

Experiences and attitudes of crisis managers concerning psycho-social support systems during and after disasters in Europe

Abstract

Context

Worldwide populations are confronted with a growing number of disasters. A major incident is a type of an emergency event or situation, which can arise from natural hazards, human-made disasters or industrial accidents, which threaten or cause serious damage to human welfare, the environment and security. These events may have traumatic effects to people affected (e.g. victims, volunteers, emergency workers). Psycho-social support systems can help them to better cope with the circumstances. The objective of the study is to present a status quo analysis of psycho-social support systems during and after disasters in selected European countries.

Methods

The authors have chosen a qualitative research approach. Intervention team leaders (= crisis managers) from different rescue organisations and authorities were interviewed with regard to the status quo of psycho-social support systems. The 20 oral interviews with crisis managers from different European countries were analysed in using the qualitative method GABEK (Ganzheitliche BEwältigung von Komplexität). GABEK is based on the theory of "Wahrnehmungsgestalten" (Perceptive Appearances), which has been transferred to a theory of linguistic "Gestalten" that is a network between units of meaning. The result consists of different holistic pictures of complex social phenomena investigated.

Results

Based on the experiences and attitudes of the crisis managers the authors present an overview about the status quo of psycho-social support systems and their strengths and weaknesses in selected European countries. The presented research results are part of the international multi-disciplinary project PsyCris (PSYcho-social Support in CRISis Management) that is funded by the European Union with the overall objective to improve psycho-social support in crisis management. A distinction is undertaken into the provision of adequate support for victims, affected people, emergency workers (staff members and crisis managers) and other groups (e.g. volunteers). Different value systems of crisis managers, depending on the organizations they work for, are reflected in strategies for appropriate treatment of trauma and stress related disorders. Their attitudes differ with regard to the needs and the moments of treatment.

Discussion

The offer and structure of psycho-social support systems in Europe depends on the experiences with disasters in the past and on the engagement of crisis managers in rescue organisations and authorities. The spectrum of services offered do not only vary between European countries but also in the provinces of the countries. Further differences in the levels of provision are seen in the priority of psycho-social support that is given by representatives of different rescue organizations and authorities.

Keyword: Disasters, crisis managers, victims, psycho-social support systems

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