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Psychosocial Factors and Quality of Life Among Flood Victims in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Objective – The study seeks to determine the relationship between psychosocial factors, namely social support, impression management and emotional factors (stress, anxiety and depression), with quality of life among flood victims. The Conservation of Resources Stress Approach Model and The Social Support Deterioration Model suggest that quality of life is dependent upon these psychosocial factors.

Methodology/Technique – The cross-sectional study examined 1300 flood victims in flood prone areas in Malaysia. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, The Bolino and Turnley Impression Management Scale and Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale questionnaires were used to measure the psychosocial factors, while The WHO Quality of Life instrument was used to measure quality of life. The results were analysed using Pearson Correlations.

Findings – The findings demonstrate that, in general, psychosocial factors are associated with quality of life. Social support dimensions and emotional factor dimensions were significantly correlated with quality of life. In addition, two dimensions of impression management were correlated with quality of life. The findings are consistent with the psychosocial theory that implies an overall relationship between the variables studied.

Novelty – This study suggests that there is much to be done in terms of community flood education in Malaysia, as well as training for emergency aid providers to decrease the likelihood of negative effects of psychosocial factors on individuals' quality of life. A psychosocial support programme is recommended to enhance overall quality of life for flood victims.

Type of Paper: Empirical.

Keywords: Psychosocial; Social Support; Impression Management; Stress; Anxiety; Depression; Quality of Life.

JEL Classification: I30, I31.

1. Introduction

Psychosocial factors, including impression management, social support and emotional factors, are

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imperative in determining quality of life among victims of natural disasters. Understanding the importance of these psychosocial factors supports the process of delivering psychological and physical aids to flood victims. As such, this study was conducted to provide insights on the psychosocial factors that may affect a victims' quality of life. Malaysia experienced one of the worst natural disasters in 2014 when heavy rain fall forced 115,000 people to flee and evacuate their home. 375 relief centers were opened to shelter flood victims during this time, primarily children in the states of Johor, Pahang and Sabah. This period saw the heaviest rainfall in Malaysia since 1971, resulting in the nationwide flooding. It was also the worst flood in Johor in 100 years. Datuk Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, the then President of the Medical Relief Society (MERCY) of Malaysia stated that the aftermath of the 2014 Malaysian floods caused victims, particularly children, to suffer from various psychological impacts as the flood victims moved into a state of helplessness. Children were particularly affected by the flooding, with schools closing and students unable to attend classes (UNICEF, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial to determine the effects of natural disaster on victims, based on psychosocial aspects such as social support, impression management and emotional factors (stress, anxiety and depression) as they contribute to overall quality of life.

Floods, among other natural disasters, have the power to significantly alter a victims' perception of themselves and the meaning of life (Adeola, 2009; Yusuf, Fahrudin, Baco, & Abdul Malek, 2000). Freedy, Kilpatrick and Reschnick (2008) state that a survivors' view of life changes both socially and emotionally as a result of flooding. Disaster survivors seek practical and spiritual assistance as well as divine guidance from their respective religious authorities, their families, friends and significant others. This constitutes the social support needed by the victims. In addition, the alteration of an individuals' perception on life and personal traits, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, will also change as a result of suffering the flooding disaster (Adoela, 2009; Sipon, 2000).

Rescuers, volunteers and emergency aid agencies play a significant role in providing physical and logistical support to victims. As a result, they form an impression on the victims' perception of the events. The impressions left by these people include: self-promotion, politeness and work performance. In this respect, it is important for emergency aid agencies and others to approach and deal with the victims with care and sensitivity.

Natural disaster in any form affects all of its victims. The calamitous event will result in emotional stress, anxiety and depression, among others, which may affect the victims' quality of life. Victims will usually experience chronic stress, psychological changes, fear, demoralization, emotional or anxiety disorders, and depression (Victoria, Holly, & Dominic, 2010). Various studies have indicated that psychological and emotional stress are common among victims of natural disasters, including flooding. Badiah, Sulaiman, Rohaya, Mohd-Zaidi, & Rohailina (2008) also found that flood victims experienced stress, anxiety, and depression. An additional study conducted in Malaysia found that the depression scores among the victims were as follows: 13% of the victims were mildly depressed, 7% moderately depressed, and 3% severely depressed. The anxiety scores of the victims also revealed that 22% were mildly anxious while 19% were moderately anxious, and 5% were severely anxious. With regard to their stress scores, 15% of the victims suffered from mild stress, 11% were moderately stressed, and 2% were severely stressed. In a study by Steffany (2010), analyses based on structural equation modelling showed a significant and direct association between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and quality of life among flood victims.

