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## COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS: EXPERIENCE REPORT

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**ABSTRACT:** The main objective of this work was to carry out a field exploration of the practices carried out by Community Psychologists in the face of emergency and disaster situations, as well as understanding how these situations affect people's lives. Using a qualitative experience report methodology, visits and walks were carried out near the old Andrea Building, which collapsed a few years ago, and interviews were given voluntarily by ten people who lived and/or live in the neighborhood of the old Building, in the city of Fortaleza-CE. Considerations were discussed regarding the important articulation between the community, the different professional categories and the authorities to welcome and support the victims and families of the tragedy on site, however it can also be reflected that these practices were not extended over time nor did they access others residents and employees who continue to experience the effects of memories in the daily social life surrounding the collapse.

**Keywords:** Community psychology; Emergencies and disasters; Public policy.

## INTRODUCTION

This work focuses on analysis and reflection on the practice and performance of Community Psychologists in emergency and disaster situations because, although these situations do not occur very frequently in Brazil and even less so in the Northeast region, it is necessary to raise awareness about the impact that these events have on society and which community support strategies can be used.

The role of psychologists in emergency and disaster situations is, according to Pacheco and Souza (2017), something recent and only received such recognition because the communities themselves brought demands and the need for more specialized and of greater interdisciplinary and intersectoral

scope and not only in areas of activity such as Medicine, Law and Police/Civil Defense. These authors also comment on the way in which professionals who work in emergency and disaster situations must act, with the obligation to have knowledge about the history of local social formation and the influences that may have contributed to the events of disasters. Furthermore, professionals in this area must collect extensive information from the family and friends of people who have been or are going through the tragedy as the work to preserve and strengthen these bonds is extremely beneficial for the victims' overcoming and recovery and also to help create a greater cohesion in the community for the reconstruction of that environment.

Community Psychology, therefore, is a field with diverse possibilities of action, and must always work in partnership with multidisciplinary teams and public policies in which greater knowledge can be obtained about ways to approach, act and strengthen the community, providing an environment in which that citizens feel safe to live, express themselves, ask for help when necessary and know how to deal with autonomy in future adverse situations (GOIS, 2003).

In this panorama, this work sought to deepen knowledge about the theories and techniques of Community Psychology in situations of emergencies and disasters, in addition to broadening the perspective in relation to the events of tragedies in society and how they have different impacts on life of people.

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This work is the result of an experience report of undergraduate Psychology students from the development of extension activities related to the discipline of Community Processes. Visits and walks were carried out

around the place where the Andrea Building collapsed, as well as interviews, with themes covered by Community Psychology analyses, with ten people who wanted to share their memories and experiences of local social daily life during the students' walks in the field, in May 2023.

In time, to contextualize the field, the Andrea Building, located in a middle-class neighborhood in Fortaleza-CE, was undergoing its first renovation in October 2019, having been built in the 80s. The property was considered in an irregular situation by the City Hall and collapsed on October 15, 2019, Teacher's Day school holiday.

The impact of the fall scared many residents close to the building, including traders who immediately ran away, as stores close to the property were hit. In October 2021, two civil engineers and a bricklayer were indicted by the Public Ministry of Ceará.

The land was purchased by the State to build a fire station (Diário do Nordeste, 2019; 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is understood that the community goes beyond the simple concept of aggregating individuals in a physical space, it is configured as something much more complex, in which subjects share social, cultural and emotional ties, thus establishing a collective identity. However, when a natural disaster hits a community, this social cohesion is deeply shaken, as can be seen with the destruction of homes, loss of lives and the weakening of collective trust. In this context, there is a need to examine not only physical infrastructures, but also the affective and social bonds that support community cohesion. This way, the relevance of Community Psychology becomes highlighted, whose approach, according to Gois (2003), is characterized by working with individuals inserted in specific contexts,

paying attention to their individual psyches. Its primary objective is to promote improvements in relations between community members and the natural environment, thus stimulating collective mobilization in search of better living conditions. Therefore, consequently, the visit to the field allows us to obtain a direct view of local conditions and needs, as well as providing an opportunity to listen to the people affected, their stories and experiences.

