

## The Importance of Psychological Preparedness among Flood Victims

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### Abstract

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This study examines the psychological preparedness among flood victims. When a disaster strikes, psychological preparedness is one of the most essential factors needed to oversee and adapt individual reactions before and during a disaster, with the objective to enhance the individual conduct and psychological reaction. Present study reveals that psychological preparedness is not the same as physical readiness since it is identified as an intra-individual and mental condition of mindfulness, expectation, and availability. The study also unravels the disaster impact on the individual, community and the nation. The undeniably recurrence and force of natural disaster everywhere in the world reveals that psychological preparedness for disaster management requires urgent attention. It is therefore, recommended that personality traits become a key component to comprehend, enhance versatility and individual readiness to confront and manage flood disaster. The study further recommends conceptual framework to explain the relationship between personality traits and the impact of the disaster based on previous studies.

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**Keywords:** Psychological preparedness; flood victim; natural disaster; personality.

### 1. Introduction

Disaster preparedness can be described as the personal protective behaviour that can be moulded to safeguard from unprepared situations that may have impact on individual's life and belongings (Hobfoll, 1988; Paton, 2005). In unpredictable situations, the needs for preparedness is a vital part of all disaster management models and frameworks, but basically concentrate only on what household readiness and action one should take to create a safety environment to oneself and family members in

the context of psychological and material aspect. The unpredictable climate phenomenon around the world and its deadly impact based on the intensity of each situation has enhanced the importance of psychological preparation relevancy.

According to Reser and Morrissey (2009), the difference between physical or household preparedness and psychological preparedness stems from the facts that psychological preparedness has intra-individual state of readiness, anticipation and awareness. This is actually a strategy to manage individual's psychological response to any emergency situations. Community and individual psychological preparedness has been highlighted as an effective strategy for resilience in terms of natural disasters.

To be prepared and be in control, an understanding of individual's and other's psychological responses are imperative. Effective emergency planning in natural disaster warning situations provide more confidence in individual. Being cooler, calmer and relax will provide substantial aid to family members and other individuals who may be unprepared for the disasters. Mental and psychological preparation will enhance the ability to think as rational as possible. This, in turn, will decrease the possibility of any serious injuries due to disasters and also minimise loss of life. (Reser, 2009).

Therefore, it is important to examine in greater detail the impact of the disaster that befell the victims so that this problem can be addressed and tackle more effectively. This article tries to assess the importance of psychological preparedness consistent with the statement from Ofrin and Salunke (2006) that state the importance of emotional preparation among people in order to face disaster such as flood, landslide or earthquake.

Furthermore, this paper will discuss the terms and principles of psychological preparedness and the explanation regarding the importance of psychological preparedness. The discussion of psychological preparedness will be focused on the literatures about personality traits that involve three elements namely optimism, self-efficiency and self-viability among disaster victims. From the discussion, this study creates a conceptual framework that represents the relationship between psychological preparedness among flood victims in Malaysia and the effects of flood disaster.

## **2. Literature review**

In recent times, many studies have related the aspect of psychology with flood and these studies have been conducted by local or international researchers. Most of the researchers want to look deeply into the effects of flood to the community. Among researchers that conducted specific studies that examines the effects of flood includes; Acharya, Upadhya, and Kortmann (2006); Becker-Blease, Turner, and Finkelhor (2010); Dorji (2006), Htay (2006); Uguak (2001); and Panyayong and Pengjuntr (2006). There were also studies that focus on how emotional responses based on stress and trauma due to flood disaster.

Karanci, Aksit, and Dirik (2005) conducted a study that measured readiness aspects among the community in Turkey that always been exposed to the flood disaster. The result of the study shows that readiness aspect is still low among the people in the community and this will finally bring great effects of the disaster to the community. The lack of readiness and preparation directly will make flood victims suffer low self-esteem.

Rao (2006) suggest that family and friend support is very important to boost preparation and readiness among flood victims especially in the aspect of psychology. This study also states that with the support from the family and friends, flood victim will be emotionally relax and this will help them make the right decision to face the disaster.

In order to understand the deeper role of psychological dimension influence the disaster preparedness among victim, this article try to analyse the previous studies regarding the frame of mind or personality factors that play essential roles in decision-making process among flood victims. It can be disputed that certain inner traits, decision-making, beliefs and the degree of cognitive process in human mind play a vital part in the mechanism of how human-environment transactions are being handled (Bishop, Paton, Syme, & Nancarrow, 2000; Mulilis, Duval, & Rombach, 2001).

To predict preparedness behaviour in earthquake situations, Mulilis and Duval (2001) have examined the event occurrence probability (the idea of potential earthquake time) and severity (potential earthquake destructiveness estimation degree) as important event variables in preparedness behaviour. In addition, self-efficacy (individual capacity beliefs) and response efficacy (the notion and perceptions of whether individual actions will decrease a problem) are considered as person variables. This is based on the 'Person Relative Event'.

Most of the times human-environment transactions are been inspired by a need for individual to feel that he or she can perform a sense of control in oneself. It becomes one of the most important elements that can influence people readiness and resilience when facing the disaster. Bauman and Sims (1972) mention that individual self-efficacy and their locus of control can be considered as predictors of preparedness among the flood victim that can be categorized as how the personality of flood victims shape individual preparedness before disaster. It is aligned with what have been said by Paton, Smith and Johnston (2005) regarding preparedness and locus of control that are related with each other if the person wants to be success when facing the problem. In other word, individual must have a certain amount of control and sense of self-efficiency.

