



Original paper

Understanding Preparedness for Natural Hazards: A cross cultural comparison

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Abstract A key element in risk management in countries susceptible to experiencing natural hazards is facilitating preparedness. While several theories of preparedness have been developed, they have emerged in countries that are culturally individualistic. Recognition of the fact that the majority of disasters occur in countries that are predominantly collectivistic has identified a need to test the cross cultural applicability of theories of preparedness. This paper discusses some preliminary work on the cross cultural applicability of Paton's (2008) community engagement theory. Following a discussion of the cross cultural face validity of the content of this theory, the paper discusses evidence of cross cultural applicability of the theory using data from New Zealand, Japan, Indonesia and Taiwan. The results suggest that, irrespective of culture, the more citizens are able to collectively formulate their risk management needs and strategies and the more they perceive their needs as having been met through their relationship with civic agencies, the more likely they are to trust them and the information they provide, and to use information to decide to adopt hazard preparation measures.

Keyword: Natural hazards, preparedness, sustainability, resilience, culture comparison..

1. INTRODUCTION

A key risk management goal in countries whose populations are periodically exposed to natural hazard (e.g., earthquake, volcanic eruptions) activity is developing a sustained societal capacity to co-exist with such activity. One element of such a strategy is developing the degree to which people and communities can reduce their risk by getting prepared (e.g., household emergency plans and resources, ability to work with others to confront local problems, capacity for self-reliance etc) in ways that increase their ability to cope with, adapt to and recover from hazard impacts (Paton 2006). However, and despite the attention and financial resources devoted to encouraging people to prepare, studies have consistently found that neither living in areas susceptible to hazard impacts nor just providing people with information on hazards and how they can manage their consequences appears to influence preparedness (Dow and Cutter, 2000; Lindell *et al.* 2009; Lindell and Perry 2004; Lindell and Whitney 2000; Paton, Smith and Johnston, 2000, 2005; Perry and Lindell, 2008). This work highlighted the fact that it was not information per se that determined whether or not people decide to

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