Texas Crisis Resiliency Team: The Impact of Religion on Humanitarianism

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that at some point in a person's life, they will be impacted by some form of a disaster. During this time, many individuals choose to volunteer within affected communities, through both affiliated and unaffiliated organizations. Volunteers play an integral role in disaster relief and recovery efforts. In order to best prepare and train volunteers to provide relief, it is beneficial to understand their motivation to volunteer, their life experiences, and the skills and gifts they might contribute to relief efforts. It is also beneficial to examine existing training programs to determine the ways in which these programs are meeting the needs of volunteers and to identify gaps in preparedness. This study examines surveys collected from a group of volunteers who completed training courses through the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT). Texas Crisis Resiliency Team is an organization which promotes "emotional and spiritual resiliency among survivors and other traumatic events" ("Welcome to the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team Website," n.d.). The primary goals of the study were to identify trends among volunteers' backgrounds and experiences, in order to better understand their needs and utilize their experience, and to provide feedback to TCRT regarding their training efforts for the purpose of quality improvement (QI) to better prepare volunteers for disaster, trauma and crisis intervention.

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INTRODUCTION

Research suggests 80% of Americans have either been impacted by some form of a disaster or will be affected by a disaster at some point in their lifetime (Littleton, 2016; Rotolo & Berg, 2011). Volunteers are a crucial element in preparation for a disaster response and disaster recovery efforts (Rotolo & Berg, 2011). Volunteering is defined as "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization" (Wilson, 2000 p.215). Volunteering can take place in both religious and nonreligious institutions (Wilson, 2000). Studies suggest that volunteers for disaster relief situations are less educated and younger; and are more likely to be recruited or asked to volunteer by someone directly in an organization (Rotolo & Berg, 2011).

The data utilized in this study was collected as part of an initiative to improve training efforts by the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT), whose primary goal is to help disaster survivors build emotional and spiritual resiliency ("Welcome to the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team Website," n.d.). As an organization, the TCRT values include: safety, respect, concern/empathy and encouragement ("Welcome to the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team Website," n.d.), and they seek to promote these values in their training of volunteers. The surveys consisted of both open and closed ended questions revolving around the organization of a community disaster spiritual care team (DSC). Community based DSC teams include a group of leaders who work closely with local emergency management systems and have the specific goal to provide spiritual care to trauma survivors. The team members of the DSC include community volunteers, who prepare and respond to disasters through coordination of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD). Some of the community teams mentioned in this study include: San Antonio

Crisis Resiliency Team, Crisis Response Ministry, Police, Fire, and Medical, and Haven for Hope.

The research objectives for this study were as follows:

1. Assess the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team training program for volunteers.

2. Assess the volunteers within these particular communities.

3. Provide recommendations for quality improvement (QI) in Texas Crisis Resiliency Team trainings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

National Association of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) is an organization which provides a platform for communication and collaboration amongst individuals and organizations providing disaster response and aiding in recovery efforts within a community ("National VOAD – National Association of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters," n.d.). Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are a large majority of the members that make up VOAD. VOAD's are also made up of faith and community-based organizations (Phillips, 2009; Smith 2011; Sylves, 2008). In order to be considered a NPO, the organizations must: be autonomous, agree not to profit from the services they provide, and have a mission statement describing the way their efforts serve the greater good (Ott, 2001; Sylves, 2008; Wolf, 1999). Once this is established, the organizations are tax exempt. NPOs have a large presence during the aftermath of disasters and have been a necessary component in aiding the relief efforts of communities throughout the history of the United States (Smith, 2012; Jorissen, 2014). NPOs mainly assist with providing individuals and families with basic needs such as food, water, clothing, shelter,

mental health services, medical care, and rebuilding due to destruction (ASPE, 2008; Fagnoni, 2006; Phillips & Jenkins, 2008; Smith, 2012).

By managing and coordinating during a disaster or crisis situation, individuals on a local level work together towards making a change. VOADs and NPOs work together in order to prepare for disasters, coordinate efforts during a disaster, and most importantly collaborate after the disaster (Jorissen, 2014).