Based on the above discussion, this study examines the relationship between psychosocial factors (social support, impression management and emotional factors – stress, anxiety and depression) with quality of life among flood victims in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Hobfoll (1989) explains the impact of adverse experiences on individual psychosocial functioning after exposure to floods or other natural disasters based on The Conservation of Resources Stress Approach Model. Factors such as stress and perception of others (impression management) during times of disaster play a significant role in determining the quality of life among flood victims. In addition, The Social Support Deterioration Model emphasizes the function of social support as psychological equilibrium during times of disaster (Guay, Ratella, & Channal, 2008). These two theories underpin the current study by providing the basis for understanding various psychosocial factors and their relationship with quality of life.

High stress levels and lack of social support tend to contribute toward low psychological wellbeing or quality of life (Åslund, Larm, Starrin, & Nilsson, 2014). Nevertheless, individuals that receive adequate social support tend to have a higher psychological wellbeing. In this regard, social support prepares individuals for a better psychological wellbeing and quality of life. With proper social support during times of disaster, one will feel cared for, loved, respected and feel that they are part of the community, who form a network of collective responsibility. In addition, social support for adolescents is thought to be positively correlated to quality of life as well as physical and psychosocial health. A study by Kumcagiz and Sahin (2017) identified a positive relationship between friends and family support and quality of life.

Social psychologists have conducted studies on impression management (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992) however, only a handful of past research has focused on the relationship between impression management and flood disaster, particularly with respect to disaster management (Wayne & Kacmar, 1991).

The public perception of efficiency and political unrest are directly influenced by the aftermath of floods. For instance, the political effects of the 2010 Pakistan flood's closely resembles that of the 1970 Bhola cyclone in East Pakistan, which is now the independent country of Bangladesh. The scepticism on the Pakistani Government's ability to conduct effective disaster management within the country was extended to foreign donors. As a result, less than 20% of the promised aid was channelled to the government, while the remaining 80% was given to and distributed by various NGO's. This influences the perception of the government by the victims of the disaster. There is currently no study focusing on the psychosocial aspect of the public's views of the flood disaster management system in Malaysia, with a focus on impression management.

With respect to emotional factors, psychological distress indicators are more apparent with socio-demographic variables such as household income, gender, age, and education. Respondents who report having higher stress levels perceived themselves to be worse off and exhibited lower levels of quality of life due to the flooding. Therefore, it is critical to assess the effects of natural hazards and disasters within a multifaceted context, particularly when examining any psychosocial factors.

A previous study examining the relationship between anxiety and depression with quality of life among outpatients in hospitals identified a significant relationship between depression and anxiety and quality of life (Paiva, Ferreira, Bosa, & Narvaez, 2017). A similar study was conducted among hospital participants exhibiting symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. This study also found a positive relationship between these conditions and quality of life (Trevizan, Miyazaki, Silva, & Roque, 2017).

In general, psychosocial factors (such as impression management, social support and emotional factors) and their relationship to quality of life are important area of study with the potential to highlight potential areas for improvement among the quality of life of disaster victims.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

Questionnaires were distributed as the main data gathering method in this study, which forms the basis of the cross-sectional study research design. This quantitative study comprises of respondents from the selected flood victims in Malaysia.

3.2 Population and Samples

The population for this study consists of all flood victims in Peninsular Malaysia, estimated to be 100,000 individuals. This sample size was then reduced based on zones. These zones were categorized as: the Northern Zone, the Eastern Zone, the Central Zone and the Southern Zone. In each of the zones, the number of samples was determined based on the flood-prone areas only.

Table 1 shows the distribution of flood victim samples. Samples were selected using a simple random sampling technique.

Table 1. Distribution of Flood Victim Samples According to Zones

Zone	State	Sample
Northern	Perlis	114
	Kedah	128
	Perak	94
Eastern	Pahang	304
	Terengganu	273
	Kelantan	88
Central	Selangor	100
Southern	Johor and Malacca	105
	Total	**1300**

3.3 Instruments and Data Analysis

This study uses several instruments to substantiate its findings including the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, & Zimet, 1988). In total, 21 instruments were used to measure social support, consisting of 3 dimensions, namely: family, friends and significant others. In addition, the Bolino and Turnley Impression Management Scale (Bolino & Turnley, 1999) was used to measure impression management. This instrument consists of 33 items, with 4 dimensions (self-promotion, making an impression, work performance and politeness). The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) was used to measure the emotional factors. This scale contains 42 items covering stress, anxiety and depression. The final instrument is a combination of WHO Quality of Life – BREF (World Health Organization, 1996) and The Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) (Weiss & Marmar,1997) which was used to measure quality of life. This instrument contains 44 items. The Likert type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree was used in all instruments. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data.

4. Results

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

Out of the 1,300 questionnaires distributed, 670 (51.5%) of the respondents were female and 630 (48.5%) were male. 306 respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years old (23.5%), followed by 41 to 50 years old (20.9%), and 21 to 30 years (20.9%). There were 245 respondents aged below 20 years (18.8%) and 213 were aged above 51 years old (16.4%).

