



# **UNDERSTANDING REACTIONS TO THE CANTERBURY EARTHQUAKES**

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# AIMS OF PRESENTATION:

- Understanding phases of disaster
- Discuss reactions to the earthquakes and the subsequent aftermath.
- Delivery of a psycho education session
- Feedback about the session



# DISASTERS

- Every disaster, natural or man made, places demands on health care, both physical and mental health.



# DISASTERS

- Mild to moderate stress reactions during the early phases of disaster are common.
- Although stress reactions may seem 'extreme', and cause distress, they generally do not become chronic problems.
- Most people recover fully from even moderate stress reactions within 6 to 18 months.

(From Disaster Mental Health Response Handbook, NSW Health, 2000, p. 27.)

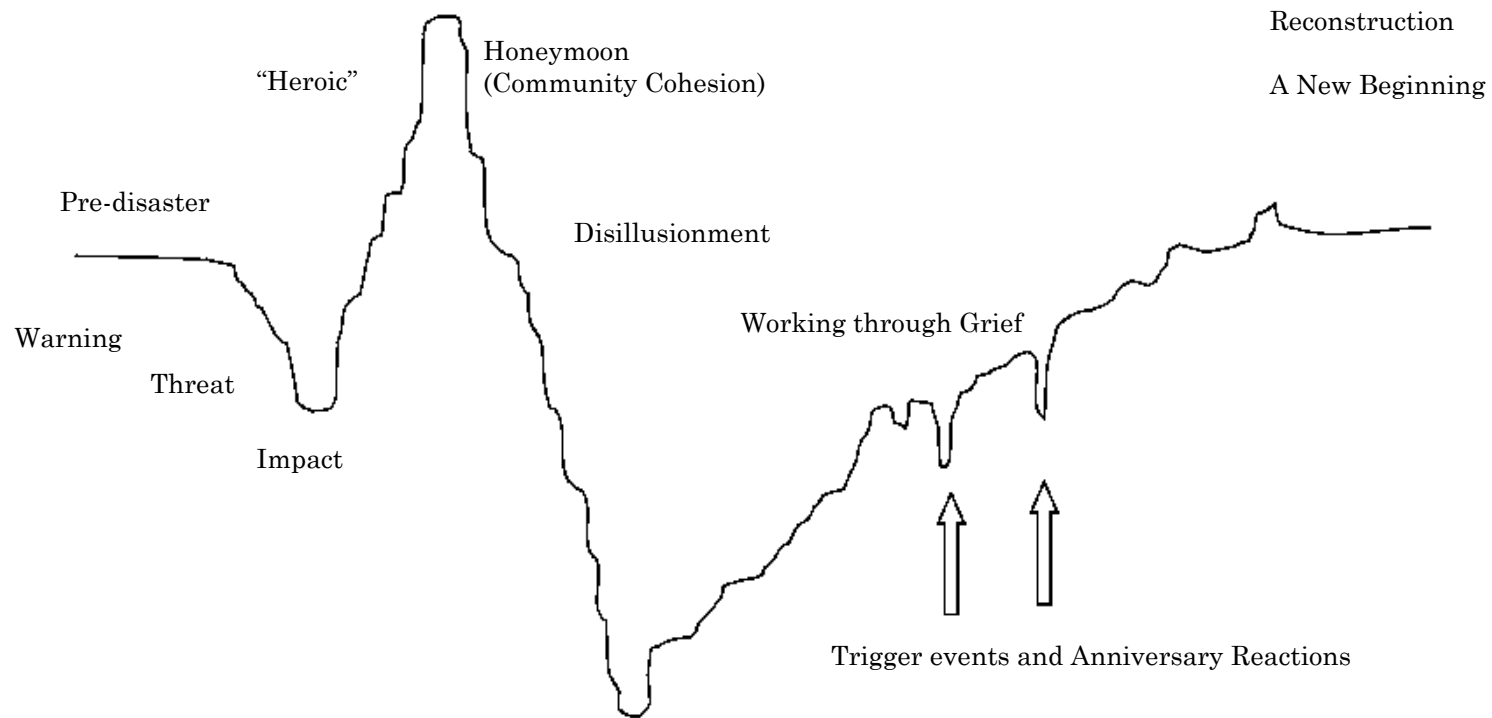


- Research suggests approximately 10% of the population will have some ongoing persisting problem
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Substance abuse
  - PTSD
  - Complication grief
  - Relationship difficulties



# PHASES OF DISASTER

Source: Zunin/Meyers



1 to 3 days.....time.....1 to 3 years



- Research suggests:
  - Disruption of community and workplace increases distress, health risk behaviours and post trauma stress disorders
  - Understanding responses and then educating and promoting the public to promote resilient healthy behaviours is important in recovery.

