

Workshop Report

The Post Disaster Role of Media Representatives (Exclusively for Media Representatives)

15th May 2019

Ministry of Disaster Management, Sri Lanka

Organized by



Collaborating Partners



Presidential
Secretariat



Ministry of Disaster
Management



Ministry of Health



SLPA

Sri Lanka Psychological
Association



Acknowledgements

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Workshop Report

The workshop titled “The Post Disaster Role of Media Representatives”, was held on the 15th of May 2019 at the Ministry of Disaster Management, Sri Lanka. It was funded by the Institute for Research and Development in Health and Social Care (IRD), and organized in collaboration with the Presidential Secretariat (Appendix 2), the Ministry of Disaster Management and the Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists. The main goal of the workshop was to share the experience and point of view, regarding the post disaster role and impact of media representatives, held by healthcare professionals & other concerned parties.

The resource persons (Figures 1-8) covered, as stated in the workshop agenda (Appendix 1), topics vital in communicating the important role that media representatives play, their impact and the considerations to be made when reporting during post disaster situations. Mr. Christy Lal Fernando, Addl. Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management, presented the welcome speech in which he framed the post disaster situation in the island, and introduced the resource persons and collaborating partners (Figure 9). Rev. Fr. Edmond Thilakartane shared with the audience his experience regarding the Easter Tragedy (Figure 10).



Figure 1. Prof. Athula Sumathipala



Figure 2. Dr. Kanthi Hettigoda.



Figure 3. Dr. Chathuri Suraweera



Figure 4. Dr. Samantha Kithalawarachchi



Figure 5. Dr. Madhava Gunasekara



Figure 6. Mr. Shaan Wijethunga.



Figure 7. Dr. Danuja Mahesh



Figure 8. Mr. Hiroshan Waduge



Figure 9. Mr. Christy Lal Fernando



Figure 10. Rev. Fr. Edmond Thilakartane

Prof. Athula Sumathipala, Hon. Director, IRD and Professor of Psychiatry, Keele University, UK presented the overview of a strategic approach, sharing his valuable experience in working with the media, as well as working in post disaster situations. Attention was drawn to the important role that the media is entrusted with at the time of a terrorist attack, and what areas media representatives should emphasize in order to minimize the negative impact on society at large.

The resource persons reiterated the importance of discussing dos and don'ts following a disaster. These included not medicalizing the distress, normal emotional reactions to an abnormal event, not unduly highlighting mental illness but talk about the long-term

possibility of only a small percentage of people getting mental illness, especially the potential of people getting addicted to drugs and alcohol, talking about resilience than vulnerability, and to take a public health approach towards managing psychological consequences.

All the resource people held a unanimous professional view concerning the impact on health, that can be brought about through media influence. The role of media networks in facilitating the processing of emotional reactions, including anger and hatred, in a non-destructive manner was a significant point that emerged.

There was encouraging media representative participation during the workshop (Figure 11). The discussion highlighted the nature of new media, especially social media, and a sensitive approach towards it at the times of man-made disaster.

The workshop was covered by several news networks. The national television broadcaster, Rupavahini, aired key points from the workshop, during its prime-time news bulletin, on the same day that the workshop was held. The Daily News newspaper, Sri Lanka's prestigious English daily, included a news article on a key point from the event; this was represented in all its editions, including its online platform.



Figure 11. An engaged audience of media representatives.

Justification

The IRD organized this workshop with the aim of capturing this opportunity to further the capacity of media representatives, to better aid relief efforts in post disaster situations, by sensitizing them to their moral obligations beyond reporting and the effect that it can have on the state of mind and the mental health of its viewership.

Sri Lanka is a largely multiethnic and multicultural nation. Media representatives need to be cognizant of these diversities. Therefore, reports need to be delivered to the public with the utmost discretion and only after all aspects regarding the consequences of such action have been considered. However, in the frenzied bid to achieve popularity and better

ratings, news networks should not sensationalize news items that guarantee higher viewership. The human element behind the news item, the impact on those receiving the segment and its consequences, often take a secondary position.