Religious Influence and Humanitarianism

An experimental study examined the commonalities and differences between religion's impact on volunteering among individuals who identified as nonreligious. The research suggested that if nonreligious or secular individuals have close connections to others involved in religious affiliations and their communities, they are more likely to volunteer for both religious and non-religious causes (Lim & MacGregor, 2012). Furthermore, analysis of the data revealed that there is a correlation between religious involvement and willingness to volunteer (Lim & MacGregor, 2012). Overall, various studies reported a positive relationship between religion and humanitarian giving, a sense of community, and volunteering (Lam, 2002, 2006; Wuthnow, 1991). There is a considerable amount of research which suggests religious individuals are more actively involved as volunteers in several settings than their secular peers (Lam, 2002, 2006; Loveland et al. 2005; Park & Smith, 2000; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Religion often provides a sense of belonging which is brought by the belief in something greater (Bellah, 1991). Additionally,religious teachings around self-sacrifice andthe significance placed on helping others are likely contributors to this desire to serve (Ellison, 1992).

Conclusion

Volunteers are the backbone of the crisis relief operations prior to, during, and after a disaster. Research suggests that at some point in one's life, individuals will experience some sort of trauma or disaster (Littleton, 2016; Rotolo & Berg, 2011). Therefore, it is particularly important to assess the individuals who have chosen to dedicate time and effort to the betterment of the community in order to understand their personal experiences, including personal experiences related to trauma or disaster. This study further addresses the preparedness, overall background, and opinions of the volunteers with Texas Crisis Resiliency Team.

Research Objectives

The research objectives were to identify commonalities amongst the volunteers who completed the surveys regarding their training with Texas Crisis Resiliency Team. Through review of literature it will be important to describe the National Association of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and the religious influence on humanitarianism. In addition, assessing the TCRT training program for volunteers and future practices that could be utilized for volunteers in crisis.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized secondary data collected by Texas Crisis Resiliency Team. Data was collected at the end of a three-day training for volunteers. The content of the training includes caring for trauma survivors, understanding different faith groups, and various other relevant topics.

Sample Selection/Description

The survey asked the participant volunteers of the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT) about their past and current professions, age, gender, education, profession, religious affiliation,

personal experience with trauma or disasters, and the organization they plan to work with in providing trauma and/or disaster response. Of the respondents, 29% reported being retired. Among participants 4% reported working in education, or social service/counseling professions. 7% reported working in the healthcare/medical field,and 34% reported serving in religious or other ministry related roles such as pastor or chaplain. Other professions, which may have been indicated as a second profession, included business and leadership. It is important to note that some participants listed their past and present professions. For example, if a participant were retired but worked as an educator, they reported "retired teacher."

Data Collection

Due to the study utilizing secondary data, data had already been collected and was de-identified when the researcher received it. A mixed method design was used for this research. A combination of close-ended questions and open-ended questions were utilized throughout the survey.

Instrumentation

The survey consisted of 23 questions, divided into three parts. The first part addressed general questions about the volunteer, such as: age, gender, highest level of education, profession, religious affiliation, personal experience with trauma or disasters, and the organization that they planned to work with in providing trauma and/or disaster response. The second part addressed personal reflections and evaluation of the training course. This section included asking their dates of training, where their training was located, what topic modules their training included, if the physical setting was adequate for their training needs, if the speaker empowered their learning, if the topics were covered well, if there were topics they did not hear and wished had been a part of training, and to rate the overall training experience. The third part

addressed big picture questions. The surveys consisted of both open and closed ended questions

revolving around the organization, Texas Crisis Resiliency Team, and a community disaster

spiritual care team (DSC). Community based DSC teams include a group of leaders who work

closely with local emergency management systems and have the specific goal to provide spiritual

care to trauma survivors. The questions included why they wanted to do this type of work, what

gifts they felt they could bring to this work, if they believed in God, what role if any did they

believe God played in the source of the disaster, what role if any did they believe God played in

helping people to recover from a disaster, and what role local religious congregations had.

Procedures

The trainings were done in three different locations in Texas (San Antonio, Grand Prairie

and Harlingen) on three different dates ranging from January 11-March 2, 2018. The surveys

were administered during the trainings and were de-identified upon collection. The completed

surveys were then submitted to Dr. Jim Ellor, Ph.D., Professor at Diana R. Garland School of

Social Work at Baylor University.

Data Analysis & Procedures

The instrument utilized some closed-ended questions such as: age, level of education

attained, gender, location of training, and questions which provided a likert scale for rating.

