

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRISIS INTERVENTION IN THE EDUCATION OF HUNGARIAN FIRE-FIGHTERS

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Fire-fighters often meet hard conditions on the spot of an accident or fire. Besides the serious material damage they also have to face with physically and/or mentally injured people and without appropriate psychological and communicational methods they can not handle the situations professionally. After all, these questions are in the background in the education system. In present days the importance of crisis intervention and disaster psychology turns up very rarely in fire-fighters' training. As a fire-fighter officer and PhD student in the field of psychology in the same time, in this paper I would like to give a short introduction and draw attention to this question.

Keywords: crisis intervention; disaster psychology; education of fire-fighters

The psychological crisis

After the Second World War, a huge number of soldiers and survivors suffered from mental disorders in connection with terrible experiences. This was the first time in our history when physicians and psychologists seriously turned their attention onto the notion of psychological crisis. Scientists noticed that the victims of horrible events who got psychological support, regained their balance and somatic health sooner than that patients, who did not get this kind of treatment. Additional researches find that the above mentioned intervention is more effective if the victim get the support immediately or as fast as it's possible (Hajduska, 2008).

In the early fifties, Caplan (1964) gave the first deep summary about psychological crisis, considered Selye's stress theory and Ericson's famous development model. In Caplan's view the term of psychological crisis means a crucial, strong emotionally and outstanding situation, which is unavoidable and unsolvable for the person with conventional and everyday knowledge (Caplan, 1964). He distinguished two main groups of crisis. The first – following Ericson – is developmental crisis in different life stages, which contains eight levels (infant, toddler, preschool, school-child, adolescent, young adult, mid-adult and late adult). At the turning points usually the one has to face with new challenges and find new coping strategies in order to step over the next life stage. This progress rarely goes smoothly. Although, the psycho-social development model is very important, presently it is not connected closely to our major question; therefore we do not expand it here.

The accidental crisis is Caplan's another main group. These are so-called "stroke of fate" events, when suddenly something unexpected happening around us, for example floods, earthquakes, storms, accident or fire, etc. Naturally, from a fireman point of view, these problems and their psychological aspects could be the parts of fire-fighters' daily life and as I see the coping strategies in connection with these situations, do not come into existence, either after long years in duty. Although, in Hungary fire-fighters have numberless technical trainings and they are often very professional in the field of technical rescue because the education system put a great emphasis on these questions, psychology and its area is a quite neglected field. Hereafter I'm going to analyze that can be a fire-fighter a crisis inventor? Fundamentally is it a real aim? To find the possible answer, first of all, we should review the scientific literature of disaster psychology, crisis intervention and firemen's labour process, too.

The stage of psychological crisis in catastrophe situations

Psychological crisis consists of at least four different levels (Kováts, 2007; Hajduska, 2008; Csürke et al., 2009). We also have to mention the stage of catastrophe situations (Hajduska, 2008), because the two categories have a close overlap:

Stage of psychological crisis	Stage of catastrophe situations
- standby	- first stage - "impact"
- fight	- second stage - after the "impact"
- precipitation	- third stage - posttraumatic period
- breakdown	

As we see, it is possible to draw a parallel between the stage of psychological crisis and the stage of catastrophe situations. In a catastrophe situation a sudden, shocking and awful thing happens, which usually causes bodily and psychical injury in the same time. Certainly, if the victim has serious bodily injuries and loses his or her consciousness, the most important is the medical attendance. But numbers of times the measure of injury, although can be serious, the injured person "clearly" conscious what happening around. Scientists agree that sooner the crisis intervention starts faster the recovery is. Accordingly, it would be essential that injured person gets not only first aid but also basic psychological support, too.

On trainings, when the fire-fighter officers have enough time to analyze their underling colleagues, I realized that sometimes neither the veteran sergeants can expertly communicate with victims. During the rescue work they usually keep quiet and do not talk with injured person.

Can be a fire-fighter a crisis interloper?

Vörös and his colleges (2009) claim that everybody can be a crisis interloper, who has the facility and can communicate with the indigent person. Consequently, a fireman can be the interloper, too.

