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Vicarious Trauma in Natural Disaster Volunteers

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Article Information:	ABSTRACT
Received December 09, 2025 Revised December 15, 2025 Accepted December 31, 2025	Natural disasters have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of volunteers involved in post-disaster management and recovery processes . This research examines the phenomenon of vicarious trauma experienced by natural disaster volunteers, identifying symptoms such as excessive anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and physical symptoms including chronic fatigue and headaches. Factors that influence the level of vicarious trauma include social support, previous trauma experiences, coping strategies , and resilience , as well as organizational factors such as supervisory support and workload. This research also highlights the importance of self-care strategies , social support, training, and supportive organizational approaches in overcoming vicarious trauma. Consistent implementation of these strategies can support volunteers' psychological well-being and increase the overall effectiveness of disaster relief.

INTRODUCTION

A person who has experienced a disaster faces a difficult situation. A disaster is an event that disrupts normal life and exceeds a person's or society's ability to cope. The problem of loss can have an impact on disrupting the balance of a person's psychological state; loss of property, loss of loved ones or loss of income. Psychological imbalance can

be felt as a disturbance in a person's psychological functions, such as thoughts, feelings and behavior.

Disasters are events or series of events that threaten and disrupt people's lives and livelihoods due to natural and/or unnatural factors as well as human factors, resulting in loss of life, environmental damage, loss of property and psychological impacts.(Maulida et al.)

Immediate post-incident care is important to reduce the negative impact of a disaster or traumatic event and to improve the recovery process of survivors . The limited number of psychosocial and mental health experts means that not all existing problems can be handled optimally. Therefore, efforts are needed to empower volunteers and the community in providing first aid. This psychosocial support is a psychological first aid (PFA) approach that can help reduce the negative impacts of a disaster. PFA children is a mental health first aid method that provides support and reduces stress for people affected by disasters.(Snider et al. 2011)

Volunteering involves people freely choosing to help others without expecting payment or other material benefits for themselves. Volunteering often involves long-term commitment and can occur in formal organizational contexts. They view volunteering as a process that involves different stages, including the initial decision to volunteer, experiences during volunteering , and the consequences of volunteer involvement.(Snyder & Omoto 2008)

Disaster volunteers play role important in management and recovery post-disaster , however work they often pregnant risk serious psychology . In this context , understand stress Disaster volunteers really are important . Disaster volunteers face various source stress , incl exposure situation traumatic , burdensome hard work , and lack support organization . This stress can manifest in various symptom psychological , physical , and behavioral , which in turn can impact seriously on volunteers ' mental health , performance , and effectiveness disaster relief whole . (Brooks et al. 2016)) . This event is close connection with Vicarious Trauma, which refers to the impact experienced by trauma survivors . This secondary trauma can influence people in a way cognitive , emotional , physiological , and behavioral . Vicarious trauma happen as a cumulative and comprehensive process in which, as consequence from listen material traumatic in a way repetitive , internal experiences of a person changed in a way negative and permanent . This can involve change in the way people look self they yourself , others, and the world .(McNeillie & Rose 2021)

This concept is outlined more continued by McCann and Pearlman (1990) who describe that vicarious trauma can change view individual to a safe and secure world predicted , to be more cynical and full uncertainty . This trauma can also be cause

individual experience similar symptoms with PTSD, like fatigue , anxiety , sadness , anger , guilt , and shame(McNeillie & Rose 2021)

Volunteers are ordinary people, they have a very high risk of psychological impacts from humanitarian work, so they have the right to defend themselves not only physically, but also in a more hidden way, namely psychosocial impacts. The author hopes that this article can provide a clearer picture of the importance and seriousness of volunteer work. Like ordinary people, volunteers also need supplies and weapons to survive a crisis. So when they return to the normal world, they can adapt and accept a reality that is very different from their mission.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of natural disaster volunteers who experience vicarious trauma . A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of volunteers' perceptions, emotions and subjective experiences. This method is very effective in exploring complex phenomena that are difficult to measure quantitatively, such as trauma and emotional responses. In addition, qualitative research provides flexibility in data collection, which is especially important when dealing with a sensitive subject such as central biomed trauma . As explained by Snyder , a qualitative approach allows researchers to capture the nuances and complexities of individual experiences that may not be revealed through quantitative methods. Furthermore, literature review was chosen as the data collection method because of its ability to synthesize findings from multiple studies, providing a comprehensive picture of the state of the art of knowledge in this field.(Snyder 2019)