(Ursano, R.J.; Fullerton, C.S., Weisaeth, L. & Raphael, B. (2007). *Textbook of Disaster Psychiatry*. Cambridge University Press.)



# CHRISTCHURCH EARTHQUAKE

## FEBRUARY 22<sup>ND</sup> 2011

- Natural disaster
- Ongoing aftershocks
- 6 months after September 2010 earthquake
- Loss of life
- Significant property and infrastructure damage
- Ongoing significant concerns/difficulties
- Learnt from September- package to assist with understanding and normalising reaction is likely assist in recovery





# AIM OF THE PSYCHO EDUCATION SESSIONS

- To educate health professionals about the role of anxiety and stress in the current climate
- To normalise their reactions to the current experiences
- To offer education at looking out for risky health behaviours
- To suggest avenues of support if it is needed



# METHOD OF DELIVERY

- 30 minute presentation, with a 10 minute question and answer time
- Offered at service level: smaller numbers of staff
- Aimed at health professionals/ hospital staff to attend voluntarily
- Gave out handouts that accompanied presentation information
- Requested completion of an evaluation form



# PRESENTATIONS GIVEN TO :

- Emergency department
- Obstetrician and Gynaecology doctors
- Radiology department
- Mental health nurses
- Mental health rehabilitation
- Salvation Army drug, alcohol and gambling counsellors



# CONTENT OF PSYCHO EDUCATION COVERED

- Recognising the signs and symptoms of anxiety and stress reactions.
- Normalising these reactions in response to the current circumstances.
- Time frames can vary from individual to individual.





FIGHT/ FLIGHT/ FREEZE RESPONSE



# COMMON REACTIONS

- Anxiety symptoms – racing heart, feeling shaky
- Feeling on edge, tense, irritable
- Reactions triggered – aftershocks, sounds, movements, smells
- Hyperarousal/easily startled
- Sleep disturbance
- Swings in emotions
- Worrying about what can / could have happened
- Feeling detached, numb
- Feeling exhausted
- Re-emerging past trauma memories



# POST DISASTER AND RECOVERY PHASE:

- As weeks and months go on:
  - Fatigue
  - Disillusionment
  - Concentration difficulties
  - Irritability
  - Or other symptoms previously mentioned

# OTHER ISSUES FACED

- Financial concerns
- Damage to property and businesses
- Dealing with EQC and insurance
- Time pressures
- Relationships strained
- Anxiety about separation from family or home



# PRESSURES ON HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- High workload, long hours
- Large number of clients in distress
- Not like to 'let the team down'
- Changes to work environment
- Stretched or limited work resources



# WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR....

- Increased use of substances/ caffeine
- Poor diet
- Ruminating about the events
- Watching excessive media coverage (about any disasters)
- Withdrawal or avoidance (becoming problematic)



