

THE IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS ON PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELFARE

(Case study Shijak-Albania)

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ABSTRACT

The city of Shijak was one of the most affected areas by the earthquakes of September 21 and November 26, 2019. Such natural disasters often result in death, injury, illness, and other negative effects of physical and mental health.

This study aims to evaluate the effects of natural disasters on the livelihood of families, their properties and other aspects of well-being in the city of Shijak. Natural disasters are considered to have direct impacts on humans as well as indirect effects on infrastructure. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines a disaster as a serious disruption to the functioning of a community or society involving human, material, economic damage or loss, and environmental impact.

Earthquakes are not a common natural disaster for the city of Shijak. Such natural disasters can be a very stressful, disruptive, and traumatic for those affected. As a consequence, people may experience a wide variety of physical, psychological, emotional, or behavioral reactions, which, although completely natural, can significantly affect their ability to cope with the given situation.

Findings from the survey conducted by 150 respondents show that a significant proportion of respondents found severe negative effects on their houses (72%), family assets (48%), and children's education (43%). Others suffered severe health, psychological, short-term unemployment impacts and more than half of respondents from urban areas moved to rural areas as a result of natural disaster events.

Whether they suffered direct losses or not, disaster can cause post-traumatic stress for people who have experienced such traumas. This fact was also confirmed by the given study, so the majority of respondents (65%) suffered from post-traumatic stress.

Based on the results of the study, such natural disasters emphasize that the investment shall be carried out in the well-being of individuals, especially long-term psycho-social recovery, including community development programs and support for areas such as health and well-being, employment, and education.

Keywords: *natural disaster, social welfare, mental health, post-traumatic stress.*

INTRODUCTION

A disaster for people disrupts the normal pattern of life, causing physical damage, maintaining emotional and overwhelming feelings of helplessness and hope. The catastrophes that occurred in the city of Shijak during a short period of time, namely on September 21 and November 26, 2019, brought many damages in the social and economic well-being of the inhabitants of the given city. The impact of a disaster in terms of socio-economic consequences for a region and its environment often requires help from abroad, from the respective State Institutions, and while being provided with such help, the basic self-awareness is actually formed for an adequate intervention, which can also be a support for the families affected by the disaster. Such measures have been undertaken in order to face this situation, including decisions, normative acts, etc. On the proposal of the Minister of Defence, the Council of Ministers decided to declare a state of natural disaster in the regions of Durrës and Tirana, as a proper consequence of the earthquake dated 26.11.2019, for a time period no longer than 30 (thirty) days from the entry into force of the given decision.¹ Thereafter, it was approved the Normative Act " On coping with the consequences of natural disasters " with the object:

¹Decision no.750, dated 27.11.2019 "On the declaration of the state of natural disaster in the regions of Durrës and Tirana"

This act regulates the functioning of the competent authorities for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the communities and the territories affected by natural or other disasters, as well as the development of new territories, defining their tasks and responsibilities, programs of reconstruction process, the operation of the reconstruction fund and selection procedures, aiming at the coping with such natural disasters occurring partially or throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania, as well as other disasters that, due to their intensity, scale and extent, require immediate intervention by all civil protection institutions and other state authorities and for which the state of emergency is declared pursuant to the provisions of the applicable civil protection legislation² in force. Also, after a few days, there were determined the rules, priority categories, benefit measures, competent authorities, and procedures for the evaluation and selection of beneficiaries based on some programs of the reconstruction process, pursuant to the decision no. 904 dated 24.12.2019.³

