



## DiversityPreparedness.Org E-Newsletter

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*Dear Colleagues,*

*Welcome to the Third Issue of the DiversityPreparedness.Org E-Newsletter. DiversityPreparedness.Org is the nation's first online resource center devoted to advancing the emergency preparedness needs of culturally diverse communities. The aim of the E-newsletter is to bring you current information on resources, research, training opportunities, and events which explicitly address emergency preparedness for diverse communities. This issue features The Psychological Effects of Disasters as the topic of the month and provides links to a range of articles, reports, and translated materials that focus on the subject. Excerpts from a conversation with Dr. Robert T. Carter of Columbia University, an expert on the topic, are also featured.*

### Director's Desk

*Thoughts from Dennis P. Andrulis, PhD, MPH, Director of the Center for Health Equality and Associate Dean for Research at the Drexel University School of Public Health.*



#### Cultural Diversity, Public Health Emergencies and Mental Health Needs

The human costs of disasters often extend far beyond the physical effects to take a significant toll on the mental health and psychological well being of individuals and whole communities. But just as physical consequences will vary by culture, mental health effects and manifestations play out in the broader context of cultural norms, customs and traditions.

They also share a legacy of disparities in access to and quality of care and, frequently, a lack of understanding among caregivers of the dynamics that affect how individuals from diverse racial and ethnic heritage cope with trauma and tragedy. How do people of different cultures respond to stressful events? How do they express grief? How do cultural roots affect responses to death and dying? When socioeconomic disadvantage is added to this legacy it leads to a parallel conclusion: for many racially and ethnically diverse individuals and their communities, they are more likely to face post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and other psychological aftereffects from natural and man made disasters.

Disasters are complex cultural encounters in which the cultures of victims, helpers and the emergent crisis can come into conflict [1]. Psychological stress and other responses to disasters, like health conditions, are likely to be influenced by the culture of the individual and related lifetime experiences [2]. A study of Vietnamese survivors of Katrina found financial strain, along with poor social supports for example, were linked to PTSD symptoms. Culture-specific concerns, however, added to the mental health challenges in that individuals who were less acculturated were associated with poorer

physical health and higher levels of PTSD [1] [3]. Actions to address the mental health needs of individuals must recognize the roles that culture and community play in resilience and response. Whether positive adaptive behavior or pathology, such as PTSD or depression, occurs is significantly influenced by the relationship between the individual and his or her culture [1]. Bridging to these individuals and communities will require providers and relief agencies to acknowledge the need to work with cultural brokers and indigenous healers. Training of workers must include cultural competence knowledge and skills for addressing the psychological consequences of disasters among diverse communities in the context of their norms of behavior, customs and history of relationships with and access to mental health assistance.

Finally, neither communities nor agencies and organizations responsible for meeting mental health needs can afford to simply wait for the next disaster to strike. Instead, as the work of our National Consensus Panel on Emergency Preparedness and Cultural Diversity has stressed, all sectors need to work proactively and in concert—before disasters occur—to reduce the stigma associated with the mental health consequences that may result from an event, to assure the availability of resources to meet need, and to build provider-community trust around the value of and seeking mental health treatment.

#### References:

1. Marsella, A. & Christopher, M. Ethnocultural considerations in disasters: an overview of research, issues and directions. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*. 2004, 27: 521-539.
2. Norris, F & Alegria, M. Mental Health Care for Ethnic Minority Individuals and Communities in the Aftermath of Disasters and Mass Violence. *CNS Spectrums*. 2005, 2: 132-140.
3. Chen, A., Keith, V., Leong, K., Airriess, C. Li, W., Chung, K. & Lee, C. Hurricane Katrina: prior trauma, poverty and health among Vietnamese-American survivors. *International Council of Nurses*. 2007, 324-330.

## Topic of the Month: Psychological Impacts of Disasters



Disasters are complex events which leave a visible trail of physical and social destruction in their wake. Beneath the debris and displaced families are often emotional scars which endure long after homes have been rebuilt and families have returned to their communities. The importance of addressing mental health issues associated with catastrophic events, such as PTSD, has gained momentum in recent years. Yet a number of studies have shown elevated rates of mental health disorders among racial and ethnic minorities following a disaster. A myriad of factors contribute to this disparity, including social vulnerabilities which may make certain communities more susceptible to adverse

mental health outcomes as well as barriers to accessing mental health services, such as cultural stigma surrounding mental illness and cultural/linguistic barriers between patients and mental health service providers. Below is a list of resources for lay individuals, mental health service providers, researchers, and emergency managers that provide information to assist in the delivery of culturally sensitive mental health services to diverse communities following a disaster.