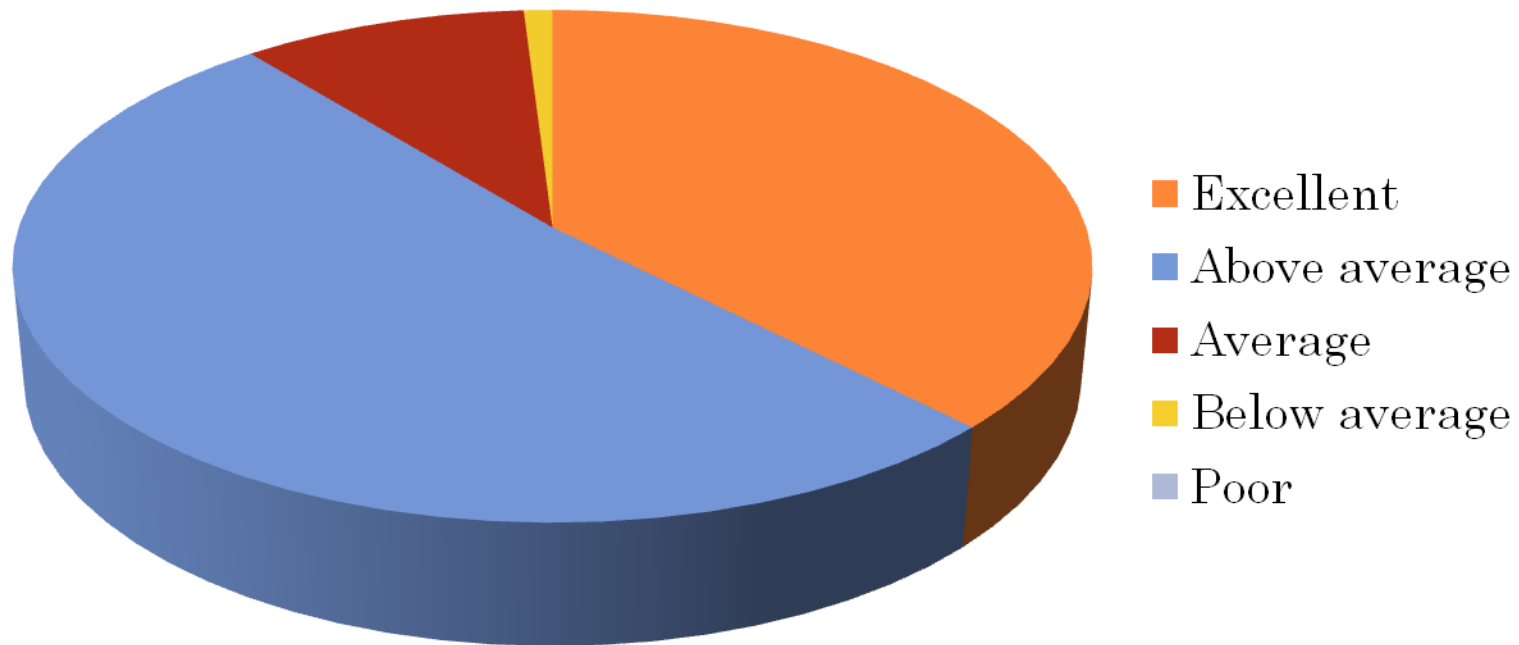
# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- Helpful interventions
  - Back to the basics- sleep, diet, exercise, social connection
  - Limit setting
  - Physical interventions
  - Psychological interventions
- When to seek further help
  - Ongoing persistent and problematic symptoms
- What supports are available

