Emergency Behaviour Response and Training in Singapore

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Singapore
The Republic of Singapore is an island of 641 square kilometres. It lies at the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsular and is situated one degree or 136.8 kilometer north of the equator.
Man-made Disasters

- Outside of the major earthquake and hurricane zones
- Spared of the many natural calamities that have struck the neighbouring countries
- Minor tremors occasionally
- However we are not spared of the man made disasters
Man-made disasters from 1960

1961

25 May 1961 Bukit Ho Swee Fire. Major fire devastated a large squatter colony of 2200 attap and wooden houses 4 killed, 85 injured and thousands made homeless
The 1970s

- 12 November 1972 – The Robinson’s tragedy: a major fire razed the colonial landmark departmental store causing 9 deaths

- 12 October 1978 – The Spyros Incident: an explosion and fire occurred on board an oil tanker docked at the shipyard for repairs: 76 workers were killed and 100 were injured
The 1980s

The Hotel New World Disaster: a six storey building housing a hotel, a bank and a night club collapsed killing 33 and injuring 17
1992

- 23 August – Sinking of the Royal Pacific: cruise liner carrying mainly Singaporeans sank after being rammed by a Taiwanese trawler, 3 dead and 6 missing
- 27 November – Sembawang Shipyards mishap: flash fire on board a tanker undergoing repair: 5 workers killed and 7 injured
1996

► 30 July – Genting Highlands landslides: landslides along the highway leading to the Cameron Highland resort, out of the 29 dead, 7 were Singaporeans while 3 Singaporeans were injured

► 14 December - North-south highway accident: a tour coach carrying mainly Singaporeans collided with a parked heavy vehicle and burst into flames killing 13 people, 10 were Singaporeans including 3 children
1997

19 December – Silk Air MI 185 aircrash: a Silk Air B474 crashed into the Musi River in Palembang: 104 crew and passengers were killed, 45 were Singaporeans.
2003

March 2003 – Outbreak of SARS: epidemic that claimed 33 lives including those of professionals in the treatment team
2004

► April – Nicoll Highway collapse - cave in at the construction site for MRT line: 4 dead and 3 injured

► 26 December – Asian Tsunami: massive earthquake that triggered tsunamis that devastated the coastlines of several countries: some Singaporeans on holidays were affected
Initiation of the Singapore National Emergency Behaviour Management System

- Initiated after the Hotel New World disaster in which psychological and psychiatric intervention were provided for the first time
- Initial plan was only to have a mental health team to be available to respond to any future disaster site
Formation of the NEBMS

- In July 1994 the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health together with other government bodies established the National Emergency Behaviour Management System (NEBMS).

- Its mission is to provide psychological support and help victims and families, emergency service personnel and the community cope emotionally and psychologically during civil emergencies and to facilitate their recovery as quickly as possible.
Purpose of NEBMS

► To identify and help people at risk cope as well as possible in the long term with the support from family and friends as well as community resources

► Most would be cared for by trained Emergency Behaviour Officers (EBO)
Roles and Functions of EBOs

► To give inputs on aspects of human behaviour in disaster management
► To provide care and emotional support to casualties, relatives and traumatised members of the public
► To provide support for the emotional well being of commanders and emergency service personnel
► To advise on crises information management, mass media relations and public enquiries
Organization structure of NEBMS

MOH | SCDF | SPF | MCYS | MOE | MITA | ENV | MINDEF | PRISONS

Sr EBOs

EBOs
Emergency behaviour planning and management according to phases of disaster

Steady Phase

Aim:
► Building community resilience and training of EBOs to face any disaster

Planning and management:
► Disaster awareness and knowledge
► Organization and role allocation
► Exercise and rehearsal
► Communication of shared values and aims
► Strong sense of community
Emergency behaviour planning and management according to phases of disaster

Disaster

Aim:
- To mitigate and manage traumatic stress and to prevent adverse mental health outcomes

Planning and management:
- Mental health information on stress reactions
- Outreach to victims, relatives, disaster workers
- Planning and action to reduce further traumatization
Emergency behaviour planning and management according to phases of disaster

Post Disaster

Aim:
► To facilitate recovery and provide long term follow up

Planning/management:
► Continuing mental health education
► Provision of PTSD treatment
► Grief leadership
► Consolidation of shared values and aims
EBO Training

- Conducted regularly during steady phase
- Participants are selected from a variety of professional and occupational backgrounds mainly mental health professionals
- Typical training session will last for five full days at 40 hours per day
- Lectures, case studies, role plays, basic intervention and helping skills as well as simulation exercises
Content of Training

- Nature, types and phases of disaster
- Organization’s response to disaster
- Hazmat (toxic contamination) incidents
- Mass casualties: what helpers should expect in a disaster
- Effects of disasters on helpers and commanders: helping the helpers
- Circles of vulnerability
- Psychological first aid, crisis intervention and basic counselling skills
- Coping with death and bereavement
- Psychological reactions to crisis and disaster
- Mental health (stress, PTSD)
- Crowd and group behaviour
- Eye witnesses’ accounts
- Decision making in a crisis
- Management of information and media in a crisis
- Concept of emergency behaviour management, the NEBMS and roles of EBOs
- Case studies: NEBMS response to previous disasters
- Psychological debriefing
- Helping children to cope
Concepts of operation

► Activation

► Chief EBO and Senior EBOs will be in control and provide operational and professional leadership

► EBOs provide first level of emotional support to casualties

► EBOs will do triaging and provide psychological first aid to all affected primary, secondary and tertiary victims suffering from ‘normal’ emotional disturbance

► High risk victims will be channeled for necessary care and treatment
Functions of different agencies in NEBMS

Ministry of Health (MOH)

Provide psychological and psychiatric triage and care to casualties and other victims at the disaster site, clinic and hospital facilities and follow-up treatment including psychological debriefing and other professional interventions for emergency service personnel.

Give inputs to emergency public information on mental health and disorders such as anxiety, PTSD, depression.
Functions of different agencies in NEBMS

Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF)

Provide psychological preparation, support, intervention for SCDF rescue and hazard mitigation personnel during operational phase.
Ensure safety and perform triage or psychological first aid for rescued victims and other victims while they are under the care of SCDF at the disaster site.
Functions of different agencies in NEBMS

Singapore Police Force (SPF)

Assist in security and safety efforts, mass evacuation and management of crowd behaviour
Conduct psychological preparation and provide emotional support for security personnel

Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS)

Provide psychological and emotional support to victims, evacuees and homeless at relief shelters, relatives holding areas and assist in the community’s recovery from the disaster
Functions of different agencies in NEBMS

Ministry of Education (MOE)
Care for the psychological and emotional well-being of pupils in or outside the schools, where the children or their families are affected by the disaster

Ministry of Environment (ENV)
Provide emotional support to next-of-kin, relatives and friends at mass burial sites
Functions of different agencies in NEBMS

Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA)

Collaborate with SCDF, SPF, MOH and MOE Public Affairs Department on the preparation and dissemination of crisis information and effective media relations
Counter rumours and recommend strategies that could enhance public morale and cooperation to reduce community stress and anxiety
Functions of different agencies in NEBMS

Ministry of Defence (MINDEF)
Augment agencies’ EBO manpower in providing care and support to affected uniformed groups and in conducting psychological debriefings

Prisons
Manage problem behaviour of detained criminal elements during the disaster
We must always be prepared for any unpredictability and be able to rise to the occasion.