Reconstruction grants program and model projects were approved based on Decision No. 5 dated 06.01.2020 "On determining the rules and procedures for the benefits from the reconstruction grants program and model projects"⁴ For the city of Shijak 1174 families received grants to the amount of 5.3 million dollars. Grants for common premises and for buildings to the amount of 1.2 million dollars. After the earthquake of November 26, 2019, in the city of Shijak, the Municipality of Shijak approved the preliminary list of families affected by the earthquake dated 26.11.2019. To begin with, temporary shelters were actually set up. Three meals were provided for homeless families and public meetings have been held in Shijak and the Administrative Units for the Reconstruction plan.⁵For these families whose houses were uninhabitable, the rent payment was approved so that they were secured and on the other hand, they would not have any other financial damages.⁶ In Shijak, 750 homeless families benefited from the Rent Bonus. The "New development area" of zone 1, including the Administrative Unit of Shijak, Municipality of Shijak, shall be proclaimed as a suitable area for forced development, " according to the map and coordinates attached to the given decision no. 45, dated 22.1.2020⁷ 2. The Albanian Development Fund is designated as the implementing unit for this area, for a) construction of new dwellings or damaged public buildings; b) construction and reconstruction of public and critical infrastructure; c) realization of constructions in this area; ç) any other interventions, in the function of the reconstruction of this area. Following this decision, the Municipal Council of Shijak decided to approve the online application platform for the reconstruction program and the user manual of the platform. ⁸For the city of Shijak will be built from scratch: The Upper Secondary School "16 September" Shijak; the Upper Secondary School "Kajo Karafili" Maminas; Elementary school "Lidhja e Prizrenit" Shijak; Elementary school "Petrit Llaftiu" Shijak; Kindergarten no. 1; Kindergarten no. 2; Shijak the nursery; 30 new buildings; 27 buildings will be reconstructed; 800 houses will be rebuilt; 1174 private houses will be repaired; Palace of Culture; Public parks; the Mosque and the Library.

METHODOLOGY

²Normative Act No. 9, Date 16.12.2019 "On coping with the consequences of natural disasters"

³Decision no. 904, dated 24.12.2019 "On determining the rules, priority categories, benefit measure, responsible authorities and procedures for the evaluation and selection of beneficiaries from some programs of the reconstruction process"

⁴Decision no. 5, dated 6.1.2020 "On determining the rules and procedures for the benefits of the reconstruction grants program and model projects"

⁵Decision of the Municipal Council no.3 dated 21.01.2020 "On the approval of the preliminary list of families affected by the earthquake dated 26.11.2019"

⁶Decision of the Municipal Council no.4 dated 21.01.2020 "For some additions and changes in VKB no.21 dated 10.12.2019 for the approval of the rent payment according to the free market value"

⁷Decision no. 45, dated 22.01.2020 "On the announcement of the new development zone in the administrative unit Shijak, Municipality of Shijak, and the designation of the Albanian development fund as the implementing unit."

⁸Decision no.7 dated 30.01.2020 "On the approval of the online application platform for the reconstruction program and the user manual"

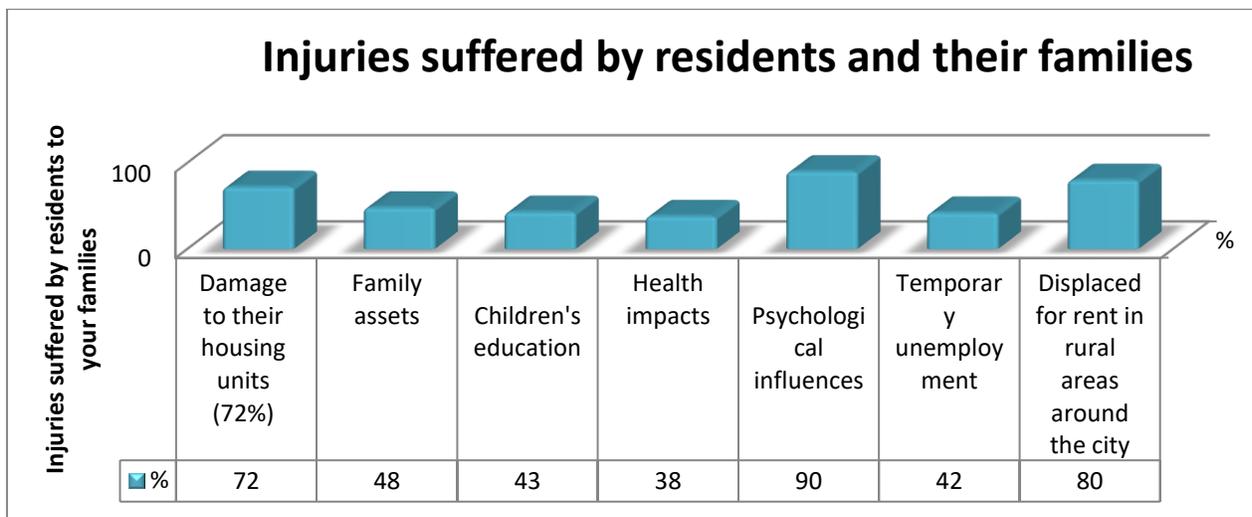
The methods used in this study are literature review-interpretation and quantitative method. In the city of Shijak there were completed 150 questionnaires by the residents affected by the earthquake. The literature was selected based on the national legislation including decisions, laws, normative acts, etc.

