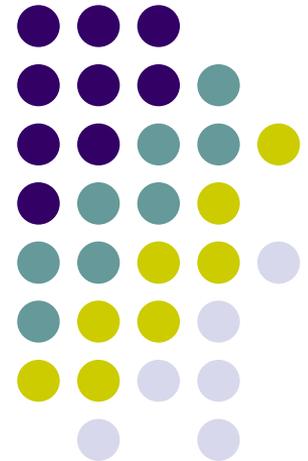


Ethical Issues in Disaster Response: Doing No Harm, Doing Some Good

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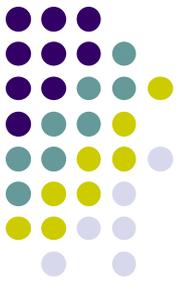


Learning Objectives:

- To understand the primary ethical issues in disaster response.
- To understand how the ethical issues apply to natural, technological and complex (i.e., of human design and intention) disasters.
- To understand how the ethical issues apply to disaster crisis intervention.
- To apply the ethical issues to participants' own experiences of disaster response.

On a scale from 1 to 10—where 1 is “I would be **unwilling** to work as a disaster helper, a disaster relief worker” and 10 = “I would be **willing** to work as a disaster helper, a disaster relief worker”—indicate your willingness in the following disaster situations:

1. _____ natural disaster
2. _____ mass casualty accident
3. _____ explosion
4. _____ chemical incident
5. _____ contagious epidemic outbreak
6. _____ radiological disaster
7. _____ genocide
8. _____ civil war



- In a . . . survey of 6,428 health care workers in New York City, willingness to work during a disaster varied with the type of event, ranging from a high of 84% during a mass casualty incident to a low of 48% during a SARS outbreak (Iseron et al., 2008, p. 346).
- In a natural disaster, 83% [of physicians and nurses] said they would volunteer to help; after an explosion, 67%; after a chemical incident, 59%; after biological incident or contagious epidemic, 56%; and after a radiological event, just 52% (Iseron et al., 2008, p. 349).
- News media, governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and the private and public sectors respond more generously to natural disasters than to complex emergencies because (1) natural disasters can occur suddenly anywhere in the world—all of us feel as if we can be victims, and (2) cause and blame cannot be easily attributed to people. Complex emergencies are more political, complicated, and sullied, and it is impossible to help without “taking sides.” There is little downside to a government pledging money and even the use of their military to aid countries affected by natural disasters (Spiegel, 2005, p. 1917).

Read each statement and rate it on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = I do not believe this is true, and 10 = I believe this is true. Do not use any rating, such as 10, more than twice.

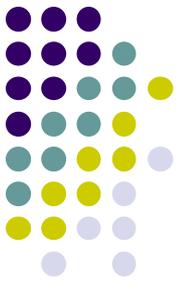


The most ethical disaster helper . . .

1. _____ thinks it is important for members of a community to be interdependent
2. _____ adheres to evidence-/experience-based standards that are verifiable or accepted by the professional community
3. _____ treats people equally, without bias
4. _____ thinks it is important for members of a community to have interest in each other and each other's concerns
5. _____ has both the knowledge and skill sets that are necessary to behave competently
6. _____ gives preferential treatment to society's most vulnerable members
7. _____ supports people's ready access to public services, so as to be able to receive health care and basic necessities such as food and shelter, with relative ease
8. _____ is adaptive, able to adjust competencies, standards, and practice to the challenges of the particular disaster
9. _____ ensures confidentiality and protects each individual's privacy



- **Add responses to 1, 4, and 7. This is your Social Solidarity score: _____**
 - This value refers to the bonds that unify a community, as well as to the structures, such as schools and organizations, that support and maintain those bonds.
- **Add responses to 2, 5, and 8. This is your Professionalism score: _____**
 - This value refers to the importance of maintaining the competence, performance measures, and social contribution of groups, organizations, and professions upon which society depends.
- **Add responses to 3, 6, and 9. This is your Justice score: _____**
 - This value involves the fundamental commitment that individuals have toward one another, and requires that we strive to ensure that "right relationships" exist between and among individuals and groups in society.



Schemas for looking at ethics and ethical behavior:

Three Guidelines for Ethical Decision Making



What Does It Mean to Be “Ethical”?

- “Ethical,” as a general concept, refers to value judgments concerning right and wrong, or good and bad, in human conduct. Behavior is ethical to the extent it reflects the application of accepted principles or a moral code guiding the practice of a particular profession.
 - This means that ethical standards are relative and adjust with changes in the community’s standards; therefore, ethical decisions are rarely “right” or “wrong,” but exist on a continuum from clearly ethical to clearly unethical.

