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**THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
EFFECTS OF THE RUAPEHU
ERUPTIONS WITHIN THE OHAKUNE
COMMUNITY.**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in
Psychology at Massey University.**

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1998

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“The earthquake was over, but disaster had just begun.”

- Dudasik, 1980.

ABSTRACT

It is commonly accepted that exposure to disaster will cause distress and anxiety within affected communities. This distress is due to both the occurrence of disaster and the secondary stressors that result from this event. Previous research has noted the beneficial effects of certain individual characteristics in the healthy recovery of community members following exposure to disaster. These characteristics are sense of community, self-efficacy, problem-focused coping, and access to adequate social support.

This study examined the importance of these characteristics within a rural New Zealand community exposed to a series of volcanic eruptions. A cross sectional survey collected data at two different periods; once in the post-disaster period, and again when the community had returned to levels of non-disaster functioning. The survey measured levels of the characteristics mentioned above and psychological symptomatology. Demographic information was also collected. A number of statistical procedures were run and the results found that age, coping style and self-efficacy were significant predictors of symptomatology during the post-disaster phase. These were mediated by the quality of social support available to the respondents. However, in the non-disaster period, none of the variables included in this study were accurate predictors of psychological outcome.

Future studies need to clarify these results within other rural New Zealand communities exposed to disaster. From this research, practical community response programmes can be installed within communities that will aid in their healthy and effective recovery following exposure to disaster.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Douglas Paton for his support and advice in the supervision of this thesis. His knowledge and expertise were greatly appreciated. Special thanks go to my parents, for their emotional and financial support over the years.

My thanks also to the many number of people who assisted me throughout the year, particularly to the members of the Ohakune community who took part in this research. Special thanks must go to Murray Swan and Bruce Rollinson for their time and effort, and also for their local knowledge from within the community of Ohakune. Thanks to the staff of 'The Ruapehu Bulletin', for providing access to community members, and also to David Johnston of the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, and the staff from the Department of Conservation office in Ohakune for providing relevant information. Special thanks to Duncan Hedderley for all his time involved in the analysis of the data and the answering of numerous questions.

Thanks also to Tony Rockhouse for his financial support, and Francesco Panza for both his time and efforts in the collection and preparation of the data used within this study, and merely for his presence.

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