

Chapter I

Introduction



Natural and human-caused disasters often occur all of a sudden and every year millions of people are affected by it. The trauma associated with disasters usually lasts very long even after the event. Several psychological and behavioural problems are experienced among disaster-stricken populations. The populations most affected by disasters are the economically and socially backward people living in the densely populated coastal areas, tribal colonies and slums.

Studies conducted at the recent Tsunami-affected localities have revealed that disaster survivors bear a substantial burden of Mental Health Problems, which include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders, anxiety, depression and suicidal tendencies. Increased alcohol and other substance abuse has been a well-documented co-morbid factor associated with traumatic and other psychological disorders in these affected populations.

The aggravation of the problem of alcohol and substance abuse in the

Tsunami-affected communities hasn't come as a surprise as it is common knowledge that all kinds of detrimental and malevolent behaviours increase in the wake of disasters.

Alcoholism and substance abuse is an area, which is rather elusive to intervention programmes, by its very nature of being multifaceted, both etiologically and implication-wise even among normal populations.

When it comes to populations affected by disasters, as in the case of the recent Tsunami, the whole scenario becomes all the more complicated. So, the formulation of an intervention protocol against this problem requires an in-depth understanding of the entire situation.

The main objective of this Handbook is to impart special skills and techniques to Health Workers and Service Providers in dealing with the alcohol and substance abuse problem in vulnerable populations affected by disasters.