

## **Observations from Sichuan**

**Prepared by Xiuxiong Steve Shi, B.Sc. Candidate (Toronto)**

June 12, 2008

1. The crisis intervention effort after the earthquake is very limited because of lack of existing community resources and mental health professionals. Most of the groups affected by the earthquake come from the lower SES strata from small cities or country side, where mental health services and resources are even more scarce than large cities. The number of professional mental health workers providing crisis intervention and psychological support in Sichuan after May 12 is approximately 2000, whereas the number of people psychologically affected by the disaster was estimated to be over 1,000,000.
2. Government attention and support on mental health recovery are badly needed after the earthquake. Psychological intervention groups rushed into Sichuan right after the disaster. However, these groups are mostly grassroots NGO-based. Some of the specialists came from hospitals and other professional institutions, but their work are largely based on individual actions. I believe that the state and provincial government should establish more systematic mechanisms in distributing and mobilizing mental health resources.
3. Many volunteers also rushed into the scene after May 12. But my experience talking to them showed that volunteer management is a very weak part of the relief effort. Many volunteers experienced significant confusion and frustration after arriving at their worksites. Local officials are always engaged with many other things, therefore the only thing they could tell the volunteers to do is often "Go find someone that might need help".
4. The way crisis intervention is implemented does not maximize the benefit of psychological support. Many Chinese counselors take a psychoanalytical approach and focus largely on short-term emotional and cognitive stability construction. I have hardly read any report on the establishment of comprehensive programs that provide support and resources on both individual and community levels. In the mean time, research in crisis response in China has been a less popular topic, therefore few studies are available for discussion on assessment of risk factors and long-term strategies on the community level.