

## **REPORT ON THE MASW / IFSW-AP REGIONAL WORKSHOP:**

### ***CAPACITY BUILDING SOCIAL WORKERS FOR DISASTER RESPONSE IN MALAYSIA***

6<sup>TH</sup> & 7<sup>TH</sup> March 2017

MAKPEM Training Centre, No. 17, Jalan 1/48A, Bandar Baru Sentul, Kuala Lumpur

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#### **Introduction**

The Malaysian Association of Social Workers (MASW) collaborated with the International Federation of Social Workers – Asia Pacific (IFSW-AP) to conduct the third in a series of regional workshops on enhancing social workers' response to disasters. The theme was 'Capacity Building Social Workers for Disaster Response in Malaysia' and it was held at the training centre of the National Council for Welfare and Social Development, Kuala Lumpur on the 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

The workshop was largely funded by the Japanese Centre for Social Welfare Promotion and National Examination via the Japanese Coordinating Body for IFSW Membership (JCB). Professor Nobuyuki Kataoka was present to represent the Japanese Coordinating Body while Dr Viktor Virag delivered a message from the President of IFSW-AP, Prof Dr Mariko Kimura during the Opening Ceremony. The Opening was officiated by the Deputy Director-General (Operations) from the Department of Social Welfare, Encik Zulkifli bin Ismail who read a message from the Director-General, Dato' Haji Zulkipli bin Ramli in the latter's absence.

#### **Purpose of Workshop**

The Workshop was planned to meet two main objectives:

- 1 To equip social work practitioners with appropriate understanding of issues related to disaster management, and with the skills to make Psychosocial Assessments and to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA) to disaster survivors, especially vulnerable children and families;
- 2 To assist social work practitioners in self-preparation and building resilience to cope with psychological experiences of responding to disasters.

#### **Programme Content**

There were three components to the programme content:

- 1 Immediate Psychosocial Approach – Participants were given an overview of disaster scenarios, the ethics and values in disaster response, and the need for

undertaking psychosocial assessments and interventions. They were put through an exercise of identifying vulnerabilities contributing towards disasters.

- 2 Intermediate Psychosocial Approach – Participants learned best practices in managing disaster situations, the creation of safe spaces for different vulnerable groups, and conducting of Psychological First Aid to support the survivors.
- 3 Long Term Psychosocial Approach – This session focused on social work skills in rehabilitation of affected communities but also in empowering communities to work on prevention of disasters while ensuring appropriate self-preparation for deployment and psychological stress management.

### **Description of Participants**

Although 86 registered for the workshop, 7 did not eventually show up so the final head count was 79, of which 20 are social workers. There were 5 participants from Indonesia and 1 each from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Singapore and Palestine. Dr Viktor Virag and Prof Nobuyuki Kataoka as guests also participated fully in the workshop sessions.

There were 8 non-profit organisations already involved in disaster management while others were looking at exploring their capacity to get involved. A number of individuals had also had the experience of providing PFA and therapeutic counseling to families of airline disasters survivors, and various other catastrophes in the region as well as the ongoing wars in the Middle East. There was a very interesting mix of age groups, cultural, religious and educational backgrounds, and occupational experiences.

### **Training Resources**

The trainers were Assistant Professor Luz Maria Martinez from the College of Arts and Sciences, Miriam College, Quezon, Philippines, and Ms Sharima Ruwaida Abbas from the School of Applied Psychology, Social Work and Policy, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Dr Luz is Assistant Professor in Social Work for the past 7 years teaching undergraduates, graduate students in the International Studies Department and conducts training on disaster management for professionals and local government officials. She has served in administrative capacities and has designed educational programmes on disaster management as part of a team of experts. She revised the Bachelor of Science in Social Work curriculum making it the first social work

programme in the country to include disaster management and humanitarian studies in the curriculum.

Ms Sharima teaches undergraduate and graduate students social work practice subjects among which are Crisis Intervention and Disaster Management, Social Work Intervention with Community and Organization and Foundation of Social Work. She conduct training on disaster management and psychosocial intervention for professionals and local government officials. She is a life member, core volunteer and part of the team expert in psychosocial intervention with MERCY Malaysia; an international non-profit organization which focus on disaster management and humanitarian services. She has been on humanitarian missions locally and internationally in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Pakistan and Chile to conduct psychosocial assessments and interventions.

### **Evaluation and Outcomes**

Participants were asked to complete evaluation forms to gather feedback on key messages learned and challenges anticipated in applying learning in disaster response. Only 37 out of 79 participants returned the forms, and a few only partially filled. From these, it can be gathered that generally participants received the key messages presented by the trainers though a number of participants indicated the need for more explanations and demonstrations of how to apply the PFA and the PiE in psychosocial interventions. A number felt the need for more sharing of examples of problematic situations, use of case studies, role play and videos to visualise learning and application. Many also expressed the need to explore ideas of how to create safe spaces for different target groups.

It is expected that there will be different learning curves in any group comprising of those new to the topic as well as those who have had significant exposure to disaster situations. It was a challenge for the trainers to meet different levels of needs within a two-day programme. It was clear that small group discussions and presentations, and the large open group discussion generated a lot more interest and sharing towards the end of the workshop. On the whole, the workshop did bring like-minded people who shared similar goals into a network where further exchanges, engagements and cooperation could be realised in disaster management. For MASW, there is encouraging potential for developing ongoing training at different levels to continue enhancing the knowledge and skills of social workers and other disaster management personnel and volunteers.

Reported by:

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