## Author's Accepted Manuscript

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 PII:
 S2212-4209(16)30209-6

 DOI:
 http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2016.08.013

 Reference:
 IJDRR396

To appear in: International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction

Received date: 12 May 2016 Revised date: 8 August 2016 Accepted date: 26 August 2016

Cite this article as: Alan H. Kwok, Emma E.H. Doyle, Julia Becker, David Johnston and Douglas Paton, What is 'social resilience'? Perspectives of disaste researchers, emergency management practitioners, and policymakers in Nev Z e a l a n d, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2016.08.013

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### What is 'social resilience'? Perspectives of disaster researchers, emergency management

practitioners, and policymakers in New Zealand

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#### Abstract

There is an increasing need to evaluate the underlying drivers of community resilience. Much of the existing research on resilience measurements assesses factors pertaining to a spectrum of societal domains that includes social, economic, institutional, infrastructural, and natural environments. Research has focused on the importance of social resilience – the capacity of people and communities to deal with external stresses and shocks – and how it contributes to community preparedness, disaster response, and post-disaster recovery. As a component of community resilience, social resilience has been examined by researchers across a multitude of academic disciplines. As a result, there are tremendous variations in how this concept is assessed. To better understand what social resilience means at the community level, this research examined the perspectives of hazards researchers, emergency management practitioners, and policymakers from New Zealand's Wellington region. The results of their responses revealed similarities in how social resilience is perceived across these three sectors. Overall, the most frequently mentioned social resilience attributes are *community gathering place*, followed by *social support*, *knowledge of risks and consequences*, *collective efficacy*, and *sense of community*. Through synthesising their responses and the literature, a core set of social resilience indicators is proposed.

### Keywords:

Social resilience, community resilience, indicators, disasters, New Zealand

### 1. Introduction

Disasters of the past decade have drawn considerable attention to the need to build resilient communities. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 calls for the reduction of disaster risks through an "all-of-society" and "all-of-State institutions" engagement approach that emphasises the important role that local governments and communities play in reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing community resilience (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2015, p. 5). As local communities begin to translate national and sub-national disaster resilience policies into practice, there is a growing need to identify the factors that affect community vulnerabilities and resilience. These factors have formed the basis of the emerging field of research in disaster resilience measurements, as they enable governments and local stakeholders to identify resilience gaps and evaluate progress and investment strategies (Committee on Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters & Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2012).

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