

Preface

Natural and technological disasters, acts of terrorism, wars, and interpersonal violence are frequent occurrences in the world today. When traumatic events happen, their impact may be felt personally and across many societal levels—locally, nationally, and globally. Given the ubiquity of such events, one possible response is to *look away*. Perhaps, we have become desensitized to traumatic happenings, where events that capture media attention briefly no longer invite our continued attention or concern. Another response is to *look at* catastrophic events, remember the survivors and their losses, and consider how these events may have changed peoples' lives and shaped history. For individuals who have been directly affected by disaster, the experience may be overwhelming, bringing stress and prolonged suffering that threatens health and well-being. Yet, resilience and recovery are also among the many psychological outcomes associated with traumatic event exposure. Years after the event, people remember what happened, revisiting disastrous events in memories driven by calendar-year anniversaries or perhaps brought to mind by commemorative activities that mark the passage of time.

The 10-year anniversary of the 2005 Atlantic Hurricanes, Katrina and Rita that dealt a catastrophic blow to the US Gulf Coast, is in the minds and hearts of many who experienced these two disasters either directly or indirectly. My earlier edited volume focused on the 2005 hurricanes, Katrina and Rita, from a lifespan developmental perspective (Cherry 2009). After completing this volume, I began to consider the long-term effects of natural disaster exposure and the consequences of catastrophically destructive events for peoples' daily lives. Finding an answer to the seemingly simple question, "How do post-disaster psychological reactions play out over time?" was important to me. I sought a research-based, scientifically valid answer to the question of how disasters affect people in the years after these events. Having an answer to this question would be gratifying and valuable for several reasons. Personally, I would have something useful to say about coping and recovery to hurricane survivors in south Louisiana. Professionally, as a social scientist, I know that empirical research and theory on disaster-related traumatic stress and the longevity of effects may provide direction for the development of evidence-based interventions to lessen suffering and mitigate adversity.

Promoting healing and recovery for those whose lives have been disrupted by disaster is a common rallying cry heard among a variety of health and wellness professionals, faith-based communities, clergy, and concerned citizens. In south Louisiana, I knew that 2015 would be a year set aside for observing the 10-year Katrina anniversary. However, anticipation of the year 2015 led to a deeper realization; 2015 also marks the 70-year anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the deadly Nazi concentration camp in occupied Poland, and a dark reminder of the World War II Holocaust. The longevity of emotional pain and potential pathways to healing for hurricane survivors brought a gradual awareness that the platform of disaster exposure and long-term recovery is much wider and far more temporally expansive than I had initially thought. Consequently, this volume is written with the expressed intent of providing a broader context for understanding disaster effects, their consequences, and how suffering may (or may not) be resolved over time.

The present volume contains 23 chapters written by scholars from around the globe, many of whom are prolific leaders in their areas of expertise. These chapters provide the reader with a diverse array of research and theory, along with a unique glimpse into the experiences of many different populations whose lives have been altered by traumatic events. For convenience in exposition, this volume is organized into three main sections: (1) Traumatic Experiences: On Events that Change Lives, (2) Consequences of Trauma Exposure, and (3) Healing after Trauma: Resilience and Long-Term Recovery. This three-part presentation is intentionally linear, although most people will quickly realize that traumatic experiences may neither unfold so neatly nor necessarily run their course in such an orderly sequence. The reader will also detect a developmental perspective within these chapters, consistent with an urgent need to recognize that traumatic events not only disrupt lives, but also may alter the developmental context and trajectories of growth and change for individuals and families over time and across generations. A glimpse of the content of this volume follows.

Section I focuses on traumatic experiences. The opening chapter offers an elegant conceptual tour of traumatic stress (which differs from the stresses of ordinary life only by degree). The *Conservation of Resources* theory is highlighted, providing a useful conceptual framework for understanding the dynamic relationships among the loss of valued resources and post-disaster psychological reactions over time. The next four chapters bring an array of natural and technological disasters into sharp focus: wildfires, tornadoes, multiple hurricanes and the British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon oil spill as well as the Great East Japan earthquake and the resulting tsunami and nuclear disaster. The last three chapters in this section focus on traumatic events delivered by the hands of humanity: mass shootings in public places, soldiers' experience of war captivity and torture, and the potential transmission of extreme trauma across generations directly affected by the World War II Holocaust.

Section II casts a spotlight on the consequences of traumatic event exposure. This section opens with an ambitious and insightful chapter on early childhood adversity in relation to health outcomes across the lifespan. The next five chapters separately address a variety of psychosocial consequences following disaster: the

long-term emotional consequences of severe stress exposure for adolescents; stress appraisal and coping self-efficacy; relocating permanently or rebuilding hurricane-damaged homes and communities; chaos, upheaval, and survival after disaster; and the successes (and failures) of faith-based communities after the 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This section closes with a cogent chapter on ambiguous loss—a unique type of loss experienced when an individual is presumed dead (e.g., the thousands washed away in the 2011 tsunami) although there is no body to bury, hence no opportunity for normal pathways of grief resolution to be realized.

Section III addresses healing after trauma, including discussions of resilience and long-term recovery. The lead chapter highlights the unique challenge for older persons exposed to trauma (either currently or earlier in their developmental history) and the dual realities of vulnerability and resilience experienced in later life. A conceptual model is presented, *The Pursuit of Happiness in a Hostile World*, which offers promising new directions for research on subjective well-being and lifetime adversities. The next five chapters address different but complementary facets of long-term recovery: ego development and lost possible selves; younger and older coastal fishers facing hurricane losses; trauma, religion, and spirituality as pathways to healing; faith and coping after disaster; and benefit finding and looking for potentially positive outcomes after disaster. The penultimate chapter covers the concept of complicated grief, along with an efficacious method of treatment. The final chapter with the last word on healing comes from a World War II Holocaust survivor whose perspective on forgiveness offers a uniquely liberating approach to releasing oneself from the pain of the past.

The present volume offers scholarly insights and a rich and diverse array of behavioral evidence concerning the experience of traumatic stress and long-term recovery. The intent of this volume has been to illuminate traumatic events that change lives, their consequences, and the process of healing after trauma based on theory and research and perhaps, most importantly through voices of people who have faced and survived catastrophic disasters and other forms of trauma. The scholarly pursuit of understanding traumatic events and their long-term effects by academicians and practitioners is not new (cf. Freedy and Hobfoll 1995). In the words of the late clinical psychologist Charles R. Snyder, an accomplished scholar in the field of stress and coping, “Undeniably, therefore, stressors keep rolling in like waves onto the psychological shores of humanity” (Snyder 2001, p. x). Indeed, the ongoing wave of present-day disasters interspersed among turbulent world events serves to remind us of the critical challenges that lie ahead for health and wellness professionals in the twenty-first century.

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