

Evidence of the psychosocial impact of socio-environmental disasters in the Biobío region

Loreto Villagrán¹, Marian Bilbao², Carolina Alzugaray³, Carlos Reyes Valenzuela⁴, Pamela Vaccari¹

¹ University of Concepción, Chile

² Alberto Hurtado University, Chile

³ Universidad Santo Tomás, Concepción, Chile

⁴Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, Ecuador

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Research on disasters has traditionally considered these events in terms of their individual impact and associated symptomatology. This proposal considers that socio-environmental disasters: a) have a psychosocial impact that includes negative and positive, individual and collective reactions; and b) the psychosocial impact can be understood from the pre-traumatic situation in which they occur, the perceived subjective severity of each event, and the losses related to each event. The question was: How does the subjective impact of socio-environmental disasters relate to post-traumatic growth and psychosocial trauma in people affected by disasters, and how do social support and community social support mediate this relationship in the contexts of the Maule and Biobío regions in Chile? The objective consisted of evaluating and relating the Subjective Impact (SI) of natural disasters with Posttraumatic Growth (CPT), Psychosocial Trauma (TPS), Social Support (AS) and Community Social Support (ASc).

A quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, correlational and ex-post facto methodology was used. The sampling was non-probabilistic and intentional, with the participation of 186 people, belonging to different localities of the Maule and Biobío regions. The sample was composed of people belonging to the Biobío region who lived through the earthquake and tsunami of 2010 (Dichato, Penco), the effects of an environmental disaster (Coronel); and from the Maule region (Constitución) the fires of 2016. The Subjective Impact scales of Alzugaray et al., (2015), Individual and Collective Posttraumatic Growth scale Wlodarczyk et al., (2017), and to measure Social Support the scale Arechabala & Miranda, (2002) were applied; and the scale of Gracia et al., (2002) was used to measure Community Support.

Correlations between variables were analyzed, finding that subjective impact correlates with the individual and collective dimension of posttraumatic growth. The structural equation model shows a direct relationship between subjective impact and psychosocial trauma. Social support (peers, partners, friends) has no significant relationship with subjective impact but with psychosocial trauma, while community support (formal and informal systems) mediates the relationship between subjective impact and psychosocial trauma. This model was significant and with good fit indicators. The model that proposed the relationship between subjective impact and posttraumatic growth considering the mediation of community social support was not significant.

The mental health impact of socio-natural disasters considers protective or healthy elements (community social support) and the effect of these (post-traumatic growth and psychosocial trauma). The study shows evidence at the national level of how certain social resources, such as having support from authorities or institutions, can influence people's response to these events. These results seek to contribute to the development of psychosocial interventions that enhance community social support resources as protective factors for the mental health of those affected, integrating informal groups and requiring an active role of government institutions.

Keywords: disaster, social support, subjective impact, psychosocial trauma, posttraumatic growth.

¹lorevillagran@udec.cl