treatment for mental disorders,
- Attempting to protect people with mental disorders from experiencing stigma
- Ways in which the autonomy of individuals with mental disorders can be respected amidst challenges that arise during emergencies

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### Children & Youth



Helping Children and Adolescents Cope With Disasters and Other Traumatic Events  
What Parents, Rescue Workers, and the Community Can Do

- Children have unique physical, mental, behavioral, developmental, communication, therapeutic, and social needs that must be addressed in all aspects of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

After a disaster, children may experience:

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Sadness,
- Sleep disruption
- Distressing dreams
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anger outbursts
- Eating problems

Learn the signs of children's distress – CDC, SAMHSA, DTAC

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### Community Resiliency & Empowerment



- A principal goal of disaster response is to develop resilient and safe communities.
- Activities need to strive towards the long-term goal of developing community resources to be more hazard-resistant and timely recovery after emergencies.
- Resilient communities have strong internal support systems and networks of mutual assistance and formal agreements.
- Resilient communities maintain sustainable and risk mitigating relationships with state and local entities to protect their natural environment.

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### Community Preservation



- Preparedness Recovery is about protecting the community
- Embodying the traditions and values of a community and a vision of how the community can be made a better environment for all its members in the future.
- Successful planning must rely on and tap into preexisting civic responsibility, sense of justice, and concern for others
- Leadership, including elected officials and other community leaders, can move communities toward common purposes

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## Revise and Update the Disaster Plan



- The development, planning, and testing cycles of any good disaster plan are ongoing:
  - The plan must be reviewed, evaluated, and updated following every test/activation in tandem with any significant change to the program's services or facilities
- The cycle is continuous, requiring resources and commitments from leadership and partners
- The benefits of disaster preparedness can save lives and mitigate the long-term impact of disaster.

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## Evaluation



- Evaluation and assessment of emergency plans and their implementation should be ongoing during and after a disaster.
- Evaluation is necessary in order to gauge
  - effectiveness of emergency plans
  - to learn from mistakes
  - to make improvements for the future.

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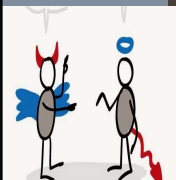
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