

Predicting Social Psychological Well-Being Following Trauma: The Role of Postdisaster Social Support

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This longitudinal study assessed both the mobilization and deterioration dynamics of postdisaster social support and aid unfolding within the first 12 months after a natural disaster. These were the predictor variables hypothesized to influence various subsequent manifestations of survivors' social psychological well-being such as perceptions of social support and community cohesion, engagement in interpersonal contacts, and beliefs about mutual helpfulness and benevolence. Data came from a sample of 285 respondents who experienced a severe flood that devastated parts of southwestern Poland in 1997. A series of hierarchical regression analyses that controlled for the influence of sociodemographic factors and direct disaster exposure measures showed that a greater involvement in the instantaneous postdisaster altruistic communities (mainly the amount of social support received) was associated with more favorable appraisals of interpersonal and community relationships assessed 20 months after the flood. Conversely, the indicators of postdisaster social bitterness, operationalized as dissatisfaction with aid and interpersonal and community animosities and disagreements, were predictive of lower levels of subsequent social psychological well-being. Results underscore the relevance of both the social support mobilization and social support deterioration models for trauma theory. These findings also suggest that postdisaster relief and intervention programs should consider helping survivors maintain, or even augment, their perceptions of being supported and their trust in benefits of belonging to a valued social group and community.

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All catastrophes, but natural disasters in particular, elicit an postdisaster). These were the predictor variables hypothesized to outpouring of immense mutual helping. In essence, this is exactly influence subsequent manifestations of survivors' social psychological well-being in terms of quality and quantity of their personal communities of victims, professional supporters, and empathetic and communal bonds assessed 8 months later (Wave 2, 20 months witnesses rally to rescue, protect, and help each other. Yet, this postdisaster). compassionate stage of resource mobilization does not last long and must inevitably cease. The sense of initial solidarity, benevolence, and altruism is slowly overpowered by a gradual disillusionment and outright realization of the harsh reality of grief, loss, and destruction. Tangible losses are often accompanied by a growing sense of deterioration of resources and increased competition and polarization within what used to be, only a short time before, a united community in shared distress. Guided by a general theory of social support and research on coping with trauma, this longitudinal study assessed both the mobilization and deterioration facets of postdisaster social support and aid processes occurring within the first year after a severe flood (Wave 1, 12 months

Mobilization of Social Support in the