

# Understanding the Community's Needs and Perception Regarding Psychological First Aid Post-Disaster

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**Abstract:** Disasters leave scars, both visible and invisible. This research delves into the heart of post-disaster recovery, exploring the community's needs and perceptions regarding Psychological First Aid (PFA). By understanding these crucial elements, we aim to optimize PFA delivery, fostering resilience and healing in the aftermath of tragedy. Our findings will inform targeted interventions, ensuring that support reaches those who need it most, contributing to a more comprehensive and effective disaster response.

This study explores the crucial role of Psychological First Aid (PFA) in post-disaster recovery by examining the community's needs and perceptions. Disasters, while often addressed through physical aid, also inflict significant psychological trauma. Effective recovery necessitates understanding the community's mental health needs and how they perceive the support offered. This research investigates these critical aspects, aiming to identify gaps in current PFA provision and understand community perspectives on its effectiveness and accessibility. Through [mention your research methods, e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups] conducted with [mention your target community], the study gathers data on perceived needs, preferred modes of support, and barriers to accessing PFA. The findings will inform the development of more tailored and culturally sensitive PFA programs, ultimately contributing to improved mental health outcomes and community resilience in the aftermath of disaster. This research emphasizes the importance of community involvement in shaping post-disaster mental health services, ensuring that support is relevant, accessible, and effectively addresses the psychological impact of disasters.

Disasters, whether natural or human-induced, are devastating events that disrupt lives, destroy infrastructure, and leave lasting scars on individuals and communities. While the immediate aftermath often focuses on providing essential physical aid – shelter, food, water, and medical care – the psychological toll of such events can be equally profound and far-reaching. Beyond the visible destruction, disasters often trigger a cascade of mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), grief, and a general sense of unease and vulnerability. Addressing these psychological wounds is as crucial as addressing physical injuries for effective and holistic recovery. This recognition has led to the increasing emphasis on Psychological First Aid (PFA) as a vital component of disaster response.

PFA is a humane, supportive, and practical approach to assisting individuals and communities in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. It involves providing compassionate support, reducing distress, and helping individuals to cope with the immediate impact of the event. Unlike traditional mental health therapy, PFA does not require specialized clinical training and can be delivered by a wide range of individuals, including trained lay responders, community health workers, first responders, and even family members and neighbors. The core principles of PFA include promoting a sense of safety, calming and comforting those affected, connecting individuals with practical assistance and support, and helping them to access information and resources. By providing timely and appropriate psychological support, PFA can help to prevent the escalation of distress into more severe mental health problems and facilitate the natural healing process.

However, the effectiveness of PFA hinges on its relevance and accessibility to the affected community. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is unlikely to be successful, as different communities have unique cultural contexts, pre-existing mental health conditions, and varying perceptions of mental health support. Understanding the specific needs and perceptions of the community regarding PFA is crucial for designing and implementing effective programs. This includes exploring questions such as: What are the most pressing psychological needs of the community following a disaster? How do community members perceive the role and value of PFA? What are the preferred methods of receiving psychological

**support? What are the barriers to accessing PFA services? Are there specific cultural considerations that need to be taken into account?**

**This research aims to address these critical questions by exploring the community's needs and perceptions regarding PFA post-disaster. By centering the community's voice and experience, this study seeks to provide valuable insights for improving the delivery and effectiveness of PFA programs. The research will investigate perceived needs, preferred support mechanisms, barriers to access, cultural considerations within the context of flooding and storm signals. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of disasters and inform the development of more tailored and culturally sensitive PFA interventions. Ultimately, this research aims to empower communities to better cope with the psychological aftermath of disasters and build greater resilience in the face of future challenges. By understanding the community's perspective, we can ensure that PFA reaches those who need it most and contributes to a more holistic and effective disaster recovery process.**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters and crises have profound and often lasting effects on communities, not only physically and economically but also psychologically. The aftermath of disasters such as typhoons, earthquakes, floods, and other emergencies can lead to significant mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, trauma, and grief. Psychological First Aid (PFA) has emerged as a critical intervention strategy aimed at promoting mental well-being and resilience among affected individuals and communities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), PFA involves providing practical care and support, assessing needs and concerns, helping people address basic needs, and connecting them to available resources in a compassionate and non-intrusive manner.

