

The Impact of the Temporary Evacuation Centre (PPS) Management System on the Psychosocial Well-Being of Flood Victims

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Abstract

Victims of floods are a vulnerable group who usually endure different forms of emotional stress and uncertainty before, during and after disasters. The impact of the Temporary Evacuation centre (PPS) management system on the psychosocial well-being of flood victims was analysed in this study. Inspired by the qualitative method, this study interviewed twelve victims who had been sheltered in a PPS in Kuala Nerus, Terengganu. Three psychosocial response patterns, emanating from management of PPS, were found to be influenced: sense of safety and stability, supportive social interaction and emotional distress enhanced by environmental discomfort. These findings support the argument that apart from being physical shelters, PPSs should also act as psychosocial support environments. The study proposes a disaster management system that is more holistic, incorporating structured emotional support and recognizing the important part played by social work.

Keywords: Flood Victims, Psychosocial Well-Being, PPS Management, Temporary Evacuation Centre (PPS), Social Work

Introduction

Malaysia experiences the highest number of natural disasters, among which the most common is flood which has a huge impact on the physical, mental and social wellness of affected community. After a flood, the victims are moved to Temporary Evacuation Centres (PPS), that are supposed to serve as a means of safety, refuge, food and medical services. Yet, aside from basic physical requirements, displacement can have severe emotional and psychosocial consequences that go unattended.

Unlike PPS management systems which can effectively coordinate logistical and other basic resource functions, the psychological support and a sense of community have reportedly exacerbated victim's emotional distress. Lacerna et al. (2023), for instance, stated that overcrowding and lacking social support in compromising emotional equilibrium.

Additionally, in the environment with disorganized emotional support in PPS, anxiety and social isolation is worsened, as mentioned by Ishak (2024).

This study, therefore, aims at not only investigating the structural adequacy of PPS, but also critically examining how management of PPS affects victim's psychosocial well being. By focusing on the lived experiences of flood victims, this research provides insights into the emotional and social impact of PPS systems and offers recommendations for more comprehensive disaster management strategies.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the effect of the PPS management system on the psychosocial well-being of flood-stricken community from the perspective of flood victims staying in the PPS Kuala Nerus, Terengganu. This study is also essential to evaluate how PPS management works not only in the physical dimension but also emotional, mental and social sphere, and to suggest more holistic interventions for the future PPS management during disasters.

Literature Review

Temporary Evacuation Centre (PPS)

PPS were formed as an anticipatory-based disaster management as a response to the disaster such as obstruction victims or flood refugees. PPS's main purpose is to shelter victims in a safe environment with basic food, water, bed, medicine and safety. However, with translation into practice, PPS frequently encounter bureaucratic hurdles that have a direct impact on their residents. Ibrahim et al. (2022) and Zawani & Ahmad (2018) argued that poor strategic location, physical facilities and support systems were also factored in reducing the role of PPS as a complete shelter to its residents.

For example, the majority of PPS sites function out of public facilities such as schools and community centers that are not designed for disaster sheltering, including privacy, sanitation access and accessibility for vulnerable populations. Studies by Subri et al. (2016) and Said et al. (2013) also showed that overcrowded, disorganized and user-unfriendly PPS have led to additional stress and conflicts among residents, in particular longer than expected evacuation processes. Therefore, the role of PPS must be expanded beyond just physical refuge to include psychosocial intervention and structured community recovery spaces.

Flood Victims

Flood affected are made up of people or communities who have been directly or indirectly affected by the consequences of flooding, such as homelessness, loss of property, injury, loss of life and disruption of health and social stability, and they have their emotional, social and spiritual balance upset. According to Zainol et al. (2022), flooding repeats and behaves in an erratic manner, disrupting victims' lives as a whole, especially those who are already vulnerable including children, elderly, women and disabled. While they may no longer be physically victims, the impact of these events influences their identity, disconnection and loss of control for the future.

Moreover, the study of Norsyuhada et al. (2021), the low level of community preparedness and the information about disaster risk management amount to the fact that when the

floods do occur, victims feel emotionally and psychosocially unprepared. Many feel stressful, anxiety, long-term worry, and mental fatigue during and after the evacuation period, and even the situation getting worse when PPS lasts for a long time without receiving good emotional support. Therefore, an in-depth knowledge of the victims and the extent impact of slavery on them is important in shaping holistic and effective aid interventions.

Psychosocial Well-being

Psychosocial well-being refers to the level of emotional balance, social relationships and the individual's ability to adapt in challenging and ongoing environments. In the context of disasters, psychosocial well-being is an essential factor that should be considered in addition to the basic needs because the former determines the degree to which a person may be able to operate normally and rebound from the trauma of the disaster. Emotional stress through evacuation such as anxiety, sleep disorder, depression and insecurity feeling are some of the common psychosocial effects which victims flood experience according to Akhir et al. (2017) especially victims who reside in PPS.

