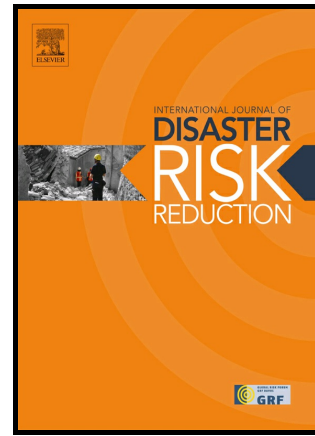


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Psychosocial Capacity Building in Response to Cascading Disasters: A Culturally Informed Approach

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Abstract

The dominant paradigm guiding mental health professionals responding to major disasters is the field of 'disaster mental health', which historically focused more on psychological factors than social factors, privileging individual over collective interventions. However, resilience to complex events is a result of multiple drivers, such as social networks and local culture, that must be considered together in the assessment and planning process. This paper adopts a multi-disciplinary perspective for disaster response, applying a social-ecological approach to disaster risk reduction which has been developed through practice and a review of the literature. In particular, we investigated how psychosocial healing, collective efficacy and social justice as intertwined aspects of the recovery process may inhibit the escalation of cascading disasters. The article argues that psychosocial capacity building can be used in disaster preparation as well as to respond to cascading events, as the escalation of secondary emergencies caused by the loss of vital services can heavily influence collective behaviours, and hinder the response capacity of emergency services. Our research suggests that adopting a multi-systemic approach, drawing on local cultural practices, can deepen the capacity of local people to take control over their own process of healing and psychosocial restoration, enhancing a sustainable recovery process. The conclusions suggest some possible applications for responders, utilizing groups and activities, and raise questions for researchers in the field.

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