These questions yielded quantitative data, while the open-ended questions yielded more

qualitative data. The researcher opted to translate all the survey responses, including answers to

open-ended questions, into quantitative data. The researcher coded answers and grouped them

into categories based on specified themes. The researcher then entered the data into SPSS and

analyzed the data by running frequencies and descriptives in order to further understand the

backgrounds and opinions of participants.

Data & Safety Monitoring

        External data monitoring is not necessary for this research study. All data was collected

as part of a quality improvement process. All participants were informed prior to the completion

of questionnaires that the information would be used to improve TCRT's training courses, and

that results from the questionnaires would be shared with Dr. Jim Ellor, Ph.D., Professor at the

Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University.

FINDINGS

Description of Sample

        The data included a total of 41 participants including: fourteen participants from San

Antonio (34%), sixteen participants from Grand Prairie (39%), and eleven participants from

Harlingen (27%), Texas. Amongst the participants, 53% were female and 46% were male.

Trainings took place over the course of three days and were all conducted between January 11 -

March 2, 2018. Individuals were asked about their religious affiliation(s) and the length of time

they had been affiliated with that organization. Data analysis can be found in the table below.

Table 1. Religious Affiliations

	Frequency	Percent
Catholic	3	7%
Baptist	15	37%
Methodist	5	12%
Independent Protestant	9	22%
Other Protestant	8	20%
Not Associated with a Religious Organization	1	2%
Total	41	100.0

Individuals reported being affiliated with a religious organization for a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 75 years, with a mean of 33 years of religious affiliation. Results indicated 2.4% had a high school education, 34% attended some/junior college, and 50% received an advanced degree (Masters or Doctorate). Participants with advanced degrees were asked to specify the field of study. Participants held a wide variety of advanced degrees including: Religion/Divinity, Education, Counseling, and Business. It is interesting to note that the most frequently noted advanced degree held by participants was Religion/Divinity, comprising 15% of the total.

Quantitative Analysis

Table 2. *"What organization will you be working with for TDR?"*

	Frequency	Percent
Crisis Resource Management (CRM)	15	37%
Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT)	6	15%
Local Jail Systems	1	2%
Military	1	2%
Unspecified	2	5%
Salvation Army	1	2%
Church/Religious Organizations	3	7%
Haven for Hope	4	10%
Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)	1	2%
Crisis Resiliency Team (CRT)	1	2%
Missing	6	15%
Total	41	100

Table 3. Participants who experienced some form of trauma or disaster

	Frequency	Percent
Major Loss	6	15%
Veteran	1	2%
Domestic Violence	2	5%
Flood	2	5%
Tornado	2	5%
Major Illness/Cancer	1	2%
Missing/None	27	66%
Total	41	100

In response to the overall rating of the training experience, 78% rated their experience asexcellent and 22% rated their experience as good. It is important to note that all, with the exception of one, reported attending all three days of training. In response to the question, *"Why would you want to do this type of work?"* 46% reported religious reasons, 22% reported humanitarianism, 15% reported that it was their purpose to do this type of work, 17% reported to support others, 7% reported being comfortable in trauma, and 7% reported having experience in this type of work. In response to the question, *"What gifts do you feel you can bring to this work?"* 39% reported humanitarianism responses, 36% reported interpersonal skills, 20% reported empathy, 10% reported leadership, 22% reported compassion, 17% reported experience, 10% reported spirituality, 7% reported their presence, 7% reported compassion and 5% reported cultural sensitivity. All forty-one participants answered yes when asked if they believed in God. When asked, *"What role, if any do you believe God plays in the source of the disaster?"* participants offered a variety of answers which the researcher combined into four categories. Of

