

TEN YEARS ON:

The Issues of Psychological Rehabilitation after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake



People Need Psychotherapy

"Don't dare to recall it", one of our interviewees who experienced the Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008 said. It's no doubt that the Earthquake left the residents with too much psychological trauma, so they cannot heal themselves from the loss of their family members, loss of their friends, loss of their properties, loss of anything important to them. That's why there is a great need for psychiatrists in the stricken zone. Although the rescue workers told us that Chinese people did not need the help of the psychiatrists, however, according to our research, people who experienced the disasters really need it to alleviate their pains and fears.

There are around 250 people who experienced the earthquake in Wenchuan participating in our online questionnaire survey about their feelings for the earthquake and local psychotherapy. Most people told us that they felt painful and stressful, and even 3% of people said that they felt autistic, which indicated that they needed professional psychiatrists to help them recover in the terms of psychology. However, only 3.1% of people indeed spent time on psychotherapy, even though they felt psychotherapy put some effects on them. Why few people choose to accept psychotherapy treatments?

This year marks the Tenth Anniversary of the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008, on which occasion we hope to carry out a survey on the psychological recovery of those affected by the quake. Compared to the physical reconstruction, such as that of buildings and infrastructure projects, mental reconstruction appears far more

Although there are some news reports about the residents in Wenchuan not responding positively to the psychological rehabilitation, according to the data of people's feedback in our research Questionnaire Survey, they did not resist the psychological rehabilitation. The people attending the psychological rehabilitation projects are those who told us



The debris of houses in Wenchuan after the earthquake

they felt the psychological distress from the earthquake. Interestingly, 50 percent of people spent 1-6 month, while other half of people said they spent just less than a week on the psychotherapy. Not surprisingly, the people who spent less than a week all said that the effects were not as strong as those who spent 1-6 month on the psychotherapy. Although the research shows that the psychological rehabilitation had some effects on people who experi-

enced the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, only 3.1% of residents in disaster affected area have experienced the psychotherapy. In other words, 96.9% of those survivors never spend time on psychotherapy healing.

In our following research, we discovered three serious issues, the lack of attention for psychotherapy, the residents' resistance to psychotherapy and the disrespect for psychiatrists, even if there has already been a good example like Ankang Home. We also found out how to apply the psychotherapy to the public properly as well. **Some people even became autistic, and they do not communicate with others for a long time.**

Attention of Society

Huang Guoping, the dean of Psychiatry Hospital of Mianyang City, Sichuan Province, has been working on the psychological recovery of people suffering from Wenchuan earthquake for a long time.

What we learnt from Huang was that there were almost no statistical data about psychological therapy. We know that hospital had sent many psychologists to Wenchuan, but there were no exact data of how many psychologists went there and how many people were recovered. According to Huang, nobody had ever worked on investigating the data for the past 10 years. This indicates that psychotherapy did not gain enough attention from the society today except for those professionals.

There are two main reasons why psychotherapy has not attracted necessary attention. Firstly, either the government or social organizations do not realize the significance of mental health. Instead, they make contributions to donating money and rebuilding their houses. Secondly, only psychologists know how to treat patients properly. Even though there are still some other people who want to help with the patients, they do not know what to do exactly.

People Refuse to accept Psychotherapy

We already know that local people had few chances to receive recovery due to the lack of attention of society, but why most of them still did not have any psychotherapy even though they heard about the Psychological Rehabilitation Projects?



Houses in Wenchuan after the earthquake

The main reason is that the Psychological Rehabilitation is too difficult and will take a long time, which requires people to spend so much time on it.

"I need to take care of my kids." one of our interviewees explained why she did not have time for the psychological rehabilitation. Following the earthquake, the survivors in Wenchuan needed to look after their families or took part in rescue work immediately. As a result, they did not have enough time to receive the psychology rehabilitation, which explains the phenomenon that few residents have received psychotherapy consistently.

Similarly, there is another reason why they did not receive the psychotherapy. According to Huang Guoping, some survivors refused psychotherapy for they could not face the reality. This problem could also be seen in the result of the questionnaire survey.

