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Crisis In The American Heartland: Disasters & Mental Health in Rural Environments: An Introduction (Volume 1)

George W. Doherty, MS, LPC

Rocky Mountain DMH Institute Press (2011)

ISBN 9781615990757

Reviewed by Richard R. Blake for Reader Views (5/11)

“Crisis In The American Heartland” is Volume 1 in a series of books for Crisis Intervention Training for Disaster Workers, for mental health workers and first responders who deal with related stress and trauma situations, specifically as they relate to disasters in rural environments.

These issues are taking on new proportions as they relate to the question of whom and how the challenge of dealing with mental health counseling will be met in the next rural crisis. The uneven distribution of population, the potential of high levels of immediate need in the event of a disaster occurrence, limited availability of rural services, and the trend of populations relocating to urban centers all impact intervention planning.

Unique mental health issues may result from stress, anxiety, and cross-cultural variables brought about by changing roles, unresolved trauma, and a declining farm economy. The impact of these issues may be demonstrated in domestic violence, youth violence, murder or suicide.

In the rural area of Southwest Michigan where I live, severe storm warnings are frequent; heavy rains may result in flooding, lightning damage or death, as well as the possibilities of destruction by high winds and tornados.

As I write this review, news reports are coming in updating the devastation impacted by a massive tornado, covering a 7-mile-wide area in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as the result of winds over 200 mph. State and Federal Agencies are setting up disaster relief for physical needs. Mental health personnel will move in to assist with post-traumatic stress and critical incident stress management and other related areas. Multiply the difficulty in providing these services in a rural situation where the results of trauma, crisis and disaster cover a much wider area and cannot be as readily implemented.

For these reasons it is critical that mental health professionals and first responders in rural areas become aware of recent research, and training approaches to crisis intervention and traumatology. I am impressed with the depth of material provided in this overview and the articulate communication in transmitting a new awareness of the specific applications to the reader.

A comprehensive bibliography of resources and references is provided to help the reader gain a better understanding of disaster mental health faced in rural areas and various cultural situations including: Physical issues such as land, air, and water resources, chemicals and pesticides, animal rights, food distribution; Quality of life issues such as rural America's declining share of national wealth, problems of hunger, education, and rural poverty among rural populations; Direct and indirect service issues; Professional training and development issues; and personal issues.

“Crisis In The American Heartland: Disasters & Mental health In Rural Environments: An Introduction (Volume 1” is a momentous breakthrough in disaster relief awareness and is destined to become a model for training manuals of the future. This is a monumental accomplishment for George W. Doherty, and Rocky Mountain DMH Institute Press.