4.2 The Relationship between the Variables

The relationships between social support, impression management, emotional factors (stress, anxiety and depression) and quality of life were tested using the Pearson Correlation. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between Social Support, Impression Management, Emotional Factors (Stress, Anxiety and Depression) and Quality of Life

Variables	Quality of Life (α=0.830) R
Social support (General)	0.118***
Family (α=0.898)	0.178***
Friends (α=0.858)	0.075**
Significant others (α=0.877)	0.067*
Impression management (General)	-0.012
Self-promotion (α=0.864)	-0.102***
Making an impression (α=0.865)	0.031
Work performance (α=0.617)	-0.126***
Politeness (α=0.954)	0.064*
Emotional factors (General)	-0.336**
Stress (α=0.972)	-0.320**
Anxiety (α=0.913)	-0.348**
Depression (α=0.922)	-0.305**

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

5. Discussion

In terms of relationship between general social support and quality of life, the results show a positive significant relationship between them ($r = 0.118$, $p < .05$). The results also show that all dimensions, including family ($r = 0.178$, $p < .05$), friends ($r = 0.075$, $p < .05$) and significant others ($r = 0.067$, $p < .05$) ware significantly related to the quality of life of flood victims. This implies that the more support the victims get from family, friends and significant others, the better their quality of life will be.

On the other hand, the overall impression management was found to have no significant relationship to quality of life ($r = -0.012$, $p > .05$). However, the results show otherwise when each dimension is tested separately. The results indicate a significantly low and negative relationship between the dimension of self-promotion and quality of life ($r = -0.102$, $p < .05$); and the dimension of making an impression and quality of life ($r = -0.126$, $p < .05$). This infers that the respondents who believe they have a low quality of life have positive views on the strategies of life promotion by donors and the work performance of donors. Meanwhile, there is a positive and significant correlation between the dimension of politeness and quality of life ($r = 0.064$, $p < .05$). This result suggests that respondents who believe they have a high quality of life viewed the politeness of flood donors as good. The dimension of making an impression and quality of life shows no significant relationship ($r = 0.031$, $p > .05$). In general, the findings of the study identify a significant relationship between quality of life and the donors' impression management. A positive perception of the politeness of the flood donors contributed a rise in quality of life of the respondents. Further, self-promotion

tactics and the work performance of the flood donors has a negative relationship with the quality of life of the respondents.

The findings also demonstrate that the overall level of emotional factors (stress, anxiety, and depression) have a negative and significant relationship with quality of life of the respondents ($r = -0.336$, $p < .05$). Separately, there is a significant, moderately strong, and negative relationship between stress and quality of life ($r = -0.320$, $p < .05$), anxiety and quality of life ($r = -0.348$, $p < .05$), and depression and quality of life ($r = -0.305$, $p < .05$). These results indicate that a high quality of life will decrease the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression of the flood victims.

These results imply that psychosocial factors (impression management, social support and emotional factors) play an important role in determining quality of life. These findings are consistent with previous literature on the topic.

A further conclusion that can be drawn from the results is that Malaysian schools are still falling behind in education of disaster management. Despite the fact that the researchers and policy makers have identified the importance of disaster management education, its implementation is still far from adequate. Disaster management education should be made compulsory in the Malaysian education system, to raise awareness and provide comprehensive knowledge during calamitous events, such as the 2014 nationwide flooding. Thus, the culture of disaster mitigation and management should begin in the classroom. Students of all ages can learn and take part in flooding precautions exercises, together with teachers and the community, to mitigate risk before, during, and after any disastrous flooding. Disaster management education must be provided through consistent, formal or informal efforts. This may be achieved through various means such as capacity assessment, hazard mapping and participatory vulnerability assessment. The initiative by the government to conduct a community outreach program will further educate community members on disaster management and increase their resilience.

Finally, the study indicates that a specialized training programme should be frequently organized for the flood volunteers and rescuers. One such area includes an emotional and social support training programme. These programmes must be constantly revised and updated to ensure their relevance. Furthermore, a psychosocial support programme for children at evacuation centers is also recommended. For instance, the programme can be run for two-hour sessions daily consisting activities like storytelling, arts and craft as well as music and plays.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper has discussed the relationships between social support, impression management and emotional aspects with quality of life of flood victims in Malaysia. The findings are supported by both The Conservation of Resources Stress Approach Model and The Social Support Deterioration Model in relation to quality of life. Several suggestions have been proposed targeted at all people involved including school children, teachers, volunteers, rescuers, outreach workers and community members. It is hoped that all these efforts will contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the flood victims, to enhance their overall physical and psychological well-being.

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