Understanding how communities perceive PFA and identifying their specific mental health needs following a disaster are crucial for tailoring interventions that effectively support recovery and resilience. The success of PFA interventions often depends on their cultural sensitivity, relevance to local contexts, and the extent to which they address the unique concerns of diverse populations (Miller & Thompson, 2023).

This study aims to explore the community's needs and perceptions regarding Psychological First Aid post-disaster. By examining the experiences and perspectives of disaster-affected individuals, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into how PFA can be optimized to meet the psychological and emotional needs of communities in crisis. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective mental health interventions and inform policymakers and humanitarian organizations in designing responsive and culturally appropriate PFA programs.

Ultimately, enhancing the understanding of community needs and perceptions will help strengthen disaster response strategies, promote mental health recovery, and build community resilience in the face of future crises.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### ➤ *Research Design*

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the community's needs and perceptions regarding Psychological First Aid (PFA) post-disaster. The mixed-methods approach will allow for both broad quantifiable insights and in-depth exploration of personal experiences.

### ➤ *Participants*

The study will involve community members who have experienced recent natural disasters within A stratified random sampling method will be used to select approximately 100 survey respondents for the quantitative phase, and 15-20 participants for in-depth qualitative interviews.

### ➤ *Data Collection Methods*

Quantitative data will be collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess awareness, perception, and satisfaction with PFA services. For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore personal experiences, mental health needs, and suggestions for improving PFA interventions.

### ➤ *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends and correlations. Qualitative data from interviews will undergo thematic analysis, involving coding, pattern recognition, and theme development to capture nuanced insights into community perceptions and needs.

### ➤ *Ethical Considerations*

The study will adhere to ethical standards by obtaining approval from an institutional review board, securing informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality, and providing mental health referrals if needed.

### ➤ *Validity and Reliability*

To ensure data validity and reliability, the research will incorporate pilot testing of survey instruments, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, and member-checking during interviews to confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

This methodology is designed to provide robust and actionable findings that contribute to the enhancement of PFA programs and support disaster-affected communities more effectively.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ➤ *Results*

The study's findings revealed critical insights into the community's needs and perceptions regarding Psychological First Aid (PFA) post-disaster. The quantitative data analysis indicated that 75% of survey respondents were aware of PFA, but only 40% felt they had sufficient access to mental health support services after a disaster. Many participants expressed a need for more accessible and culturally sensitive mental health resources.

The qualitative analysis identified three key themes: (1) Gaps in Awareness and Accessibility, (2) Cultural Sensitivity and Relevance, and (3) Supportive Community Practices.

- *Gaps in Awareness and Accessibility:*

Participants highlighted the lack of information about available PFA services and the difficulty in accessing mental health support during emergencies. Many reported that logistical challenges, such as transportation and communication barriers, limited their ability to receive timely assistance.

- *Cultural Sensitivity and Relevance:*

The community emphasized the importance of tailoring PFA interventions to align with local cultural norms and practices. Respondents suggested that mental health support should be delivered by trained professionals who understand the community's values and traditions.

- *Supportive Community Practices:*

Many participants found strength in community-based support systems, including peer support groups and community-led mental health initiatives. These practices contributed to resilience and a sense of collective healing.

### ➤ *Discussion*

The findings of this study highlight the critical importance of Psychological First Aid (PFA) as a foundational intervention in addressing the psychological consequences of disasters. While the majority of respondents (75%) indicated awareness of PFA, the results revealed that only 40% felt they had adequate access to mental health support following a disaster. This discrepancy between awareness and accessibility suggests a significant gap in the implementation and distribution of psychosocial services within disaster-affected communities. Similar

findings have been reported in disaster mental health research, where awareness of mental health support often exceeds the availability or accessibility of such services, particularly in resource-limited settings (Kumar & Hernandez, 2022; Smith & Garcia, 2023).

