



Building Individual and Organizational Capacity for Psychological Intervention after Disasters in the Asia and Pacific Region

IUPsyS Project: 2013-14

Partners

- ❖ International Union of Psychological Science
- ❖ ICSU Regional Office for Asia and Pacific
- ❖ Chinese Association for Science and Technology (CAST)
- ❖ Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS), University of Jena, Germany

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Brief description

Natural and man-made disasters have tremendous consequences for destruction of physical infrastructure and social institutions, often leading to displacement of populations. These conditions have short or long-lasting effects on psychosocial adjustment and wellbeing. It is known that the psychological consequences vary remarkably, depending on a host of vulnerability factors and also including a shielding called resilience. Very recently, however, new insights have been gained in how disasters and resulting experiences affect the development across the lifespan, especially of children and adolescents. It is a new combination of genetic, neurocognitive, and psychological processes that explain better than before which individual or family living in which circumstances will show maladjustment when hit by disaster. The most innovative approach is epigenetics which demonstrates how experiences modulate DNA activities, with influences on the stress processing system, resulting in lasting effects on further development.

Such research and its application will be the core of a workshop for scientists and practitioners of the younger generation, from countries in the Asia-Pacific region particularly prone for disasters. The aim is to build capacity in this new field. The workshop brings together an international faculty of experts from various disciplines, basic and applied, with participants from countries of the region that share risks for a range of disasters, but differ in the level of infrastructure and socio-political organization, as well as in cultural beliefs and practices. This variation is reflected in the framework of the project that differentiates disaster-related experiences by the empowerment provided by the context. Furthermore, as vulnerabilities and resilience processes differ as a function of developmental stage (age), regional constraints (urbanization), and past history of dealing with stressors and their mark in the human system, interventions need to be targeted not to the “average victim,” but to particular subgroups. The dissemination of the new scientific insights to the field is best achieved by scholars and practitioners who have ongoing exchange with research, and toward this end a network among participants and a mentoring relationship with faculty will be established. It is expected to result in better practice and new research lines.