Data collected through a literature review was analyzed using a descriptive-interpretative approach. This technique involves grouping data into relevant domains, identifying the smallest clear units of meaning, and grouping them based on similarity to produce categories and subcategories . The main results are then outlined in a narrative supplemented by direct quotes from the literature reviewed. This approach allows researchers to highlight emerging themes and significant differences in experiences, as well as provide meaningful interpretations of the data collected(Gjerstad et al. 2024)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Natural disaster volunteers often experience symptoms of vicarious trauma influence well-being psychological they . According to (Cieslak et al. 2014)symptom These symptoms include **:**

1. Worry excessive appears frequently as one of the symptom from stress traumatic secondary (STS). STS usually covers similar reaction with disturbance stress post -traumatic (PTSD), incl experience intrusive , avoidant , and enhancing stimulation physical . When professionals exposed in a way No directly to the

material traumatic through work them , them Possible experience excessive anxiety as response to exposure the .

2.   Depression is symptom general others related with fatigue work and STS. Fatigue Work Alone defined as response prolonged to stress work , which involves exhaustion , cynicism , and inefficacy . Study show that the providers service mental health at work with traumatized populations have level high fatigue , which can impact on welfare them and effectiveness in give maintenance . Depression can appear as consequence from fatigue prolonged emotional and mental illness .

3.   Disturbance sleep is also a symptom general of STS and fatigue Work . STS often results enhancement stimulation physical , that can make somebody difficult Sleep or experience disturbed sleep . Besides that is , fatigue resulting from exposure material traumatic and demanding emotional in work can bother pattern healthy sleep .

This research shows that there is a strong relationship between job burnout and STS, meaning professionals exposed to secondary trauma tend to report similar levels of job burnout and STS, especially when measured within a compassion fatigue framework . fatigue). Therefore, excessive anxiety, depression and sleep disorders are symptoms that professionals working in stressful and traumatic environments may experience.

Volunteers who experienced secondary trauma can show symptom physique like fatigue chronic , sick headaches , and distractions digestion as manifestation from the trauma . Secondary trauma (STS) is syndrome almost symptoms identical with emerging PTSD from exposure information about incident trauma experienced by others. This can trigger significant and resulting stress various response stress , incl fatigue chronic , sick headaches , and distractions digestion(Baum 2016)

The level of vicarious trauma in natural disaster volunteers is influenced by various factors. According to research, (Derivois et al. 2017)factors that influence the occurrence of secondary trauma include: Factors that influence vicarious trauma in volunteers can be found in several parts of the uploaded document. Here are some of the factors mentioned:

1.   Trauma Exposure : Frequent volunteering exposed with other people's trauma, esp in such a disaster situation earthquake earth , more prone to experienced vicarious trauma

2.   Duration and Intensity Exposure : More and more intensive exposure to other people's trauma, increasingly big possibility volunteer experienced vicarious trauma

3.   Support Social : Level of support low social can worsen risk the occurrence of vicarious trauma in volunteers . Volunteers who have support strong social tend more capable overcome pressure and load emotional that they are experience

4.   Experience Personal Previous : Volunteers who have history of personal trauma previously tend more prone to against vicarious trauma compared with those who don't own history of trauma

5.   Coping and Resilience Strategies : Abilities volunteers in use effective and level coping strategies resilience they also influence the level of vicarious trauma experienced . Volunteers who have good coping strategies and high resilience tend more stand against vicarious trauma

The importance of providing adequate psychosocial support for volunteers as well as training to develop effective coping strategies and increase their resilience in facing difficult tasks

Individual factors that influence vicarious trauma in volunteers include social support, perception of support, social selection mechanisms, and post-disaster recovery. Lack of social support can increase the risk of PTSS (Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms) in volunteers exposed to trauma, while individual perceptions of support from parents, friends, and teachers also play an important role, where low perceived support can worsen PTSS symptoms. PTSS may cause individuals to avoid sources of social support or feel less supported, and post-disaster recovery that focuses on basic needs may reduce the social support felt by affected individuals.(Lai et al. 2018)