Ishak (2024) emphasized the fact that confusion in the management, lack of organised psychosocial support, including counselling sessions, group therapy activities and integral communication may exacerbate PPS residents' state of the soul. Such a situation may bring social conflict, the sensation of under-appreciation and distrust to the system of management of the disaster. Non-emotionally supported victims are likely to develop post-traumatic stress that may not disappear even after the exit from the PPS and interfere with long-term recovery procedures.

Thus, the aspect of psychosocial well-being is to be addressed in the PPS management system. This entails the design of proactive human-centred support strategies that caters for the emotional needs of victims and facilities for their complete recovery. PPS should not only be viewed as a refuge are but also recovery hub for communities capable of restoring the inner strength of the victims either individually or collectively.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to research, which is necessary for getting detailed and accurate information; more so, as regards those elements that cannot be measured quantitatively and entail individual feelings (2009, Othman). The study took place at the PPS Kuala Nerus, Terengganu where the greater percentage of victims of the flood that were sheltered at the PPS was of Malay race. In total, there are 12 respondents that were chosen for this study. In qualitative research, credibility is fulfilled when a consensus is made that the experiences that have been reported by the respondents are similar to others in the same situation (Chua, 2006).

The sampling for the respondents was made by purposive sampling in terms of inclusiveness set by the researcher. These criteria consisted of people who have first-hand experience of being affected in flood events, those that stayed in PPS for at least two years or more and those above 18 years old and Malaysian citizens.

Different methods of data collection used were observation and in-depth interviews. Thereby, the researcher was enabled to have a clearer picture of what the participants thought about (Alston & Bowles, 2003). This was done individually and face to face with using structured questions guided to the research objectives to obtain comprehensive and in-depth responses.

After carrying out the interviews, verbatim transcripts were made for data analysis. Each transcript was read by the researcher twice to be able to internalize and understand the gist of data as well as to make sure that data saturation is reached. Such an analytical approach was used, i.e. thematic analysis that includes such processes as transcription, coding theme identification and systematic theme organization (Daama et al., 2023; Christou, 2022). NVivo 14 software was utilized to help the researcher to have a better understanding of how PPS management systems affect the psychosocial well-being of flood victims.

Findings and Discussion

This theme explores how the PPS management system shaped the psychosocial well-being of flood victims, based on their lived experiences. The analysis identified three interrelated subthemes that reflect the range of emotional and social impacts encountered during their stay in the PPS.

Subtheme: Sense of Safety and Control Reducing Emotional Tension

This subtheme highlights how the perceived order, security, and access to basic necessities in the PPS environment helped many victims feel emotionally calm and supported. In the case of several respondents, structured management of the center and the prompt medical assistance reduced emotional tension and anxiety.

Respondent 1 said he could tell food was available, secure and comfortable so he had the emotional reassurance:

“I felt okay the entire time I was here (PPS)... food was sufficient, the tent was comfortable, and there were RELA officers on patrol. So, I didn’t feel very scared even though our house was flooded.”

The statement reflects how physical security and food provision acted positively to make emotional stability.

Respondent 6 also pointed out that having quick access to healthcare services helped keep her emotionally steady while taking care of her sick child.

“My child had a fever at the time, but the health staff provided medicine quickly. I felt relieved, so I didn’t panic too much.”

This means parents gained access to health services which defused parental anxiety and furthered emotional self-control.

Respondent 9 expressed that the PPS environment did not negatively affect his emotions:

“Alhamdulillah, so far there hasn’t been any significant impact on my mental or emotional well-being.”

The absence of mental disruption here is linked to basic stability and order in the PPS. Respondent 4 shared a similar sentiment, stating:

"I was okay the whole time at the PPS. Food was there, and we just waited. There were no issues."

This shows that predictability in routines and sufficient resource provision contributed to a sense of control and psychological calm.

Meanwhile, respondent 10 stated:

"Honestly, I felt nothing special. I just went through the routine, eat, sleep and so on. There was nothing stressful."

The neutral tone here indicates that a well-managed environment helped avoid any emotional disruption.

These responses show that emotional tension can be effectively mitigated when essential needs are met promptly and orderly. The visible presence of security personnel and medical staff helped reduce fear and reassured victims of their safety. The orderly delivery of food, shelter, and healthcare created an emotionally secure environment for many victims, thereby reducing fear and promoting psychological calm.

Subtheme: Social Interactions Enhancing Emotional Resilience

This subtheme points to the significance of existence of positive social relationships within the PPS environment. Respondents said that interactions with neighbours, other evacuees and family members strengthened them emotionally. They promoted a sense of togetherness and mutual support and reduced any feelings of loneliness and emotional strain.

Respondent 11 shared that communicating with neighbours helped alleviate her stress:

"I didn't feel stressed or worried. My relationship with PPS neighbours was good, and we often talked to pass the time. This made me feel closer to villagers I hadn't really known before."

This highlights how forming new bonds in shared crisis situations helps reduce stress. Respondent 8 also found comfort through social engagement:

"We talked with our neighbours a lot while in PPS, sometimes helping the kids play together. So I didn't feel very lonely."

Her experience shows that collaborative childcare and social conversation lessen emotional isolation.

