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An Evaluation of the Process Impact and Outcome of a Debriefing Programme

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2002
Most people will be exposed to some form of traumatic incident during their lifetime. These traumatic incidents can be devastating for those involved and could lead to long-term psychological problems. The difficulty in dealing with these traumatic incidents, and preventing occupational stress, (especially in high-risk occupations) led to the development of psychological debriefing.

The evaluative literature on debriefing has produced mixed findings on its effectiveness. To date most of the literature finds debriefing to have minimal or no effect on minimising the psychological morbidity associated with critical incidents, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, there are many methodological and implementation issues in the evaluative research into debriefing, which need to be addressed.

The present study was intended to collect baseline data on the effectiveness of the debriefing programme at a mental health unit. The 18 participants were given a questionnaire that contained several measures examining, attitudes, knowledge and experience of debriefing, as well as measures assessing psychological and physical health, and job satisfaction.

Independent samples t-tests revealed a strong significant relationship between knowledge and debriefing status. The present study revealed the importance of process and impact in the design and implementation of a debriefing programme. Future research should examine the process and impact issues raised in the present study using a larger sample size.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I want to say a HUGE thank you to everyone who has helped me with my Masters thesis. It has taken a mammoth group effort to get me finished, so here goes:

Chris Stephens thank you for your supervision, patience and understanding throughout my long journey!

Te Whare Ahuru - A big thank you to the 18 staff members who responded to my questionnaire because without you, this research would not have been possible. I also want to thank my two helpers down there who went out of their way to help me.

All the computer advice/help I received in my crash course on learning about computers from Massey's Student Learning Centre (thank you Tony for your patience with all my questions), Computing Services (especially to Des Clearwater for the manuals), UCOL, and EIT. I can confidently say I have learned a lot!

Harvey (psychology IT expert), for your open door policy and kindness

Sandi and co. I'm glad I met you, and I'm grateful for you helping put me back on the straight and narrow.

On a more personal note, I have some friends I want to thank:

Katrina and Steve, Simon and Juliet - I will always be grateful for your generous and kind offers that got me through my thesis, I learned a lot of valuable life lessons!

Nicola - I've really enjoyed our chats about debriefing and having someone else who understands what it is.

Shane and Rosie - thank you for all the invites to get out of the house and listening to my thesis stories. I still love chatting to you about psych Shane!

George - my quiet but solid supporter, thank you for listening and the visits to Palmy.

Rachel - my dear friend who always knew what I needed on her visits home from Japan, a real gem of a person

Wendy - I really enjoyed getting to know you again due to our shared theses experience, it was good to talk to someone else whose thesis journey wasn't so easy!

I will always be eternally grateful to the three very special people who were so wonderful to me in the last days of my thesis. Their commitment to me to help me finish actually blew me away and I can't express in words how much it meant.

Cecilia - my fellow psych graduate and friend, e-mail buddy and (great) peer editor. I was always so appreciative of your supportive words, our good talks and your advice. I hope we can always stay in touch.

Dave - my new friend, to think if it weren't for my thesis I would never have gotten to know you! I really enjoyed and looked forward to our 'long lunches'. I feel very lucky to have met a friend like you.

Philippa - my old flatmate, my movie bud, taxi driver and social life (without you I would have been lonely and not going anywhere!) I have always been very grateful for all that you have done for me, but you have outdone yourself in these last few days. I will always treasure your kindness and generosity toward me, you and Dave have shown me what true friendship is.

To my two biggest supporters - Mum and Dad - thank you for an abundance of unwavering support, understanding, love and never ending belief in me that helped get me through my thesis. Thank you for giving so much of yourselves for me, and all the care packages from home, visits to cheer me up and long phone calls. But my biggest thank you is for you not losing sight of my vision (and helping me not lose it either) that I WILL FINISH!! This experience has made me love and appreciate you more.
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