### Training & Education:

- **Cultural Competency in Disasters:** This streaming video addresses the concept of cultural competency as it relates to the choice and implementation of mental health outreach strategies in disaster response. Continuing education credit is available.
- **Ethical Issues in Disaster Response:** This ½ hour, online, training module addresses ethical issues in disaster response such as

cultural competence and ethical conflicts which arise from inequalities of power and/or control. Continuing education credit is available.

### Reports & Resource Guides:

- **Helping Children Cope with Crisis: A Guide for African American Parents:** This resource reviews signs of post-traumatic stress in children and specifically targets African American families.

- **Developing Cultural Competence in Disaster Mental Health Programs- Guiding Principles and Recommendations:** This comprehensive resource guide, produced by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), focuses on methods to integrate culturally competent practices into mental health services for disaster survivors.
- **One Year after Katrina, More Is Known about Its Mental Health Effects, Storm's Widespread Effect on People of Color and Children, And the Need for Culturally Competent Mental Health Services Are Evident:** This thorough press release issued by the American Psychological Association discusses the mental health effects of Hurricane Katrina on minorities and emphasizes the need for cultural competence training among first responders.

### Books & Journal Articles:

- **Ethnocultural Perspectives on Disaster and Trauma- Foundations, Issues, and Applications:** This book provides a range of perspectives and strategies for providing mental health services to diverse populations following a disaster. Specific chapters examine the needs of Arab, Caribbean, Latin, and Vietnamese Americans as well as other minority populations.
- **Ethnocultural Considerations in Disasters- An Overview of Research, Issues, and Directions:** This article provides an overview of research which focuses on the role of culture in complex emergencies and explores how it contributes to psychological responses following a disaster and the need to provide culturally competent mental health services.
- **Mental Health Care for Ethnic Minority Individuals and Communities in the Aftermath of Disasters and Mass Violence:** This article synthesizes research on the psychological effects of disasters amongst ethnic minority individuals and provides guidelines for culturally responsive post-disaster interventions.
- **Adjusting to Uncertainty- Coping Strategies Among the Displaced after Hurricane Katrina:** This study examines differences in coping strategies employed by

individuals from different sociodemographic backgrounds post-Hurricane Katrina.

- **Hurricane Katrina- Prior Trauma, Poverty and Health Among Vietnamese-American Survivors:** This study examines factors contributing to differences in health outcomes, including PTSD, within the New Orleans Vietnamese community following Hurricane Katrina.

### Translated Materials & Fact Sheets:

- **Healthy Roads Media Translations:** Healthy Roads Media provides a number of translated resources which address mental health issues such as PTSD and anxiety. Translated materials are available in various formats including web-based videos, mobile videos, audio recordings, multimedia presentations, and handouts. Resources are available in Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, English, Kirundi, Russian, Somali, and Spanish.
- **After the Disaster:** This resource, produced by the California Department of Mental Health, provides information on the unpleasant feelings one may experience following a disaster and suggests a number of coping strategies. The resource is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- **How Do I Deal With My Feelings?:** This resource provides information on the emotional and physical symptoms one may experience following a traumatic event. The resource is available in [Arabic](#), [Bosnian](#), [Chinese](#), [Croatian](#), [English](#), [Farsi](#), [French](#), [Khmer/Cambodian](#), [Laotian](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#), [Spanish](#), and [Tagalog](#).
- **Helping Young Children Cope with Trauma:** This brochure provides information on how to help children cope with a traumatic event. The resource is available in [Chinese](#), [English](#), [Farsi](#), [French](#), [Hmong](#), [Khmer/Cambodian](#), [Korean](#), [Laotian](#), [Russian](#), [Spanish](#), [Tagalog](#), and [Vietnamese](#).
- **When Bad Things Happen:** This resource is designed for middle school and high school students who are coping with disturbing emotions in the wake of a terrorist attack and is available in [Arabic](#), [Bosnian](#), [Chinese](#), [English](#), [Farsi](#), [French](#), [Khmer/Cambodian](#), [Korean](#),

Laotian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

- **Tips for Teachers- The Role of Culture in Helping Children Recover from a Disaster:**

This fact sheet provides advice for teachers to better understand how cultural differences contribute to a child's psychological responses to disaster.

*Below are links to recent and upcoming events and training opportunities as well as recently published reports, books and articles.*

### Events & Training:

#### **The Eighth UCLA Conference on Public Health and Disasters**

May 3-6, 2009

Torrance, California

This multidisciplinary conference brings together academics, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers from public health, mental health, community disaster preparedness and response, social sciences, government, media, and non-governmental organizations to promote a dialogue and exchange of ideas. For more information on the conference program, speakers, and student poster session [CLICK HERE](#).



