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Understanding the post disaster effects on mothers after the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes in New Zealand

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Abstract

The city of Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand experienced two large earthquakes in September 2010 and February 2011. The most destructive of these earthquakes was in February which resulted in 185 casualties. The purpose of this study was to explore the post disaster experiences of mothers and consider factors which helped or hindered their recovery. A qualitative study was utilised in order to understand the post disaster experiences of mothers and their coping resources. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with six mothers, using open-ended questions, which focused on personal, environmental and psychological impacts of the earthquakes to understand their experience. Topics included the immediate experience of the event, factors which impacted on their recovery, their community experience and roles in the wider recovery effort. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Key findings were established from themes within the research which underpinned experiences for mothers; these included care of children, the importance of social networks, the role of the community and mothers' evolving role in the wider recovery effort. Core characteristics of resilience, such as adaptability, flexibility, optimism and coping skills, were portrayed by participants, which became paramount in supporting their post disaster recovery. These findings underpinned practice approaches for social workers when working with mothers post disaster and highlighted the significance of the social workers' role in promoting the involvement of women within their community and in future disaster management planning and discussions.

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