Scheier and Carver (1985) define optimism trait as expectation of great outcome that appears when facing crisis or critical issues. Individual that have this type of trait will be more prepared and less affected by the disaster; thus, they can prevent themselves from stress, trauma and fear more than individual that do not have optimism trait in their personality. It is because optimism is a continuous attempt of some people to solve the problem that they are facing contrary to the individual who easily give up when facing some crucial issues in their lives.

Optimism trait has an opposite relationship to stress, depression or any other negative effect of the disaster. That is why optimism becomes a significant predictor of the problem solving coping strategies, improving cognitive skill and also as emotional controlling devices. In order to understand resilience and preparedness, people need to identify the meaning and the concept of optimism; it is because optimism is a road map to success in a process of creating a greater outcome after facing adversity and crisis (Norris, 2010). Karademas (2006) also said that optimism is more efficient than any other personality trait in order to improve individual cognitive, problem solving and decision-making.

Self-esteem is another trait of personality that can improve flood victim preparedness and resilience against the effect of disaster. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is a positive or negative attitude toward oneself. Hobfoll and Lilly (1993) state that, self-esteem can be a significant source of resilient in a person when facing stressful event. When a person has high self-esteem trait they will able to focus more on preparation before the disaster happens directly which will make them more resilience and able to avoid themselves being exposed to emotional threatening situation. That is why Hobfoll (1989) highlighted the importance of self-esteem as one of the most important psychological construct and as a motivational factor to improve preparedness before facing the disaster.

However, most people prefer to focus more on improving the material aspect in disaster prevention, but tend to forget that the true key element to minimize the effect of disaster is their own self. That is why Loewenstein and Lerner (2003) opine that people with high self-esteem automatically become a person with more sense of worth, more skill and more prepare in any type of stressful situation.

Self-viability is characterized as the apparent capacity or ability to compose and execute an action to accomplish a fancied outcome. This trait is appeared to impact preparatory conduct and how well individuals react emotionally and behaviourally to traumatic event. Those with positive perspectives of their own viability will probably invest more energy to succeed and continue even with the difficulties (Norris, 2010). Self-viability reflects the impression of individual ability to accomplish something and result adequacy is the measuring of the view of fundamental activities in lessening an issue. The "Person relative to event" model, utilizing for flood preparedness, predicts that expanding levels of risk when assets are assessed as adequate in respect to the greatness of the danger will build issue centred adaptation.

In a research conducted by Paton, Smith and Johnston (2005), disaster preparedness demonstrated both self-viability and result adequacy anticipated problem-focused behaviour or activity adapting being connected to disaster preparedness conduct. There are numerous theoretical explanations for expecting that the anxiety vaccination and administration segments of the psychological readiness material may be less viable for people that portrayed by moderate to high interminable anxiety (Lazarus, 1991).

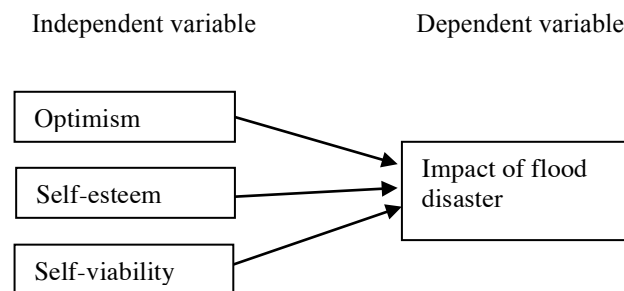
Based on the result of the previous studies, it is recommended that personality traits are importance to the comprehension of understanding and preparedness of disaster. Most of the studies also suggest that understanding psychological components that can influence the preparedness among the victim are fundamental to the effort to decrease the negative impacts of flood disaster.

### **3. Proposed conceptual framework for the relationship between the variables**

From the literature review, the importance of personality element in the psychological preparedness among disaster victim has been emphasized. Therefore, a framework could be proposed in accordance with the flood disaster in Malaysia as in Figure 1. Based on the framework, personality traits have been predicted to have significant role in order to improve the disaster preparedness among flood victim.

This conceptual framework suggests the independent and dependent variables for future research. The independent variables represent the personality traits such as optimism, self-esteem and self-

viability. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is the impact of disaster during disaster and after it occurs. The ability of flood victims to control their personality traits will affect the impact of disaster and will shape their reaction during the time of the disaster. Previous studies have mentioned that when a person has the ability to control or improve their personality traits when the disaster happens, they will be less affected by the disaster (Bishop et al. 2000; Paton et al. 2005; Scheier, & Carver, 1985).



**Fig. 1.** A conceptual framework describes the relationship between variables.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It was widely agreed that flood disaster goes with loss of life and destruction of property to the residents. However, the situation can be addressed or reduced if people are in good health and also, if the individual had prepared to face disaster. At the point when flood strikes, people, organizations, and victims should not only be logistically prepared, but also emotional and mentally arranged. How well the individual psychological state gets prepared for an occasion may give a big influence on the achievement of reaction and recuperation endeavours. In this manner, it is important that psychological readiness be calculated into crisis and disaster planning.

Therefore, this paper has developed a conceptual framework that highlights the psychological preparedness being the element that influences the effects of the disaster. This will create another opportunity for the future research to analyse this element of preparedness on different type of disaster or culture. Meanwhile the benefit of this study if successfully implements will help disaster victims understand the importance of getting well prepared in the perspective of psychology. It also contributes to a better understanding among disaster management agencies to develop a strategy that can improve disaster management not only in terms of material preparedness but also psychological preparedness.

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