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Is Queenstown a Sanctuary?

**A retrospective study of the preparation,
mitigation and recovery of the Queenstown
community from the effects of the Queenstown
flood and hazard slip events of 1999.**

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Abstract

Using a salutogenic paradigm, the present study examined the factors that contributed to hardiness and resilience, in the Queenstown community, following the flood and slip events of November 1999. It was hypothesised that sense of community, coping style, self-efficacy, and social support would predict stress, as measured by the Hopkins Symptom Checklist-21 (HSCL). It was also hypothesised that unique environmental qualities of Queenstown, i.e. the lakes, mountains, small community and being a visitor destination, would make a significant contribution to participants sense of community. Hazard knowledge, preparation and mitigation, with particular reference to flood hazards was also examined. Additionally, in depth interviews with a high intensity sample of participants, were also carried out. This qualitative information was intended to examine the strengths within the community that had helped the community to deal with the flood and slip events. Additionally, the interviews were used as a forum, for participants to raise their own issues, relating to these events. The hypothesis that the selected variables would predict resilience, was not supported, but support was found for the importance of the unique physical and environmental qualities of Queenstown to residents. The interview results provided support for the view that the Queenstown community was able to withstand the effects of the flood and slip events, with recovery of businesses and tourism being almost complete at four months post event. Though some of those properties affected by the event could never be restored, resulting in irreplaceable losses and changes to individuals' lives, the community showed remarkable strengths and had done much to address inadequacies highlighted by the events .

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview

Natural hazards are increasing globally and there is a gathering body of research concerned with preparation for and mitigation of some of the social and psychological impacts on individuals and communities. (Mclure, Walkey & Allen, 1999) A telephone survey conducted in the United States, found that during the period 1970-1980, almost two million households per year had experienced either injuries or damage, sustained as a result of household fires or the natural hazards of floods, hurricanes and severe tropical storms, tornados and severe windstorms, and earthquakes and severe tremors. (Rossi et al 1983, cited in Solomon and Smith 1994.)

Kaniasty and Norris (1999), note that disaster often results in loss of possessions that have significant economic and symbolic, or emotional significance. Additionally, resources needed to sustain psychological health are also likely to be affected, and previous research has found increases in physical and psychiatric problems following disaster experience. These have included, increases in depression and anxiety, post -traumatic stress disorder, (PTSD), family stress, alcohol abuse, and violent behaviour. However not all those who experience disaster, suffer these negative effects. (Green, 1994, cited in Benight, Swift, Sanger, Smith, A & Zeppelin, 1999)

Factors that influence individual and community ability to withstand hazard effects may be both individual and environmental. The extent to which individuals and communities are able to utilise their strengths to recover from disasters may also be an important factor in considering preparation for, and mitigation of disasters. Examples of

constructs that have been implicated in this process are, self-efficacy, resource loss, and personality traits. (Benight, Swift, Sanger, Smith & Zeppelin, 1994). Additionally it has been noted that there are sometimes positive and beneficial effects reported by individuals who have had hazard experiences. This may occur as a result of cognitive restructuring following trauma that gives meaning and thus provides comfort to individuals. (Thoits, 1995) These positive outcomes and the recovery processes associated with them have been described as salutogenic effects. Research in this area acknowledges that growth experiences may potentially be harnessed in rehabilitation efforts, and in preparation for future hazard or other traumatic events. (Paton, 2000) Central to this concept is the notion that individuals possess resilience and hardiness that allows them, not only to withstand traumatic experiences, but also to derive positive benefits and psychological growth. A resilient person is one who is able to move from a purely individualistic approach to his or her experience, to collaborate with the group, in order to resolve issues resulting from trauma. In combining efforts, group resilience may be facilitated that in turn leads to restoration and growth. (Higgins, 1994, cited in Violanti, J M and Paton, D., 1999) Similarly a strong community may provide a salutogenic environment (derived from salutary-producing good or beneficial effects) (Paton, 200) or 'sanctuary' that provides resources for and thus enables individuals to withstand further hazard experiences. (Bloom, 1997;1998, cited in Violanti, & Paton, 1999). Tobin (1999) describes the resilient community, as one that is organized to minimize the effect of disasters and to quickly restore the socio-economic life of the community. The central theme of this study is to examine the psychological, social and physical factors that may have impacted on the ability of Queenstown to recover from the flood and slip experiences of November 1999.

Chapter Two provides an overview of current psychological literature on hazard preparedness and on selected moderating and mediating factors implicated in psychosocial effects of disasters on communities, and provides the rationale for the present study. Chapter Three describes the research methods used in the study. Chapter Four contains the results. Chapter Five contains the discussion, limitations of the present study, conclusions, and suggestions for further research.