

# THE PARALLEL PROCESS NATURE OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS

Sandra L. Bloom, M.D.

2008

## Organizational Dynamic

## Trauma-based Parallel Process

Social service systems today are experiencing significant stress.

**CHRONIC STRESSORS: HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT**

In many helping organizations, neither the staff nor the administrators feel particularly safe with their clients or even with each other.

**LACK OF BASIC SAFETY**

Atmospheres of recurrent or constant crisis severely constrain the ability of staff to: constructively confront problems, engage in complex problem-solving, and involve all levels of staff in decision making processes.

**LOSS OF EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT**

<p>Communication networks tend to break down under stress and as this occurs, service delivery becomes increasingly fragmented, and organizational memory is lost.</p>	<p><b>DISSOCIATION, FRAGMENTATION, AMNESIA</b></p>
<p>When communication networks break down so too do the feedback loops that are necessary for consistent and timely error correction.</p>	<p><b>SYSTEMATIC ERROR</b></p>
<p>As decision-making becomes increasingly non-participatory and problem solving more reactive an increasing number of short-sighted policy decisions are made that appear to compound existing problems.</p>	<p><b>LOSS OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES and PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT, LOSS OF COMPLEXITY, IMPAIRED COGNITION</b></p>
<p>Unresolved interpersonal conflicts increase and are not resolved.</p>	<p><b>IMPOVERISHED RELATIONSHIPS</b></p>
<p>As the situation feels increasingly out of control, organizational leaders become more controlling, instituting ever more punitive measures in an attempt to forestall chaos.</p>	<p><b>INCREASED AUTHORITARIANISM, LOSS OF CRITICAL JUDGMENT, SILENCING OF DISSENT, INCREASED CONFORMITY</b></p>
<p>As the organization becomes more hierarchical there is a progressive and simultaneous isolation of leaders, loss of critical judgment, and a “dumbing down” of</p>	<p><b>DISEMPOWERMENT, HELPLESSNESS</b></p>

<p><b>staff.</b></p>	
<p><b>Staff respond to the perceived punitive measures instituted by leaders by acting-out and passive-aggressive behaviors.</b></p>	<p><b>INCREASED AGGRESSION</b></p>
<p><b>Loss of key staff and leaders due to downsizing. Standards of care deteriorate and quality assurance standards are lowered in an attempt to deny or hide this deterioration.</b></p>	<p><b>UNRESOLVED GRIEF</b></p>
<p><b>Over time, leaders and staff lose sight of the essential purpose of their work together and derive less and less satisfaction and meaning from the work.</b></p>	<p><b>LOSS OF MEANING</b></p>
<p><b>When this spiral is occurring, staff feel increasingly angry, demoralized, “burned out”, helpless and hopeless about the people they are working to serve.</b></p>	<p><b>DEMORALIZATION</b></p>
<p><b>Ultimately, if this destructive sequence is not arrested, the organization begins to look and act in uncannily similar ways to the traumatized clients it is supposed to be helping.</b></p>	<p><b>SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR, FORE-SHORTENED FUTURE, LOSS OF CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING</b></p>