This study aims to evaluate the effects of natural disasters on the livelihood of families, their assets, and other aspects of well-being in the city of Shijak.

RESULTS

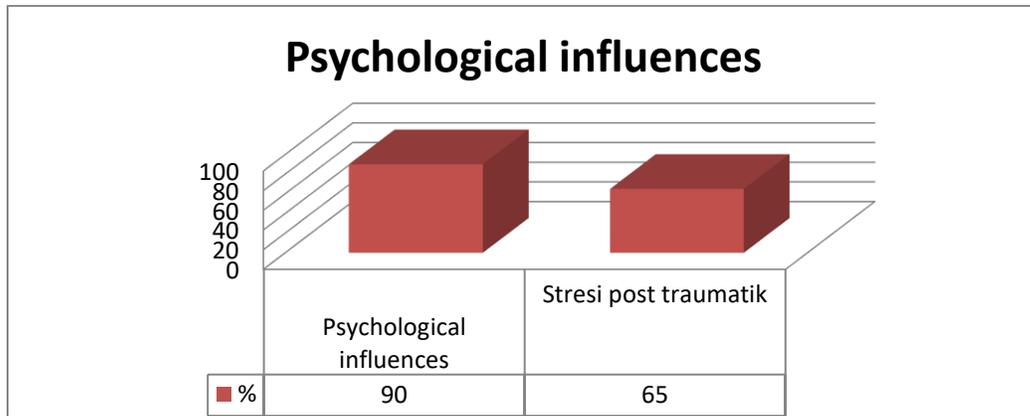
Regarding the answers to the injuries suffered by the residents in their families, most of them had injuries in their housing units, but which were also associated with injuries to family assets, children's education, health impacts, psychological impacts, temporary unemployment, or move to rural areas around the city, by renting houses in such areas. The chart below shows the damage that residents suffered to their families.

Given the high percentage of residents who responded that the earthquake had psychological effects resulted that a large proportion of them 65% suffered from the post-traumatic stress.