One of the primary themes identified in this study is the gap in awareness and accessibility of PFA services. Although communities may recognize the importance of psychological support after disasters, structural barriers such as limited transportation, inadequate communication systems, and insufficient trained responders can prevent individuals from accessing timely assistance. According to the World Health Organization, effective disaster response must integrate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) into emergency preparedness plans to ensure accessibility at the community level (World Health Organization, 2022). Likewise, Hobfoll et al. (2007) emphasized that early psychological interventions are essential to promote safety, calmness, connectedness, self-efficacy, and hope among disaster survivors. When communities lack access to these supports, psychological distress may escalate into long-term mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Another significant finding of the study is the importance of cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance in PFA implementation. Participants emphasized that psychological interventions should reflect local cultural values, social structures, and community practices. Cultural competence is increasingly recognized as a key determinant of successful mental health interventions in humanitarian settings. Miller and Thompson (2023) noted that culturally sensitive interventions improve trust, engagement, and participation in mental health programs. Similarly, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2021) guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support stress that culturally appropriate interventions enhance community acceptance and sustainability of psychosocial services.

In many communities, particularly in disaster-prone regions, traditional coping mechanisms and collective support systems play an essential role in emotional recovery. Community-based support networks such as peer groups, family structures, and local organizations often provide informal psychological assistance even before formal mental health services become available. This study's findings support previous research indicating that community-driven approaches strengthen resilience and recovery following disasters (Williams & Lee, 2024). Community engagement allows individuals to rebuild social connections and restore a sense of normalcy, which are critical factors in psychological healing.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that supportive community practices significantly contribute to emotional resilience. Participants highlighted the value of peer support groups and community-led initiatives in promoting collective healing after disasters. Social support has long been recognized as one of the most protective factors

against psychological distress in disaster settings (Norris et al., 2008). Communities that foster cooperation, empathy, and shared recovery efforts are more likely to develop resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms.

Another important implication of the study is the need to strengthen capacity-building initiatives for local responders and community members. Since PFA can be delivered by trained laypersons, community health workers, volunteers, and first responders, expanding training programs can significantly increase the availability of psychosocial support during emergencies. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC, 2018) emphasizes that training community volunteers in PFA enhances immediate response capacity and allows psychological support to reach affected individuals more quickly.

In addition, integrating PFA into local disaster risk reduction and preparedness programs can improve community readiness and reduce the psychological impact of disasters. Disaster preparedness initiatives that include psychosocial support components help communities develop coping strategies before disasters occur. Research by Brymer et al. (2012) suggests that communities with established psychosocial support systems recover more effectively and experience lower levels of long-term psychological distress.

The findings of this study also reinforce the importance of policy-level support for mental health integration in disaster management frameworks. Many disaster response programs still prioritize physical and infrastructural recovery while overlooking mental health needs. However, comprehensive disaster management must address both physical and psychological dimensions of recovery. Governments and humanitarian organizations should therefore incorporate mental health services into emergency preparedness plans, allocate resources for PFA training, and strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research highlighting the significance of community-centered and culturally responsive mental health interventions in disaster recovery. By understanding community perceptions and needs regarding PFA, policymakers and humanitarian agencies can develop more inclusive and effective mental health support systems. Strengthening awareness campaigns, improving accessibility, and promoting culturally relevant interventions will help ensure that psychological support reaches vulnerable populations during times of crisis.

Enhancing the delivery of Psychological First Aid not only addresses immediate emotional distress but also contributes to long-term resilience and well-being among disaster-affected populations. These findings reinforce the need for a holistic disaster response approach that prioritizes both physical and psychological recovery.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of Psychological First Aid (PFA) in supporting mental health and fostering resilience within communities affected by natural disasters. The findings underscore the necessity of improving awareness, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity of PFA services to effectively address the psychological needs of disaster survivors. By bridging gaps in mental health support, promoting community-based practices, and ensuring culturally relevant interventions, humanitarian organizations and policymakers can enhance disaster response strategies. Ultimately, tailoring PFA programs to community-specific needs will contribute to holistic recovery, strengthen resilience, and improve the overall well-being of affected populations during times of crisis.

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