Therefore, it is vital that media representatives are reminded of the social impact that their work can have and their responsibility to ascertain the human cost before releasing the information available to them. If this responsibility is ignored, it could incite further civil unrest, or cause the public to suffer in silence.

Conclusion

The workshop introduced attending media representatives to the discourse on the post disaster role of media representatives, taking into account the social influence that they wield and its accompanying responsibilities. It served to sensitize and introduce those in attendance to the true nature of the mindset upon which an individual who would carry out such an attack would operate, and how not to inadvertently promote or foster future attacks. It also sensitized those in attendance to the impact that their work can have on the well-being of survivors & even those who were not directly affected by the attack. The attendees were able to gain knowledge regarding the important considerations that must be made before preparing and presenting news items to the public.

The workshop proved to be an excellent opportunity for media representatives to network with police & military representatives, academics, clergy, medical professionals, and state officers. It also allowed them to share their experiences, exchange ideas, express their concerns and engage in discussion (Figure 12). Further instances of productive interaction are presented through the figures in Appendix 3.



Figure 12. Attendees engaging in dialogue on the post disaster role of media representatives.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Workshop Agenda

The Post Disaster Role of Media Representatives

(Exclusively for Media Representatives)

15th May 2019

Ministry of Disaster Management, Sri Lanka

Resource Persons

Resource Person	Designation	Organization
Prof. Athula Sumathipala	Hon. Director	Institute for Research & Development in Helath & Social Care
Dr. Samantha Kithalawaarachchi	Director	Presidential Task Force on Drug Prevention
Dr. Kanthi Hettigoda	President	Sri Lanka Psychological Association
Dr. Chathuri Suraweera	Public Relations Officer	Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists
Mr. Shan Wijethunga	Director	Sri Lanka College of Journalism
Dr Rohan Ratnayake	Acting Director Mental Health	Ministry of Health
Dr Dhanuja Mahesh	Consultant Psychiatrist	
Mr Hiroshan Waduge	Entrepreneur	Advertising

Presentations

Session	Description	Resource Person
Commencement	Welcome	Mr. Christy Lal Fernando
Presentation	Strategic Approach to Recovery & Past Experience with Disaster Management & the Media	Prof. Athula Sumathipala [Professor of Psychiatry]
Presentation	Reporting & Suicide Bomber Mentality	Dr. Kanthi Hettigoda [Clinical Psychiatrist]
Presentation	Experience in Working with Media as an Expert on Psychiatry	Dr. Danuja Mahesh
Presentation	How the Media can Effectively Contribute to Reduce Post-Disaster Substance Use Addiction	Dr. Samantha Kithalawarachchi
Presentation	International Experience on Disaster & Media Responsibilities	Dr. Madhava Gunasekara
Presentation	Combating Disaster Related Mental Health Problems: The Role of the Media	Dr. Chathuri Suraweera [Specialist in Psychiatry]
Presentation	How to use Social Media in a Positive Manner	Mr. Hiroshan Waduge
Presentation	Role of Media during the 2019 Easter Tragedy	Mr. Shaan Wijethunga
Conclusion		



ජනාධිපති කාර්යාලය
சனாதிபதி அலுவலகம்
PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT



මගේ අංක : PS/DSP/DPU/04/03/02

2019 මැයි මස 10 දින

සියලුම මාධ්‍ය ආයතන ප්‍රධානීන් වෙත

2019 අප්‍රේල් 21 පාස්කු ඉරිදා ත්‍රස්ත ප්‍රහාරයේ මානසික බලපෑම අවම කිරීමේ මාධ්‍ය කාර්යයභාරය සම්බන්ධ මාධ්‍ය සාකච්ඡාව හා වැඩමුළුව

පාස්කු ඉරිදා සිදු කළ ත්‍රස්ත ප්‍රහාරයේ සෘජු තීරණාත්මක බලපෑම එල්ලියේ සමස්ත ජනතාවගේ මනසට බව අවිවාදිතය. බය, සැක, ක්‍රෝධය, වෛරය, අවිනිශ්චිතභාවය, අනාරක්ෂිතභාවය ආදී සියලුම බලපෑම් එල්ලවී ඇත්තේ ජනමතයටය.