On the other hand, organizational factors that contribute to vicarious trauma include low organizational commitment, lack of supervisory support, high workload, unsupportive organizational culture, and inadequate education and training. Dissatisfaction in work and high levels of absenteeism indicate low organizational commitment, which increases the risk of vicarious trauma. Lack of support from superiors and co-workers, excessive workload without adequate breaks, and an organizational culture that does not value employee well-being also exacerbate the effects of secondary trauma. In addition, a lack of training on stress and trauma management makes employees less prepared to deal with traumatic situations, thereby increasing the risk of vicarious trauma. Effective organizational interventions, such as increasing supervisory support, reducing workload, and creating a supportive organizational culture, can help reduce the risk of vicarious trauma.(Ludick & Figley 2017)

Natural disaster volunteers develop various strategies to overcome vicarious trauma. According to (Molnar et al. 2017)there are several ways disaster volunteers can overcome the vicarious trauma they face,

1)   Regular self-care practices :
   a)   Do activity physique in a way regular
   b)   Guard pattern Eat Healthy
   c)   Ensure enough sleep
   d)   To spare time For hobbies and enjoyable activities
2)   Develop resilience emotional :
   a)   Practice mindfulness and meditation
   b)   Practicing technique relaxation like Respiratory in

    c)   Write journal For express feeling

3) Look for support social :
    a)   Speak with colleague fellow volunteer
    b)   Participate in group support
    c)   Consult with professional mental health

4) Set healthy boundaries :
    a)   Recognize limit ability self
    b)   Study For Saying " no " to assignments addition If feel overwhelmed
    c)   Guard balance between work and life personal

5) Reflection and meaning :
    a)   Ponder impact positive from occupation
    b)   Identify personal values and goals in do work humanity
    c)   Look for meaning from experience traumatic experience

6) Training and education :
    a)   Follow training about management stress and trauma
    b)   Learn effective coping techniques
    c)   Increase understanding about vicarious trauma and how overcome it

In other research, strategies for coping with vicarious trauma involve approaches. Individuals, such as therapists , should maintain well-being with enjoyable activities, building social support networks, and engaging in self-reflection and mindfulness practices . Following relevant supervision and training helps in identifying signs of vicarious trauma and developing effective coping strategies. Understanding and respecting clients' cultural and gender differences is also important. In addition, support from coworkers and those closest to you, maintaining professional boundaries, using humor, and engaging in spiritual or religious activities can help reduce stress and the risk of secondary trauma. Manning(Manning-Jones 2016)

Multicultural approaches and resilience vicari , as learning from the client's resilience, also strengthens the therapist's own resilience , supporting their well-being in the long term. Consistent implementation of these strategies can reduce the negative impact of vicarious trauma and support psychological well-being and secondary post-traumatic growth(Hernandez-Wolfe et al. 2015)

CONCLUSION

This research shows that natural disaster volunteers are particularly vulnerable to vicarious trauma due to constant exposure to traumatic situations. Symptoms experienced by volunteers included excessive anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, as well as physical symptoms such as chronic fatigue, headaches and digestive disorders. Individual factors such as social support, perception of support, previous trauma experiences, as well as

coping and resilience abilities greatly influence the level of trauma experienced. On the other hand, organizational factors such as low commitment, lack of supervisory support, high workload, unsupportive organizational culture, and lack of training also contribute significantly to vicarious trauma.

To overcome vicarious trauma, various strategies need to be implemented by natural disaster volunteers. Self-care practices such as maintaining physical and mental health, seeking social support, setting healthy boundaries, and reflecting and giving meaning to the work done are important steps. Training and education about stress and trauma management are also very crucial. Additionally, effective organizational strategies, such as increasing supervisory support, reducing workload, and creating a supportive organizational culture, can help reduce the risk of secondary trauma. Consistent implementation of these strategies can support volunteers' psychological well-being and increase the effectiveness of aid in post-disaster management and recovery .

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