#### **The 16th World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine**

May 12- 19, 2009

Victoria, British Columbia

The 16th World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine is a

bi-annual event convened by the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine which will be held in Victoria, British Columbia this year. The mission of the Congress is to equip health professionals with tools to prepare for, and respond to, disasters and health emergencies around the world. Topics for the 16th convening include cross-cultural issues in mental health services and needs of immigrants/refugees. To learn more about registration and the event program [CLICK HERE](#).

#### **The 19th World Conference of Disaster Management**

June 21-24, 2009

Toronto, Canada

The theme of this year's World Conference of Disaster Management (WCDM) is "A Climate for Change: Communication, Collaboration and Co-operation." The WCDM is geared towards professionals across the spectrum of disaster services including emergency responders, public health officials, risk communication specialists, emergency managers and other disciplines. The previous WCDM attracted 2,100 disaster management professionals from over 40 countries. For more information [CLICK HERE](#).

#### **The National Conference on Community Preparedness**

August 9-12, 2009

Arlington, Virginia

The 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness: The Power of Citizen Corps is being hosted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Community Preparedness Division and the International Association of Emergency Managers. The conference will bring together approximately 600 emergency managers, first responders, non-government organizations, advocacy groups, and the public to share best practices on collaborative emergency planning, discuss preparedness education for target populations, and network with Citizen Corps participants. Abstract submissions are being accepted until March 2, 2009. For more information [CLICK HERE](#).

### Initiatives & Publications:

#### **American Public Health Association Offers Get Ready Scholarship**

The Get Ready Scholarship is being offered in conjunction with the APHA's Get Ready campaign and open to high school seniors graduating in 2009. Applicants are required to submit an essay of 500-1,000 words describing the importance of emergency preparedness and steps families can take to get ready. The winner will receive a \$500 scholarship. For more information [CLICK HERE](#).



## National Consensus Statement on Emergency Preparedness and Cultural Diversity: Spanish Translation:

The National Consensus Statement is the nation's first blueprint for integrating racially and ethnically diverse communities into emergency preparedness. The statement was developed by a diverse group of leading national, state and local organizations who came together for the first time to define a unified set of priorities for preparing and responding to culturally diverse communities in public health emergencies. The statement has recently been translated into Spanish to raise awareness of the need to develop emergency preparedness programs, plans, and policies which are inclusive of the cultural and linguistic needs of Hispanic/Latino Communities. To view the statement in full [CLICK HERE](#).



## Sesame Street Workshop Develops Emergency Preparedness Resources for Spanish Speaking Children

The highly acclaimed children's education program Sesame Street has acknowledged the potential for fostering family emergency preparedness through children.

In collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security and the Weill Cornell Medical College's Pediatrics Department, Sesame Street has produced a number of age appropriate preparedness materials in English and Spanish. To learn more about Sesame Street's preparedness initiatives and access Spanish language materials [CLICK HERE](#).

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Launches Snap Shots of State Population Data (SNAPS) to Assist in Emergency Preparedness Planning

The CDC has recently launched SNAPS to provide local-level community profiles consisting of key variables for developing and tailoring health education and risk communication efforts to ensure that diverse audiences receive critical public health messages that are accessible, understandable, and timely. Data is provided on variables such as race/ethnicity and primary language spoken at home. To access the SNAPS data [CLICK HERE](#).



## Race, Hurricane Katrina, and Government Satisfaction: Examining the Role of Race in Assessing Blame

There is little question that public dissatisfaction with government response to Hurricane Katrina was widespread and in large due to the storms devastating impact upon minority

communities and the shortcomings of recovery efforts. This article examines racial differences in government satisfaction among Hurricane Katrina survivors and the role of informal social networks in forming opinions. To access the full article [CLICK HERE](#).

## The 2006 California Heat Wave: Impacts on Hospitalizations and Emergency Department Visits

This study, which recently appeared in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, examined racial/ethnic differences in hospitalizations and emergency department visits during the 2006 California heat wave. Selected tables provide information on hospitalization rates by heat related illness, geographic region, and race/ethnicity. To view the full article [CLICK HERE](#).

## Averting Disaster: What the California Wildfires Can Teach Us About Reaching Latinos in Times of Crisis

This report issued by the National Council of La Raza examines issues surrounding the impact of the 2007 California Wildfires on Latino and immigrant communities. The report discusses how Latinos have historically fared in past disaster in California and across the U.S. The report concludes with a series of policy recommendations and suggestions for philanthropic institutions. To view the full report [CLICK HERE](#).