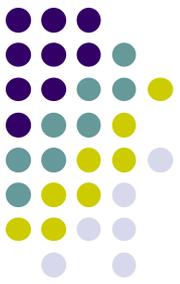
SCHEMA I: Situational Concerns



Four situational factors are pertinent to making judgments about the ethics of a given practice or behavior, such as “disaster relief”:

- the **means or methods** used to enact the practice or behavior
 - How do you behave?
- the **ends or goals** of the behavior
 - What do you hope to accomplish with what you’re doing?
- the **motives or intentions** of the individual enacting the behavior
 - What are your personal reasons for doing what you’re doing?
- **consequences or effects** of the behavior in question
 - What are the consequences of what you do—for the disaster survivors, for yourself, for the community of disaster helpers of which you are a part, and for the larger social community?

SCHEMA II: Professional Codes of Ethics



National Association of Social Workers

- **Value: Service**
 - **Ethical Principle (1): *Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.***

Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest. Social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems.
- **Value: Competence**
 - **Ethical Principle (6): *Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.***

Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.



American Psychological Association

Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence

- Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. . . . [P]sychologists seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they interact professionally and other affected persons.

Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility

- Psychologists establish relationships of trust with those with whom they work. . . . Psychologists uphold professional standards of conduct, clarify their professional roles and obligations, accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior

Principle C: Integrity

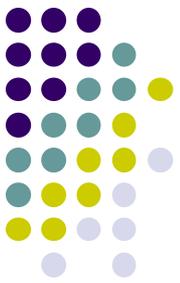
- Psychologists seek to promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in the science, teaching, and practice of psychology.

Principle D: Justice

- Psychologists recognize that fairness and justice entitle all persons to access to and benefit from the contributions of psychology

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

- Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination.



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

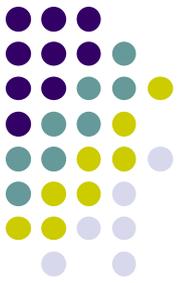
Code of Conduct No. 1. The Humanitarian imperative comes first.

The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries

Code of Conduct No. 2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.

Wherever possible, we will base the provision of relief aid upon a thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs. . . . Human suffering must be alleviated whenever it is found; life is as precious in one part of a country as another. Thus, our provision of aid will reflect the degree of suffering it seeks to alleviate.

SCHEMA III: Balancing Social Solidarity, Professionalism, and Justice



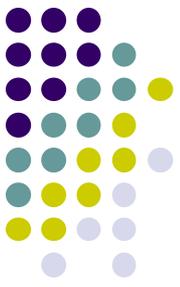
- **Social Solidarity** This value refers to the bonds that unify a community, as well as to the structures, such as schools and organizations, that support and maintain those bonds.

In the matrix, three characteristics of social solidarity are listed:

- **interdependence**—with and among others
- **attachment**—interest in others and their concerns
- **commitment**—support for the social structures that make social life possible

and two ethical principles derived from these characteristics:

- **common good**, the conditions such as health care, housing, and food, that each person and groups of persons need to live a full and productive life
- **ready access** to public services, so as to be able to receive health care and basic necessities such as food and shelter, with relative ease, or at least without bureaucratic obstacles



- **Professionalism** This value, which denotes much more than "being a professional," refers to the importance of maintaining the competence, performance measures, and social contribution of groups, organizations, and professions upon which society depends.

In the matrix, three characteristics of professionalism are listed:

- **adherence to evidence-based standards**—actions sufficiently verifiable or accepted by the professional community
- **competence**—having both knowledge and skills
- **adaptability**—ability to adapt competencies, standards, and practices

and three ethical principles derived from these characteristics:

- ***duty to act***, the obligation to perform one's professional duties without inducement
- ***transparency***, openness regarding one's actions
- ***integrity***, the need to act with honesty, reliability, and fairness, and a willingness to be held accountable to explain one's actions



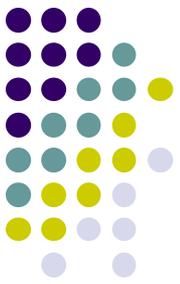
- **Justice** This value involves the fundamental commitment that individuals have toward one another, a commitment that makes social solidarity possible and drives professional decisions regarding the provision of services. Justice, as its biblical grounding in righteousness suggests, requires that we strive to ensure that "right relationships" exist between and among individuals and groups in society.

In the matrix, three characteristics of justice are listed:

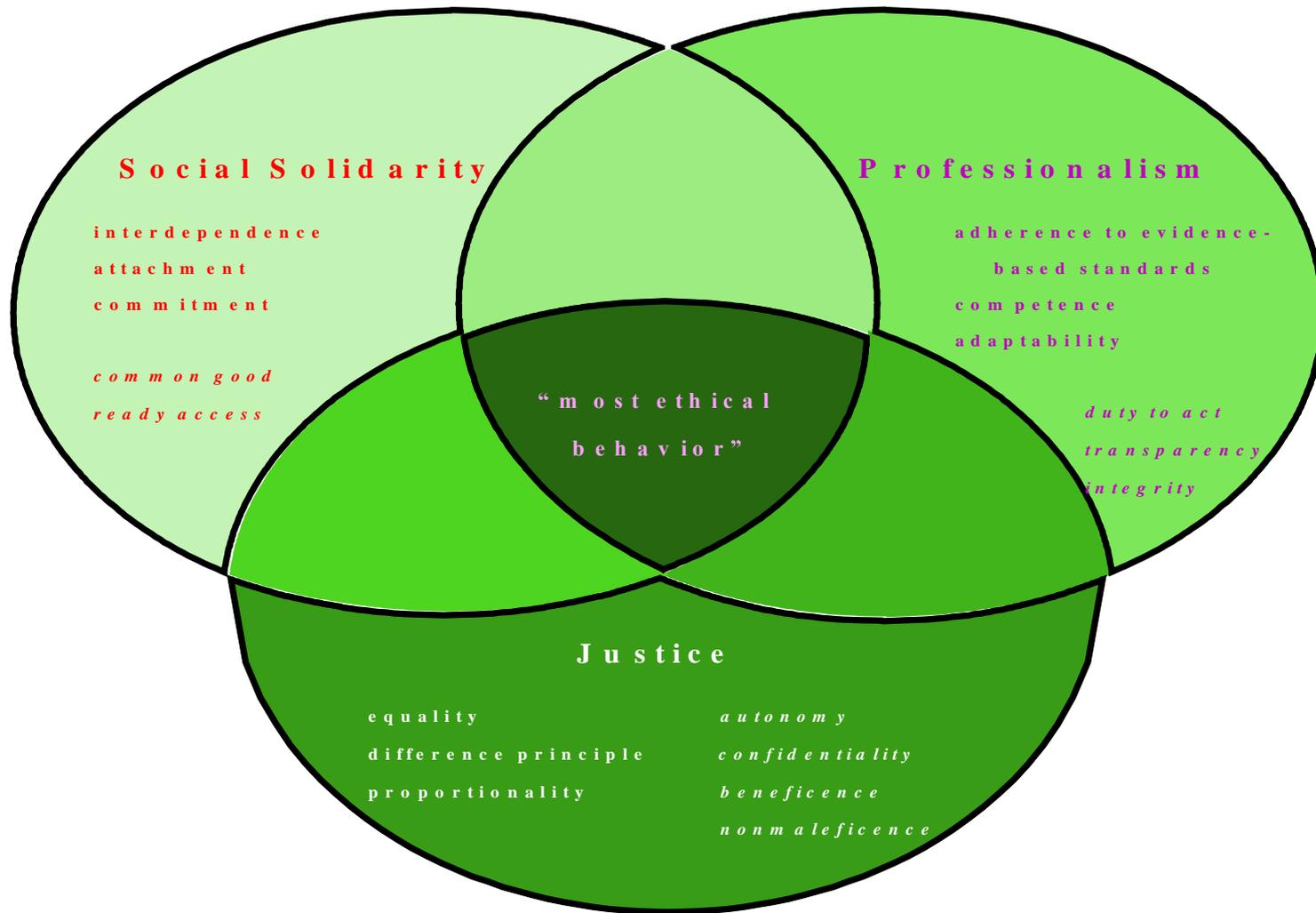
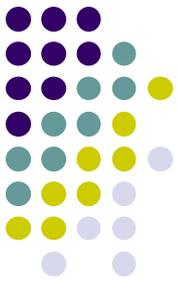
- **equality**—avoidance of bias
- **difference principle**—showing some preference to the most vulnerable members of society
- **proportionality**—accounting for the tensions that can arise between the liberty of the individual, the needs of society, and the standards of a profession

and four ethical principles derived from these characteristics:

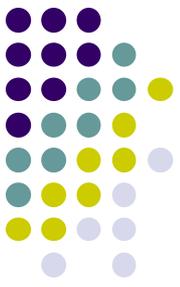
- **autonomy**, respect for the individual and her or his claims and aspirations
- **confidentiality**, the protection of an individual's privacy
- **beneficence**, the obligation to provide for the good of others
- **nonmaleficence**, the obligation not to harm self or others



The “most ethical behavior” balances the three values: social solidarity, professionalism, and justice. The balance is dynamic, that is, the three values often are in tension with one another, and the outcome depends on the characteristics of the disaster, the helper, the code of ethics of her or his professional organization, and the social and cultural context within which the helper works.



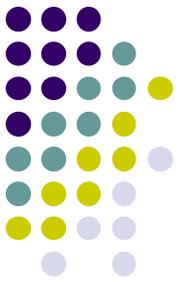
Adapted from: Tuohey, J. F. (2007, November-December). A matrix for ethical decision making in a pandemic. *Health Progress*, 88(6), 20-25.



“Ethical lapses are almost never cases of bad people, doing bad things, for no good reason. More often they are good people, doing bad things, for good reasons.”



**Loosely quoting Marcia Angell, MD
Editor-in-Chief (1988-2000), *New
England Journal of Medicine***



How do you balance the myriad of ethical principles and concerns?

- Which principles are most important to you?
- Under what circumstances does your hierarchy of ethical principles change?
- Have you ever behaved in a way that, upon reflection, struck you as unethical?
 - What motivated your behavior in the first place?
 - What will you do next time?

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Thank you!