
APPENDIX H

Mental Health in the Post-Katrina Era

Mental Health Association (MHA) Biloxi office was totally destroyed. Mental Health agencies case loads are greater but agencies are not operating at full capacity to address the rise in mental health and substance abuse needs. Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Mental Health Association of Mississippi, Project Recovery, Emergency Dispatchers, and other local community mental health agencies have reported an increase in the number of crisis calls, suicide calls, and other calls for immediate mental health assistance.

Data presented this week by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service — Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration at the Spirit of Recovery Summit showed that 25-30% of Katrina Survivors has clinically significant mental health needs. 142,000 – 214,000 and another 200,000 have sub clinical needs.

One early assessment for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated that as many as 500,000 people who delivered or did relief work in the region would require mental health services. Another report indicated that at least 100,000 children who lived through Katrina were likely to suffer post traumatic stress disorder. A study by Florida State University looked at experiences of nearly 1,000 south Florida teens who lived through Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The researchers found that some of them continued to have psychological problems even seven years after the storm.

Those struggling with stressful events in their lives or had mental

health problems before the storm are more adversely affected. Those displaced from homes and schools for an extended time are also at higher risk for long-term problems. Researchers believe that the victims of Hurricane Katrina will be at an increased risk for mental health problems for many years to come. The extent of the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina was widespread and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced from their homes and families. Those aspects of the storm mean that many people were exposed to some degree of adversity, and that puts them at greater risk for mental health problems both immediately and over a long period of time.

At this time, additional data is being collected on mental health and substance abuse and will be provided as assessments are complete.

Critical mental health services that are needed both immediately and long term:

- > Crisis Intervention/Management (suicide lifeline, crisis counseling, etc.)
- > Counseling (individual, marital, family, youth, seniors, teenagers)
- > Intensive case management and monitoring
- > Specialized outreach program and community activities for seniors
- > Substance abuse prevention programs and supportive services
- > Coping and Resiliency programs (families and children)
- > Training and education (teachers, first responders, administrators, caregivers, mental health professionals and paraprofessionals, etc.)
- > Violence prevention

Building Islands of Resilience

Intervention Programs:

- > School-based
- > Clinical training
- > Train-the-trainer
- > Psychological supports for caregivers

> Community level interventions

Currently, Mental Health Association of Mississippi, Gulf Coast Mental Health Center, and private practices are providing counseling and case management services in Biloxi. While Project Recovery is conducting outreach, assessment, crisis counseling and referral services, it is only a temporary grant provided by FEMA and does not provide for long term mental health services. Both Mental Health Association of Mississippi and Gulf Coast Mental Health Center are serving immediate and long term mental health needs but are not operating at full capacity and their case loads are greater.

City of Biloxi can assist mental health agencies in promoting its programs and services through community awareness and prevention campaigns as well as help spread information within the city about how to access these services through the City newsletter and email alerts. Additionally, City of Biloxi can support mental health agencies by funding programs and working directly with agencies to promote the importance of mental health and its coping, resiliency, and prevention programs.

Senior Citizens

Many of Mississippi Gulf Coast elderly residents, as with most area residents, have survived the overwhelming destruction and devastation of the greatest natural disaster in US history, often suffering from:

- > Personal injury and pains of struggle for survival
- > Loss of loved ones, friends and community members
- > Loss of complete homes, pets, vehicles and personal property
- > Loss of precious life collections and memorabilia
- > Loss of community identity: homes, neighborhoods, places of worship and historical structures and landmarks
- > Loss or disruption of health & community services and resources

Field Assessments

Upon several interviews and home visits with seniors and other

community members, seniors suffer from the following:

- > Loss of identifiable past
- > Discouraged by their present conditions
- > Uncertain and afraid of what the coming future may bring

This, while many Gulf Coast community members including seniors find themselves:

- > Living in semi-isolated
- > Distant from the already limited health and mental health services
- > Limited resources and support systems

We also found seniors to be suffering from mental health systems including:

- > General anxiety and high levels of emotional uncertainty
- > Significant weight loss
- > Insomnia and other sleep disorders

Studies of post major disasters indicate a large number of survivors suffering mental health and emotional disturbances and ailments including: Depression, Acute Stress, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

There are few agencies addressing these critical senior citizen needs. At this time, Mental Health Association of Mississippi is providing a one day per week Senior Day Support Program and some in-house case management services.

The City of Biloxi can support Mental Health Association and other senior providers by supporting its efforts to carry out and expand senior programs and community services.