## Terrorism-Related Fear and Avoidance Behavior in a Multiethnic Urban Population

This study, led by Dr. David Eisenman and colleagues, sought to assess the perceived risk of terrorism and avoidance behavior among vulnerable populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, in Los Angeles County. Results indicate that vulnerable populations may have elevated concerns and are thus disproportionately burdened by the psychosocial effects of the threat of terrorism. To access the article in its entirety [CLICK HERE](#).

## Providing Access to Resilience-Enhancing Technologies for Disadvantaged Communities and Vulnerable Populations

This report, which is the product of the Community & Regional Resilience Initiative and the Institute for Advanced Biometrics and Social Systems Studies, examines technologies that hold the most promise in strengthening the disaster resilience of vulnerable communities, such as those which are low-income and/or culturally diverse. The report also discusses strategies for community leaders, managers, and planners to utilize these technologies and integrate them into emergency preparedness, response, and recovery activities. To view the full report [CLICK HERE](#).



## Voices from the Field:

### Robert T. Carter, PhD

A range of social, economic, and political factors shape the disproportionately adverse mental health outcomes experienced by minority communities following a disaster. Pre-disaster vulnerabilities certainly contribute to these outcomes, but there is great potential for service providers to mitigate the aftereffects of trauma and emotional distress in these communities through the application of culturally competent mental health services. We spoke with Dr. Robert T. Carter\* to learn more about the cultural complexities surrounding mental health outcomes in culturally diverse communities following a disaster and guiding principles to culturally competent disaster mental health services.

Dr. Carter's work on disaster mental health and preparedness emphasizes the need to ground services within the worldview of the local community and resist the inclination to reduce the culture of the "other" to its simplest form, a practice which is inherent to American culture. Dr. Carter explained how the way people feel and behave is strongly influenced by the complex interplay between physical, social, and cultural environments. "People are quite complex in thinking about who they are... the way I think about myself as a man is quite different than how someone else thinks about themselves as a man," Dr. Carter

went on to explain.

While overarching similarities often do exist between like groups, it is a disservice to assume that the worldview of all members of a specific racial/ethnic group is alike. According to this principle, recruiting a diverse workforce that visually resembles the racial/ethnicity composition of the community they serve is only part of a successful strategy. Service providers need to be able view situations through the cultural lens of the local community to fully meet their needs.

As a method to facilitate the adaptation of another's worldview and improve service delivery Dr. Carter recommends that pre-disaster training modules include activities that promote the "self-exploration" of the service provider. The benefits of self-exploration are founded upon the notion that one's familiarity with their own culture, norms, and communication styles enables them to better understand how someone else may see the world. Self-exploration occurs through a process in which individuals are encouraged to examine their personal experiences and beliefs. This process, however, poses difficulties as it is normally "not within the purview of expectations [of the service provider] to abandon their inherent culture." Dr. Carter describes this discord between what the service provider considers to be within their scope of occupational responsibility and the key to culturally competent care as a "dynamic cultural conflict."

Increasing the style, duration, or intensity of cultural competence training sessions may allow for greater self-exploration and in turn, the implementation of mental health services which are sensitive to distinct cultural ends. Concrete examples of such practices include recognizing non-verbal communication styles, emotional distress, and help-seeking behaviors.

For more information on Dr. Carter's work you can visit his [Website](#). You can also view his report "[Disaster Response to Communities of Color: Cultural Response Intervention](#)" by following the link.

\* Robert T. Carter, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology and Education in the Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University. His research focuses on issues of race and culture and he is internationally known for his work on black and white racial identity. Dr. Carter was involved with the Disaster Mental Health Research Mentoring Program at the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Dartmouth University and has written reports and given presentations on issues surrounding race/ethnicity and disaster mental health.

*The National Resource Center is continually growing and updating its collection of resources and information. We welcome individuals and organizations to submit stories from the field and resources including publications, information on current initiatives, training curriculum and educational exercises, measurement and evaluation tools, research activities, policies and services focusing on preparedness for culturally diverse communities. To submit a resource or story from the field [CLICK HERE](#).*

*We encourage you to share the National Resource Center with your peers and colleagues and welcome you to link to the website. Please also feel free to e-mail your comments and any feedback to our team. We look forward to working with you to making this site a resourceful and useful tool in advancing the preparedness of our nation's diverse communities.*

***Sincerely,***

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