The psychotherapy requested survivors to recall the things they felt bitterly painful, in order to help them to relieve their feelings, and then guide them to face the reality ra-



tionally. But most people do not dare to face what they have experienced. They prefer to bury their painful memories in the bottom of their hearts instead of recollecting them. So, they choose to escape from the reality.

Disrespect For the Psychiatrist

There is a report showing us that the psychiatrists have not been respected in the earthquake stricken zone few months after the earthquake happened. Why?



Psychiatrists in 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake (Shots by iFeng News)

Firstly, the news report shows that most psychiatrists only stay in Wenchuan for few days but did not provide a long-term psychotherapy. The Chinese Academy of Science Institute of Psychology realized some defects of the Psychological Rehabilitation after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake and tried to send the psychiatrists to the stricken zone, but most of the psychiatrists did not stay long enough in Wenchuan, and the psychiatrists alternated frequently. Every time the new psychiatrists replaced the former, it may cause new psychological trauma to the residents.

Secondly, the quality of the psychiatrist is another problem. The professional level of the psychiatrists who went to Wenchuan is not high enough to help the residents recover from their psychological trauma, instead, they even created a larger psychological problem to the residents. "The business card that I got from the psychologists at that time could be used to play poker." said a woman interviewed by CCTV interviewer.

Lastly, the interviewees made us know that some of the psychiatrists were irresponsible to the residents. "Most of the psychiatrists just tell us not to worry and then give us a questionnaire." one of our interviewees told us. This damaged the trust between the psychiatrists and the residents. The interviewees also mentioned that they even made joke with the psychiatrists, asking the psychiatrists to pay for their irresponsible actions by jokes.

Those three issues, causing more psychological harm to those residents, bring about the disrespect of psychiatrists and an unserious attitude toward psychotherapy. Although organizations like Chinese Academy of Science Institute of Psychology have tried to solve them, there is still much work need to do to improve the situation.

Ankang Home

However, fortunately, some of the homeless kids find a new home with the help of the "China Children and Teenagers' Fund", named "Ankang Home". "Ankang" in Chinese means well-being and good health. Back to the year of 2008, 672 lucky kids have been sent to Ankang Home. Today, 48 of them go to secondary school, and 282 of them study in university or college, and 342 kids are going to work or join the army. Only those who study in secondary schools still stay in Ankang Home.

“**A**nkang Mum” is the name of the volunteers whose job is to look after the kids in the Ankang Home. Li Shuman, who’s the first batch of Ankang mum, is the only person who stays in Ankang Home from the building up of Aikang Home until now. She said:” The day when Ankang Home closes is the day she retires.”

“Some children are very introverted; some have not come out of the pain, so they have no interest in learning, and have no confidence in life.”, said by Tse Changrong, another Ankang mum who just works as a volunteer for a year. “Some children blame me. I was still a little sad at the time, but I thought they were children, and I understood them deeply.”, she also told us that she was really happy when she received the greeting cards and congratulation SMS, because she knew the kids learned how to be grateful. “As an Ankang mum, I’m pretty pleased. Within the year, my kids and I are like a family, and the children live happily in this happy family. I sincerely hope that the children of Ankang will have a bright future!”



Kids in Ankang Home
(Shots by Tencent Charitable Foundation)

This year, the anniversary of ten years after 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, nearly 300 kids who received the help of Ankang Home before went back to Ankang Home in May 9th, 2018. They felt they were

back to home, and they shared story with Ankang mums, said thanks to them sincerely.

Today, only 48 kids still stay in Ankang Home., In 3 years , all of them will graduate from secondary school, leave Ankang Home, and start their new life. The day they graduate is the day when Ankang Home completes its mission.

How To Provide Better Psychotherapy?

On the one hand, the government should take some actions to make sure the psychiatrists can help residents in the stricken zone, such as making some standards and protocols, or even legislate on the issue. Also, the government should try to develop and carry out some welfare policy to encourage more high-quality psychiatrists to work in the disaster area and encourage psychiatrists to stay in the disaster area for a long time.

On the other hand, the public should also take the responsibility to help those survivors. We can donate money not only to rebuild the houses but also hire more psychiatrists. Furthermore, we should try to tell the residents to respect the psychiatrists and let them know the significance of mental health by designing posters or making short films, which can be accepted more easily.

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