

A RESPONSE TO "PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID IN PAKISTAN: THE NEED OF THE HOUR"- COMETH THE HOUR, COMETH THE SOCIAL MEDIA?

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Dear Editor,

The editorial entitled "Psychological First Aid in Pakistan: The need of the Hour"¹ provides a valuable contribution to the implementation of a Psychological First Aid (PFA) program in Pakistan. It is noted that although many volunteers are trained in first aid in response to medical emergencies, few volunteers are trained to support those experiencing psychological emergencies. The article provides a review of the implementation of PFA program in Pakistan. It can be argued, however, that the described PFA can be extended with the assistance of social media to disseminate awareness and training regarding PFA to meet this shortfall.

Social media and internet based communication technologies that help people to connect and share information, using specific tools like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, and chat rooms², can deliver immediate safety related information and contribute to feelings of connectedness, both to the family and to the wider community that ultimately enhance support and provide routes to get further assistance.³ Existing literature has identified that social media in general, and blogs in particular, provide emotional and social support during disasters.⁴ Research has shown that social media not only provide social benefits but also promote suitable places for sharing emotions, feelings, and pursuing empathic concerns.⁵ Moreover, research has identified that during disasters, online applications serve as a therapeutic function in terms of providing opportunities for users to express their internal state that may consequently lead to the experience of emotional relief.⁶

According to the Emergency Event Database (EM-DAT),⁷ during the period of 2001 to 2015, 25 serious natural disasters occurred in Pakistan, including those of floods, earthquakes, and landslides. In addition, Pakistan has also been subjected to a number of man-made disasters.⁸ Therefore, such PFA training programs can be very beneficial to deal with psychological well-being of victims during and after crisis and disaster situations.

In recent disasters, people have used such internet based social media tools to manage risk and crisis. In Pakistan, after the 2005 earthquake, social media activated and mobilized the general community⁹ and a large number of volunteers provided support to the victims. During the 2010 flood, a campaign primarily based on social media tools, was designed to disseminate awareness, managing aid, raising funds, and to initiate relief efforts¹⁰. Therefore, it is hoped that social media can help in the delivery of PFA in Pakistan.

Social media tools can be used to activate humanitarian support and giving, to promote awareness, and through the provision of video demonstrations for the online training of volunteers. Coping skills can be taught to deal with post-disaster stress and adversity. People can educate themselves how to respond to psychological crises like trauma, anxiety and depression. Social media can help to provide situational awareness in real time, to encourage resilient behaviors and to enhance recovery management in general public during disasters. In the post-disaster phase, social media can help to recognize where PFA is most required for recovery and rehabilitation.

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