

Cultural perspective on mental health and disaster of women affected by the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption

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Location of Study: Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Mt. Merapi is Indonesia's most active volcano

Villagers living on the slopes of Merapi have a spiritual connection to the volcano

Research indicates approximately 20% of individuals affected by a natural disaster will develop PTSD

Mt. Merapi erupted on October 26, 2010, causing over 300 casualties and displacing more than 360,000 people



Research Questions

- 1) to understand how women were affected by the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption
- 2) to explore their PTSD symptoms
- 3) to explore their coping strategies



Research Methods

- * Local contact introduced researcher to potential participants then additional participants were referred through snowballing.
- * Qualitative study using an interview guide. An interpreter was present for all recruitment and interviews
- * Verbal consent was obtained from all participants
- * Total Number of respondents: 12 women, age range from 20-90 years. 4 women were able to return to their homes after the eruption and 8 women were living in transitional shelters



Photo of transitional shelter



Data-analysis

Notes from the interviews were rewritten into narratives

Direct quotes were included to capture the participant's voice

Line by line analysis was used to identify themes, and matrices were developed to uncover relationships between themes and categories

Themes

Culture of disaster existing in the villages along the slopes of Merapi

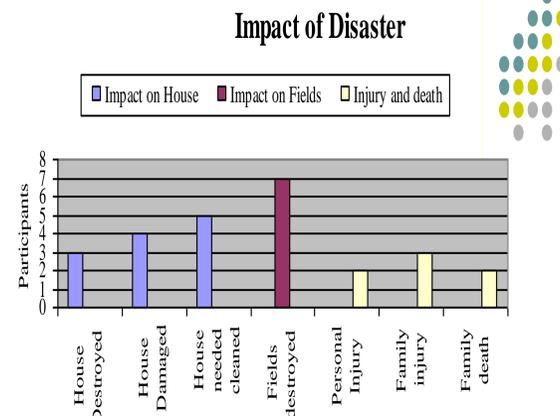
Villagers' desire to return to their former communities versus government push for relocation away from Merapi.

Lack of resources to help with rebuilding their lives

Mental health is stigmatized and devalued in Indonesia

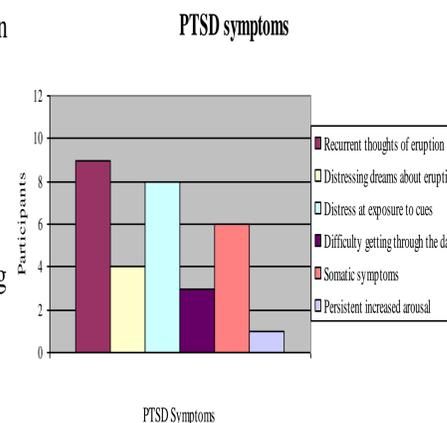
Results

How were they affected by the eruption?



Did they experience symptoms of PTSD?

None of the women qualified for a clinical diagnosis of PTSD. However, they experienced a range of distressing symptoms as a result of the eruption.



Results Continued

How do they cope?

- * Prayer
- * Engaging in activities
- * Talking about the eruption with friends and families
- * Avoid thoughts about Merapi
- * Avoid talking about Merapi

"For relaxation I listen to Javanese music with my family"

"The community has a tent where we pray together. We also do religious activities like singing."

"The thoughts make me feel sad, especially when I think about my parent's house being destroyed. I feel closer with my family and community since the eruption because we all stuck together. We avoid talking and thinking about Merapi. All will be ok."

Implications

Practice

Disaster responders should draw on the strengths of the community built from their traditional, spiritual connection to Merapi

Need for macro-level interventions to assist with employment, rebuilding, healthcare, and education needs

Policy

Empower the Merapi villagers to have a voice in government policies about permanent resettlement

Future Research

Availability of mental health services in the immediate aftermath of eruptions in the Merapi area

Impact of disasters on the mental health of men and children