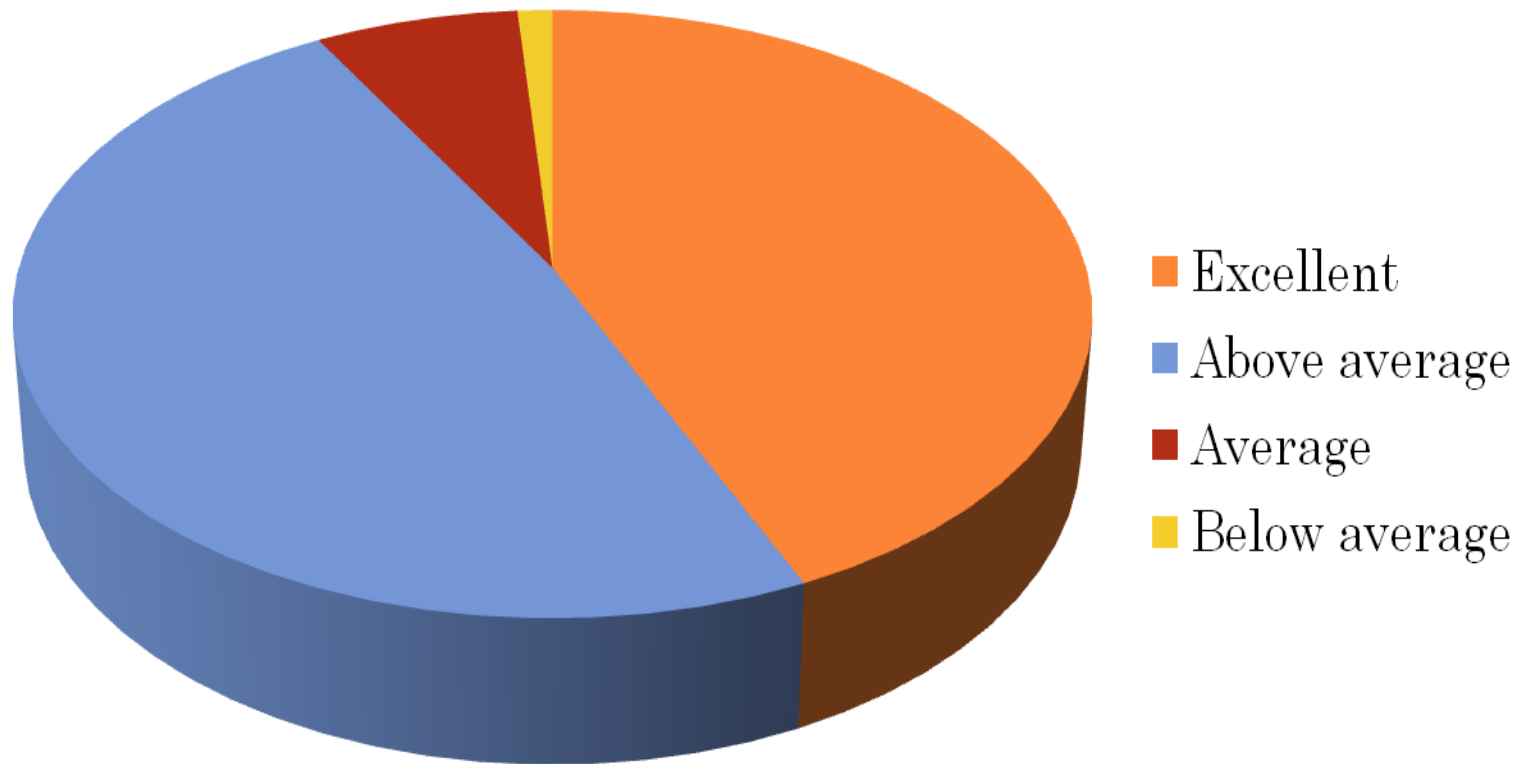


# FEEDBACK FROM THE SESSION

**Please rate the overall value of the presentation**



## How relevant was this session to your current position?



# THEMES FROM COMMENTS

- Four main themes emerged
  - **Normalising**
    - “good to know my reactions are normal- great relief helped me understand how I can start to cope”
  - **Reassuring**
    - “just makes me feel ok”
    - “very affirming”



- **Reminder of knowledge**

- “great reminder of things we are trained to know but cranial liquefaction has rattled out of us”
- “helped reinforce those aspects of post trauma anxiety that we all know- coping, symptoms experienced and looking after oneself”

- **New knowledge**

- “valuable to give some starting information for initiative for post disaster management.”



## TO DATE

- As time has gone on, the presentation has been adjusted to accommodate needs
- In the current circumstance, there are many unknown factors- ongoing EQ's is puzzling scientists and affecting Chch's psyche
- What we know is sleep and rumination are ongoing difficulties
- Ongoing education and intervention is likely to be helpful





# TIPS ON HOW TO STAY STRESSED

- **Never exercise:** Exercise wastes a lot of time that could be spent worrying
- **Eat anything:** Hey, if cigarette smoke can't cleanse your system, a balanced diet isn't likely to.
- **Personalise all criticism:** Anyone who criticizes any aspect of your work, family dog, house or car is mounting a personal attack. Don't take time to listen, be offended, then return the attack.
- **Throw out your sense of humour:** Staying stressed is no laughing matter & it shouldn't be treated as one.
- **Become a workaholic:** put work above everything else, & be sure to take work home with you. keep reminding yourself that holidays are for sissies.
- **Males & Females alike- be macho:** never ask for help and if you want it done right, do it yourself.