මේ බව ඉතා හොඳින් පිළිබිඹු වන්නේ පාසැල් ආරම්භයට පසුව, දරුවන් පාසල් වෙත එවීමට දෙමාපියන් දක්වන මැලිකමයි. මෙම සමස්ත බලපෑම ළමා මනස තුළ ඇති කරන ලද බලපෑම නිසා අපේ රට තුළ අනාගතයේ දී ඇති විය හැකි ව්‍යසනය ද බරපතල ය.

මේ හේතුවෙන් සෞඛ්‍ය අමාත්‍යාංශය, ආපදා කළමනාකරණ අමාත්‍යාංශය හා අධ්‍යාපන අමාත්‍යාංශය එක්ව සකස් කරන ලද වැඩසටහනක් ක්‍රියාත්මක කිරීම සඳහා සුදානම්ව පවතී.

මෙම පසුබිම හමුවේ සාමාන්‍ය ජන ජීවිතය යලි නඟාසිටුවා තහවුරු කිරීමටත්, ඇති වී තිබෙන මානසික කම්පනයෙන් ජනතාව මුදවාගෙන සාධනීය මාවතකට ජන ජීවිතය හා ශ්‍රී ලංකාව යොමු කිරීමේ දී මාධ්‍ය වෙත වාර්තාකරණයෙන් එහාට ගිය භූමිකාවක් ඇත.

මෙතෙක් මාධ්‍ය විසින් කරන ලද සාධනීය භූමිකාව තවත් ඉහළ තලයකට ඔසවා තැබීමටත්, එම භූමිකාව නිසියාකාරවම අවබෝධ කොටගෙන බෙදාහදා ගැනීමටත් අරමුණ කර ගෙන පැවැත්වෙන පුළුල් සංවාදයකට / වැඩමුළුවකට ඔබගේ මාධ්‍ය ආයතනයේ නියෝජිතයන් කිහිපදෙනෙකු 2019.05.15 දින පෙ.ව.9.30 ට කොළඹ 07, විද්‍යා මාවත, ආපදා කළමනාකරණ මධ්‍යස්ථානයේ ශ්‍රවණාගාරයට සහභාගී කරවන ලෙස ගෞරවයෙන් ඉල්ලා සිටිමි.

011-4354614 අංකය ඇමතීමෙන් සහභාගීවන නිලධාරීන්ගේ තොරතුරු ලබා දිය හැකි බව වැඩිදුරටත් කාරුණිකව දන්වමි.

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මන්ද්‍රව්‍ය නිවාරණ ජනාධිපති කාර්යය සාධන බලකාය

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පිටපත්

- 01. ජනාධිපති අතිරේක ලේකම්, සංවර්ධන හා විශේෂ ව්‍යාපෘති - කරු.දැ.ගැ.ස.
 - 02. ලේකම්, අධ්‍යාපන අමාත්‍යාංශය
 - 03. ලේකම්, ආපදා කළමනාකරණ අමාත්‍යාංශය
 - 04. මහාචාර්ය අතුල සුමනිපාල මහතා, අධ්‍යක්ෂ, පර්යේෂණ සංවර්ධන ආයතනය
 - 05. අධ්‍යක්ෂ, බෝ නොවන රෝග ඒකකය, සෞඛ්‍ය අමාත්‍යාංශ
- } කරු.අ.ක.ස.

Figure 13: Letter from the Presidential Secretariat inviting media representatives to the IRD workshop.

Appendix 3



Figure 14. Attendees engaging in dialogue on the post disaster role of media representatives.



Figure 15. Attendees engaging in post workshop networking.