the participants, 59% reported the belief that God plays some role in the source of the disaster, suggesting a more active role, while 48% of participants reported the belief that God doesn't actively play a role. Of that 48%, half of them specified the belief that He does allow the disaster. Lastly, 10% reported believing He doesn't play a role at all. In response to the question, *"What role, if any do you believe God plays in the source of recovery?"* 98% believe He plays some role in the recovery while 2% did not answer the question. When asked, *"What role do you see for local religious congregations?"* The majority (93%) believed there was a role for local religious organizations to play in recovery efforts, specifying a variety of approaches organizations might take. Cultural diversity was reported to be the topic best covered during the trainings. All participants felt that the speaker empowered their learning.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The surveys collected for this study further assist organizations such Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT) in the overall quality improvement of their trainings. Having a comprehensive understanding of these individuals allows TCRT to prepare for future proceedings. Eleven Baptist, five Independent Protestant, and four Methodist individuals answered yes when asked if they believed God plays a significant role in the source of a disaster. Individuals who participated in the training felt that cultural diversity in particular, death notification and suicide were the topics best covered. Participants who reported surviving a disaster or some form of trauma commonly indicated a belief that God plays an active role in a disaster. This is particularly important to consider for future trainings due to overall religious

sensitivity of the volunteers and their outreach into the community. It will be important to highlight any biases that may occur.

Impact of Political and Organizational Issues

With the usage of secondary data, there are potential challenges organizationally that may occur with the reception of the data or the interpretation of the findings. This includes awaiting another disaster to survey the individuals. In addition, appropriately asking questions that are broad and exploratory, rather than potentially leading the participants to answer a certain way.

Dissemination Plan

The research focused on the interpretation of secondary data and assessing overall quality improvement for the Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT). The findings of this study will be shared with the researcher's class at the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University. In addition, the findings will be shared with Dr. Jim Ellor, Ph.D., Professor at the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University and eventually with TCRT.

Strengths and Limitations of Study

The secondary data was analyzed and will be used to contribute to quality improvement (QI) for Texas Crisis Resiliency Team (TCRT). One strength of the study was the variety of questions and the content of data collected. The survey provided information on participants' personal backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, motivations for service, potential qualifications and skills that may better prepare them for this type of work, and potential biases. The questions also provided useful information regarding the trainings, including data on the most useful topics and areas for improvement. The variety of questions offers TCRT the opportunity to approach quality improvement from multiple angles. Another strength of this study is the confidentiality provided to participants since questionnaires were de-identified. Additionally, the participants were

educated on the potential reasons for the survey being distributed and collected. The key

limitation in this study was that the surveys were not intended to be used for this type of study,

which presented some difficulties when interpreting and coding the responses.

Recommendations

The primary recommendation includes changes to the survey or questionnaire. The

researcher would recommend eliminating most of the yes/no questions. Instead, it would be

beneficial to rephrase these questions in a way that asks participants to provide specific support

if they would answer yes to the question, and give the option of selecting none if the response is

"no." Additionally, the researcher recommends utilizing the categories developed from themes in

this study to provide multiple choice options to many of these questions. Creating more close-

ended questions would allow for easier interpretation of future data while supporting the themes

already identified.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Part I. General questions about yourself.

1. Your age

2. What is your highest level of formal education?

    a. Elementary School

    b. Middle School

    c. High School

    d. Junior College

    e. Some college courses

    f. 4-year college degree

    g. Master's degree: which degree and subject?

    h. Doctorate: which degree and subject?

3. What organization will you be working with for trauma and/or disaster response?

4. Please share with us your profession outside of disaster and trauma response.

5. Are you a member of a religious organization? (for independent churches, please put

    "Independent Protestant?"

6. How long have you identified with the above religious organization above?

7. What is your gender?

8. Are you personally a survivor of a major trauma or disaster?

Part II: Reflections on the courses that you have taken?

9. What are the dates of your training?

10. Where was your training located?

11. What topic modules did your training include?

    a. All 3 days of training

    b. All 3 days of training for the trainer

    c. If you did not take the entire 3-day training, please list the modules you have completed:

12. Was the physical setting adequate for your training needs?

13. With regard to the speaker, did she/he empower your learning?

14. Did you see topics that you felt were well covered?

15. Did you see topics that you felt were not covered well?

16. Were there topics that you did not hear at all and wished had been a part of this training?

17. Please think about the entire experience of this training, how did it go?

    a. Excellent

    b. Good

    c. It was alright

    d. It was disappointing

    e. It was an absolute waste of time

Part III. Big Picture Questions

18. Why would you want to do this type of work?

19. What gifts do you feel you can bring to this work?

20. Do you believe in God?

21. What role if any, do you believe God plays in the source of the disaster?

22. What role if any, do you believe God plays in helping people to recover from a disaster?

23. What role do you see for local religious congregations?