

Session 3: After Care

Chairs: Paula Madrid; M. Rooze

Establishing Permanent Mental Health Programs Post-Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Practice in Underserved Communities Impacted by Mass Trauma

P.A. Madrid,¹ M.A. Grant,² R. Domnitz,² I. Redlener³

1. Columbia University-TRP, New York, New York USA
2. USA
3. Columbia University and Children's Health Fund, New York, New York USA

Operation Assist, a joint initiative of Columbia University's National Center for Disaster Preparedness and the Children's Health Fund was formed after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the United States in August 2005. Mental health, medical, and public health professionals have spent one year addressing the needs of victims through direct work and research programs, which have resulted in findings relevant to disaster preparedness, resilience, and the creation of child-focused mental health programs post-disaster. While the immediate impact of a disaster is ubiquitous and widespread, children are most likely to require mental health intervention following a disaster. It also is important to care for families and service providers who also are at risk. Operation Assist staff have worked closely with local community leaders as well as with key health and mental health officials to develop relevant programs to meet the mental health needs of children and families. The proposed presentation will describe one year's work with children and families affected by Hurricane Katrina. Program findings, recommendations for future work and implications for policy, delivery and practice that are applicable to underserved communities impacted by mass trauma around the world will be discussed. **Keywords:** children; disaster; Hurricane Katrina; mental health; public health

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