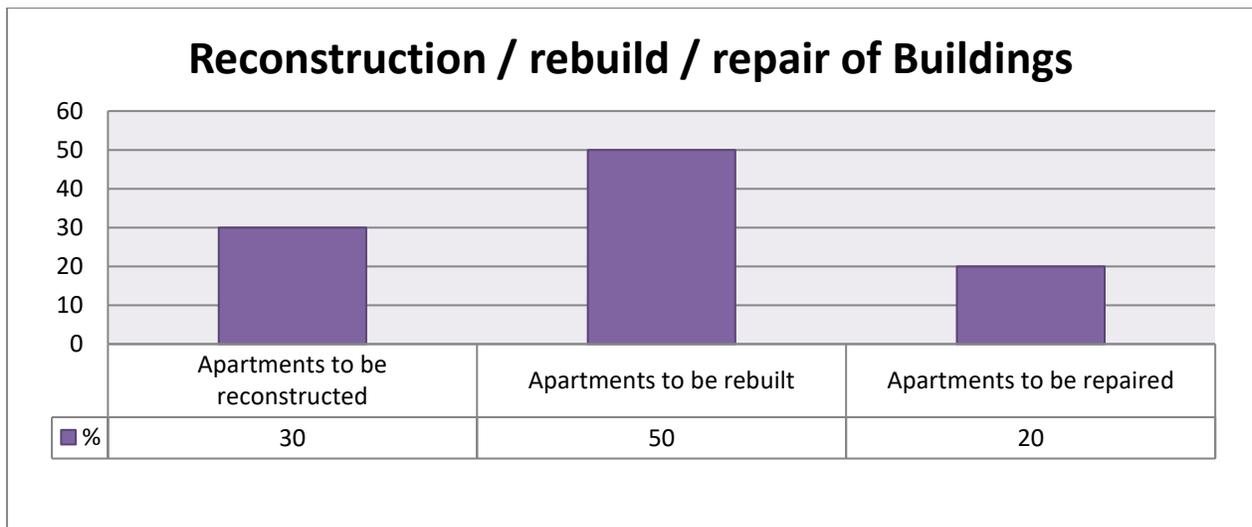
Graph no. 1

Given the high percentage of residents who responded that the earthquake had psychological effects resulted that a large proportion of the 65% suffered from post-traumatic stress.



Graph No. 2

All respondents would be able to have 30% of their apartments reconstructed, 50% of their apartments rebuild and 20% of their apartments to be repaired All families who moved as a result of the earthquake in rented rural areas benefited from the rent bonus. Regarding the education of children, due to the damage of kindergartens, nurseries, and schools, a solution has been found so that the children can attend the lesson regularly in shifts in undamaged schools.



Graph No. 3

CONCLUSIONS

The initial and quite critical step is the immediate evaluation of the situation and the affected population. This will determine the current needs and interventions that are most appropriate in the current circumstances. It is important to clearly define the priorities and effective coordination of rescue activities, both in the beginning and in the subsequent stages. ⁹Findings from the survey conducted by 150 respondents show that a significant proportion of respondents

⁹Patrick Mahar | Julia A. Lynch | Joseph Wathen | Eric Tham | Stephen Berman | Sathyanarayanan Doraiswamy | Allen G.K. Maina , Disasters and their Effects on the Population: Key Concepts, Module I

found severe negative effects on their housing units (72%), family assets (48%), and children's education (43%). Others suffered severe health, psychological, short-term unemployment impacts and more than half of respondents from urban areas had moved to rural areas as a result of natural disaster events. Whether they have suffered direct losses or not, disaster can cause post-traumatic stress for people who have experienced such traumas. The given fact was confirmed by this study, so the majority of respondents (65%) suffered from post-traumatic stress. Based on the results of the study such natural disasters emphasize that investment should be made in the well-being of individuals, especially long-term psycho-social recovery, including community development programs and support for areas such as health and well-being, employment, and education. Preparation is the only way to reduce the impact of disasters as most disasters are unpredictable and even if predicted, there is not much time to act. Readiness and community-based administration should be a top priority in managing physical therapy practice. It should also be the main agenda of the government to designate a proper department dealing with disaster management and preparedness.¹⁰ Disasters are inevitable, we can do nothing to prevent them but disaster preparedness is only in our hands. Disaster management requires government intervention and proper planning as well as funding.

We must also keep in mind that the target groups most affected by disasters are children and the elderly people, and the latter should be treated more carefully when it comes to the distribution of sanitary and nutritional resources as well as effective preventive interventions.

¹⁰<https://targetstudy.com/articles/importance-of-disaster-management.html>

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