

The Experiences of the Department of Mental Health, Thailand In helping the survivors from the Tsunami Disaster

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In accordance to the severe earthquake, on 26 December 2004 at the center point of Sumatra Island, Indonesia, 6 provinces along the coast in Southern Thailand were affected. Many people were killed and some are still undiscoverable by the largest disaster in Thailand, which is known Tsunami. This was the greatest loss within the century for many people. There were many sectors, including private, public, and individual, expressed their intention to assist Tsunami survivors post-event. However, the incident caused Tsunami affected individuals more than depression that we can imagine. The experience and feeling of loss is still traumatic and not easily forgettable for them. It is pertained to the view that Tsunami survivors, especially children, appeared to have depression, anxiety, and some desired to commit suicide. This issue is very important as it is likely to affect children's future. Thus, it is necessary to rehabilitate mental state of the Tsunami survivors promptly.

The role of the Department of Mental Health of the Ministry of Public Health is to provide the appropriate psychological care for everyone regardless of nations, age, and gender. Thus, we delivered intervention/ rehabilitation/ treatment plans for the Tsunami survivors in an attempt to accompany them to recover from the traumatic distress as mentioned. We planned to assign roles, duties, and responsibilities to each section differently for our operation, which concerned about operational, structural planning, processing, and administrating aspect. Our roles, duties, and responsibilities are listed as followed:

1. Establish the Mental Health Center for Thai Tsunami Disaster (MHCT).

This center aims to command, communicate and control the concerned mental health facilities to deliver various services, such as medical, psychosocial services, and mental rehabilitation, to the Tsunami survivors who have, either or both, physical and/or psychological problems.

2. Set up Mental Health Mobile Teams (MT) to deliver mental health services to Tsunami survivors

The DMH transited six mental health mobile teams to each southern province of Thailand that were affected by Tsunami. Each team consists of 10 professionals, who are: 1 Psychiatrist, 2-3 Psychologists, 1 Social Worker, 2 Psychiatric Nurses, 1 Pharmacist, 1 Assistant Nurse, and 1 Driver. Each province has its own local center, which are:

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| 1. Phuket | => | Soun Saranrom Psychiatric Hospital and the Royal College of Psychiatrist of Thailand |
| 2. Krabi | => | Soun Saranrom psychiatric Hospital |
| 3. Phang-nga | => | Somdej Choa Praya Psychiatric Institution and Srithanya Psychiatric Hospital |
| 4. Ranong | => | Mental Health Center No.11 |

5. Trang and Satun => Songkhla Rajanakarindra Psychiatric Hospital and Mental Health No.12

Each mobile team has basic responsibilities, which include: psychological first aid, mental health assessment, physical and mental health intervention/treatment, counseling service, referring severe patient to the corresponding hospital when necessary, and accumulate and transfer daily reports to the MHCT.

The process of accumulating and transferring data is conducted daily. All local mobile teams are responsible to infer data regarding the services accessed daily, which are sent to MHCT at Soan Sararom Psychiatric Hospital. Then, they are forwarded to the Planning and Mental Health Technical Unit, Department of Mental Health for analyzing and finalizing the data. These data will be presented to the high rank order administrators and other relevant units.

3. Deliver psychological public relation and education

The Department of Mental Health attempted to promote the operational plan of MHCT by delivering public education media sources, e.g., pamphlets, TV programs, and website <Website MHCT @ http://www.dmh.go.th/dmhmc/dmh_tsunami/>. The MHC website allows the public to access and be informed about the situation and our intervention delivered to the Tsunami survivors.

4. Monitor, follow up, and evaluation

The Department of Mental Health has organized the administrative and academic teams from the Central Administrative Section in order to monitor, follow up, and encourage every mobile team staff, who have been working tirelessly since Tsunami occurred.

5. Administer the budget

Planning Division of the Department of Mental Health has operated a seminar calling for the government budget support of 20.2 million baht. The budget is used for emergency support by the psychiatric mobile team to the Tsunami survivors and to establish the Mental Health Recovery Center for Thai Tsunami Disaster at Tagoupa, Phang-nga (MHRCT). The Center provide psychosocial assistance (expectation of situation/ mental health assessment/ provision of psychosocial services/ transferring/ and other assistance).

6. Organize seminars and training sessions

The Department of Mental Health, Mental Health Technical Development Bureau, has organized training sessions in which delivered psychological education to teachers, parents/caregivers, public health staff, and health volunteer as follows:

6-7 January 2005: training for teachers and parents/caregivers at Phuket, Ranong, and Phang-nga

7-9 January 2005: a training for health volunteer and public health staff from Phang-nga, and a meeting (practical/ role play) to elucidate and share the experiences from mobile team staff, and outline the plans for long-term intervention and rehabilitation to Tsunami survivors.

7 January 2005: the academic workshop on Mental Health Disaster was conducted

26 - 28 January 2005 and 16 - 18 February 2005: The training on Mental Health Effects of Disaster and Trauma on Individuals, Families, and Communities: Understanding and Intervention: for the mental health professional and public health personnel at The Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok and The Metropole Hotel, Phuket, respectively.

2-3 February 2005: The Dept. of Mental Health and the Pfizer (Thailand) Limited held The 1st World Conference on After the Tsunami: Mental Health Challenges to the Community for Today and Tomorrow at The Grand Hyatt Eravan Hotel, Thailand.

28 February - 1 March 2005 The Dept. of Mental Health with UNICEF, KKU, and CWRU held the Conference on Psychosocial Care and Support for Children in Emergency Situations at the Chaopraya Park Hotel, Bangkok.

For fiscal year 2006, the DMH will call for the budget of 15,409,000 baht, which is to deliver intervention and rehabilitation services to the Tsunami survivors more effectively under the responsibilities of the Mental Health Recovery Center at Phang-nga. In addition, the system of monitoring and following up the Tsunami survivors will be developed within the Tsunami affected areas.

Currently, the DMH is in the stage of planning for the strategy of intervention and rehabilitation for Tsunami survivors in order to construct a long-term operational plan for our future.

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