



## MOOC 1

### Learning Unit 7

### Chapter 3

## GOOD PRACTICE 1

### Leadership in the Mass Disaster of the Morandi Bridge Collapse, Genoa (Italy)

#### Instructions for learners

Working in groups, review the details of the case study and answer the questions to complete the activity. It is not necessary to describe the whole process in detail.

In the following case study, you will be provided with a scenario to use in your classroom for an exercise that will last around 35 minutes:

- 5 minutes for the trainees to read the instructions and the information about the scenario.
- 10 minutes for individual/subgroup discussion.
- 20 minutes to answer the questions.

#### Background Scenario Description

On Tuesday, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018, before noon, a section of the Morandi bridge on the A10 motorway collapses. At the time of the collapse, over 30 vehicles, including cars and heavy vehicles, were passing on and under the bridge. 46 people died, including 3 children and 2

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adolescents. The last two bodies were extracted from rubble on Wednesday evening. Rescuers have dug non-stop for over 36 hours, but no sign of life has come from under the mounds of debris. There are 16 wounded people, 9 with code red injuries.

The people affected by the collapse are mostly from the surroundings. So far, 634 citizens have been forced to abandon their homes: a dozen buildings have been evacuated by the Civil Protection, but the number could increase following ongoing inspections of the buildings. The mayor announces that there is a serious risk that all the buildings under the viaduct will be demolished.

Among the people forced to leave their homes are many elderly people and families with children.

### **Methods, resources and obstacles:**

Psychological intervention in an emergency must follow and take into account the stages of the traumatization process. For example, immediately after the trauma and in the first 2 days after, the psychological state of the subjects is between dissociation, confusion, disbelief, etc. Therefore, a support based on talking would have little effect.

In this phase, it is necessary to initially stimulate the natural processes that tend to calm the person and restore balance, reducing the dissociation that may be taking place, promoting contact with environmental stimuli, and increasing body awareness. In a second phase, when people have intrusive symptoms, it is important to relive the event, in order to be able to re-process it and resolve the discomfort (Foa, 1990).

It is essential that trauma victims re-establish contact with their social support network. The traumatized need to have access to shelter, food and other kinds of resources to recover.

After safety is ensured, psychological interventions may be needed. People need to learn to put the problems they face into words, name them and formulate the appropriate solutions. It is important to talk to them about the irrational fears that are part of the disorder. If anxiety dominates, they need to strengthen coping skills. They must keep distance from the sensory inputs and emotions related to the trauma to observe and analyze them without hyperarousal or avoidance. They must find a language to understand and communicate their experiences. To put it in another perspective, the victim needs to relive the event without feeling helpless. It is important to describe what happened, the thoughts during the event, the worst part of the event and the reactions in detail, and how these affected the perception of oneself and others. This exposure therapy reduces symptoms and helps understand that remembering the trauma does not mean reliving it and that the experience has a beginning and an end.

To know more see also Good Practice number 3 of the present Learning Unit 7.

**Objective:**

You are contacted by the association of emergency psychologists which you are a member of. You are appointed as rescue leader to provide your expertise in organizing the intervention.

**Questions:**

1. Considering the number of victims involved in this mass disaster, how long will the intervention be? Give reasons for your answer.

*Please provide your answer and then read the note at the end of the document.*

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2. Considering the number of victims involved in this mass disaster, how many psychologists will you need to involve?

*Please provide your answer and then read the note at the end of the document.*

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3. It is August 14<sup>th</sup>, the peak of summer holiday season in Italy. What kind of communication can you structure to invite psychologists (a substantial number) to collaborate?

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4. You are the leader: you must lead the response mission to this disaster, address the need to understand the causes, vulnerabilities, challenges and opportunities of the disaster in order to achieve an effective response. Talk to your staff, ask for their support and let them know your plans and intentions in terms of duration of the intervention, distribution of work shifts, settings in which to operate.

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5. As a leader, what tools do you envision for monitoring the intervention?

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Note: 60 Psychotherapists experts in trauma focused intervention were involved in the first 4 weeks.