In this sense, with the insertion of students in the surroundings of the Andrea Building, it can be reflected that its collapse generated a psychological impact of significant magnitude on the community. In general, residents expressed a wide variety of emotional and psychological reactions to the incident, such as shock, fear, sadness, anger, anxiety and confusion. Furthermore, none of the community members demonstrated knowledge regarding psychosocial support that could be offered to the community, which may indicate a gap in the dissemination of information or in the availability of psychological and social assistance services, including professional services at the mental health interface. and with community social psychology.

It is crucial that, in the face of a traumatic event of such magnitude, an effective effort is made to provide adequate emotional support to the people affected, as it is known that the community, when aware of the risks it suffers in relation to the disaster, is better prepared to avoid, minimize negative impacts and act in an articulated manner in the face of these events. Raising community awareness means protecting it, as it is the community's response that will determine the degree of impact generated by disasters (CFP, 2021). It is understood that post-disaster psychological support must be comprehensive and personalized in order to meet the specific needs of affected people, playing a fundamental role

in strengthening resilience, promoting mental well-being, rebuilding social relationships and in community empowerment. By providing adequate support, Community Psychology contributes to the recovery and healthy reconstruction of the community.

At the time of the collapse, the students at the site were able to see that it was the community itself that provided initial assistance to the victims and the neighborhood. The mention that the community tried to help those who were in the vicinity of the collapsed building indicates a joint effort to help. Furthermore, the collaboration of local businesses and the Church demonstrates the mobilization of resources and services available in the region to meet the emergency needs of victims, such as shelter, food, essential items and emotional support, thus playing a relevant role in post-disaster recovery.

This manifestation highlights the presence of resilience and solidarity among community members in the face of crisis situations, aspects that are theoretically addressed in the field of Community Psychology and that materialize in practice. Solidarity and cooperation between members can promote a sense of belonging, strengthen social ties and facilitate overcoming adversities faced. However, it is important to highlight that external support from competent authorities, such as police and firefighters, also plays an essential role in coordinating and providing broader assistance in large-scale disasters. Therefore, it was observed that joint action between the community and the competent authorities was fundamental to promoting the recovery and resilience of the affected community. This collaboration allows the mobilization of complementary resources, support and socialization techniques to face the challenges arising from this crisis situation (CFP, 2021).

The community itself made critical observations about the supervision of

construction in the neighborhood, pointing out that it is extremely important, as it points to systemic problems in urban management and the support provided to the affected community. In this context of lack of supervision, it is essential to recognize the responsibility of the competent authorities in ensuring the safety of constructions, as the lack of adequate supervision in all works, including negligence in relation to an abandoned building without insulation, reveals failures in implementation. of construction standards and regulations. In this sense, Psychology reinforces within the community its role in promoting community empowerment, encouraging social mobilization in the search for more rigorous current supervision in the municipality, warning of the prevention of more catastrophes like the one that occurred. The urgency of Psychology to work in a collaborative network with residents, authorities and other institutions to address adversities and promote collective well-being in the face of catastrophes stands out (CFP, 2021).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Within the biopsychosocial context, it is concluded that the role of the Community Psychologist is of paramount importance within the context of emergencies and disasters as he seeks to expand the promotion of resilience and psychological well-being of victims, actively involving them in the recovery process and community reconstruction. Therefore, it is clear that Community Psychology plays an essential role in responding to disasters, focusing on immediate psychological support, assessing the needs of that community, strengthening community resilience and community engagement.

On the other hand, it is essential to highlight the importance of integrated

and collaborative approaches that involve Psychology professionals, disaster response teams, community leaders and the victims themselves.

Therefore, based on the students' experience of insertion in the field and contact with the area of Community Psychology, it was possible to understand that it is imperative that governments, non-governmental organizations and disaster response agencies adopt the psychosocial approach as a powerful factor in their

policies and action plans. Furthermore, the professional training of Psychologists to know how to manage psychosocial practices in the face of catastrophes is of great importance, acting beyond a traditionalist perspective, as the collective that is experiencing an extremely adverse situation demands the strengthening of its human, social and political capital for the its recovery and improvement of socio-community reality in the medium and long term.

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