As we mentioned, the first stage of psychological crisis is "standby". On one hand, at this level in a catastrophe situation – because of the unsafe conditions – agitation and apprehension increase and the victim easily becomes emotionally unstable. On another hand the injured person's receptivity usually goes up a very high level. He or she becomes so

suggestive for the positive feedbacks (Hajduska, 2008) therefore at this stage the easiest bring back the victim into the normal consciousness.

In dangerous situations trust is a key-question. Garaj (2005) claims that interloper has to create a trustful connection with his subject. Trustfulness between participants undoubtedly decreases distress and increases not only the effectively of the rescue work but also reach the mental well-being in the same time. Today fire-fighters are one of the most popular figures in our society. Their trust index is the highest in Hungary in 2011. This fact shows that firemen have an exceptional good basement to help physically and mentally for the sufferer.

Trust index in Hungary

Place	Profession	Trust (%)	
		2011	2010
1.	Fire-fighters	98	97
2.	Postmen	96	95
3.	Teachers	91	90
4.	Medical doctors	86	88
5.	Soldier	79	80
6.	Market researchers	74	79
7.	Enviromental protectionists	71	71
8.	Policemen	70	65
9.	Charitable organizations	63	57
10.	Court	61	60
11.	Lawyers	55	55
12.	Marketers	53	56
13.	Civil servants	53	54
14.	Churchmen	50	50
15.	Directors	47	43
16.	Labour organizations	46	46
17.	Banker	45	45
18.	Admen	41	37
19.	Journalists	32	31
20.	Politicans	14	9

Naturally, fire-fighters often have a lot to do at these cases, and nobody expect that they should have to become a psychologist. But often fire-fighters are the first helper on the spot because, for example, at a car accident, in lack of appropriate technical gadgets, emergency medical technicians, doctors and policemen not able to approach the injured person. These are the main explanations why should fire-fighters learn basic communicational and psychological techniques about crisis intervention and disaster psychology.

Crisis intervention and disaster psychology in the education system

Psychology is widely not as important subject in fire-fighter's education system as technical sciences. In our system there are three different levels. These are the basic, the middle and the higher stage. Expect the latest level psychology is not educated in the original programs.

“Disaster psychology” is a compulsory subject at Police Collage of Hungary and Zrínyi Miklós University but unfortunately, most of graduated officers never become an experimental fireman. These young colleagues mostly take up white-collar worker positions at Hungarian Directorate for Disaster Management (OKF) or its regional divisions. In this manner the theoretical background fully losses.

As we mentioned before, the basic and the middle level trainings do not make an introduction into the fields of psychology in the original programs. After the little go, The Central Education Base of the Hungarian Ministry for Home Affairs (BM KOK) offers two optional course in psychology. These are “Psychological training I.” and “Psychological training II.” but as I see, the local fire-fighter commanders have negative preconceptions about these facilities, because they do not believe in the effectivly of social sciences. Additionally, these trainings are not free of charge.

Suggestions

I think, it’s absolutely clear that disaster psychology and crisis intervention is only a peripheral side of the fire-fighters’ education system in present days. In order to change this condition we should take a higher emphasis on the act of psychology at all levels of trainings. It would be essential not only in the case of newcomers but also for the older campaigners, too.

Most of fire-fighters have only a “basic” level qualification. Accordingly, it would be suggested to instruct psychological and communicational techniques for them already at this stage because this group of firemen will do most of technical rescue on the spot, under the direction of an officer. They have to communicate with injured people during their work and as we saw, the quality of this communication can significantly affect the psychological state of the victim.

Disaster psychological trainings also would be very useful for the present officers, too, because they are the leaders of a group and after years, probably they will be the managers and commanders at a fire-station. In this manner, stereotype against psychology and its methodology would decrease.

The literature and methodology of disaster psychology is quite well worked out today. Our only exercise is the adaptation. In USA, Canada and several EU countries crisis intervention is an important part of the education of fire-fighters. We should just simply take over the good examples there.

Summary

In the last few years the education of Hungarian fire-fighters reached a very good level in the field of theoretical and technical knowledge. The best evidence is the popularity of firemen. However, there are some blind spots, which are a little bit neglected. Disaster psychology is one of them. Both disaster psychology and crisis intervention is a very useful tool in our hand but we do not use it widely up to now. By their methods fire-fighters could increase the efficiency of the rescue work and probably could help better for injured people. To reach the best result in this area, we should think over and change our education system.

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