According to Respondent 12, mutual help among mothers was emotionally uplifting:

"There were other mothers who shared experiences and helped when needed."

Peer support, especially among mothers, strengthened a shared sense of emotional resilience.

Respondent 5 focused more on internal stability and responsibility:

"I didn't feel much emotional or mental change. I was more focused on ensuring my family's safety and trying to adapt to the PPS environment."

This suggests emotional stability was supported through internal focus and continuous support from family and familiar routines.

Respondent 7 reflected on his calm approach to crisis:

"I'm used to this. When disasters happen, I try to just go along with it. The people here are okay."

This reflects individual coping style combined with a generally positive social atmosphere in the PPS.

These examples suggest that interpersonal support within PPS environments plays a significant role in enhancing victims' emotional endurance. Opportunities for informal interactions helped alleviate stress, particularly for women and families with children. Social ties fostered within the PPS acted as informal emotional support systems that helped victims sustain emotional resilience and manage displacement-related stress.

Subtheme: Physical Discomfort and Environmental Stress Causing Psychological Distress

This subtheme illustrates the negative emotional consequences experienced by some victims due to inadequate facilities and overcrowded conditions in the PPS. Issues such as discomfort while sleeping, caring for children, and uncertainty about the future generated feelings of sadness, worry and helplessness.

Respondent 2 openly expressed emotional distress caused by physical limitations:

"I just felt uncomfortable and lacked peace of mind. I always complained about how difficult it was to lie down and get back up. If I slept in a chair, my body would hurt even more. So, I felt quite sad."

This reflects the strain of physical discomfort translating into psychological distress. The inability to rest properly led to emotional exhaustion.

Respondent 6 described the psychological strain of caring for young children in a constrained space:

"When I saw my children crying, I felt worried and sometimes hopeless because I didn't know what would happen next."

Over the course of caregiving under uncertain conditions emotional fatigue increased. There was not much structured support and it made you feel vulnerable.

Respondent 3 on the other hand, were detached from show reacting despite cramped conditions:

"There was no change in my emotional or mental state. I just stayed and waited. It was cramped, but I didn't think too much."

One contrast is this example, where there is discomfort but emotional detachment is a coping mechanism.

The purpose of these findings is to show that the PPS environment was functional, in short term relief, but was not fit for comfort or privacy. Many of these factors wore down emotional coping especially for at risk groups such as parents with infants and the elderly. The psychological burden was aggravated by the absence of psychosocial support mechanisms and limited physical resources alongside lack of privacy and poor environmental conditions multiplied emotional suffering and brought to the long run concerns on well-being, highlighting the role of the emotional care component in PPS core management practices.

Conclusion

Findings of this study shows the PPS management system plays a major role in enhancing the psychosocial well-being of the flood victims. The impacts of these are dependent on individual experience, personal adaptation to these conditions and on social support received during the period of evacuation. A relatively stable emotional and social environment was provided to many victims by their being at the PPS which formed interpersonal relationships and acknowledged the disaster's reality.

But others caused victims emotional stress, anxiety over the future and lasting physical distress. This shows that the PPS system has not reached a point where it is inclusive of people to address their psycho social needs, particularly with the elderly, single mothers and those with special needs. Therefore, a more humane and responsive management approach to psychosocial dimensions must be prioritized.

To bridge this gap, the role of the social work profession should be expanded within the context of disaster management. The active involvement of social workers in PPS can have a significant impact through the implementation of emotional support interventions, crisis counseling, community recovery activities and advocacy for the needs of marginalized groups. Social workers can also function as intermediaries between victims and involved agencies, thereby ensuring more systematic aid delivery focused on holistic well-being. As such, institutionalizing the role of social work in the national disaster management plan is a step worth considering.

In conclusion, the researcher hopes that further studies in this field will continue with more detailed methodologies and broader scopes by future researchers. This is in the hope that the findings obtained will strengthen the emotional support aspect of PPS management, including the provision of user- friendly facilities, systematic psychosocial support programs and continuous training for frontline personnel involved in evacuation operations. Through this integrated effort, it is hoped that future PPS management systems will not only provide shelter but also contribute to rebuilding more resilient and empowered communities in the face of disasters.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution

This study enhances our understanding of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in disaster management. It specifically looks at how factors at the microsystem level, such as the structure and responsiveness of PPS, affect the emotional well-being of flood victims. The findings show that having a functional structure is not enough for disaster response; good PPS management needs to include emotional support and encourage social resilience

among evacuees. This study also highlights the vital role of community-based psychosocial care in post-disaster recovery.

This research is important because it examines the experiences of flood victims in Malaysia, particularly in Kuala Nerus, Terengganu. It provides firsthand insights into the challenges and psychosocial effects within local PPS settings. The study stresses the need to include social work approaches in disaster response, especially for vulnerable groups. By highlighting the gaps in emotional and community support, this research offers practical ideas for improving PPS systems. It also contributes to discussions about policies aimed at developing more people-focused and sustainable disaster intervention models in Malaysia and similar areas.

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