

Multicultural Approach to the Study of Myths about Trauma and Disasters

Hazards and disasters continue significantly affecting to millions of people nowadays (World Health Organization, War Trauma Foundation & World Vision International, 2012; Reis, Carvalho & Elhai, 2016).

One of the most frequent psychopathological consequences a person can experience after having survived a disaster is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bal, 2008, Campbell et al., 2007, Green, Lindy, Grace and Leonard, 1992, Wang et al., 2012). Psychological theoretical models on PTSD (e.g. Brewin, Dalgleish, & Joseph, 1996; Ehlers & Clark, 2000; Foa & Rothbaum, 1999), have always assumed an individual point of view. However, according to the so-called Socio-interpersonal models (e. g. Maercker & Horn, 2012, Maercker & Hecker, 2016), the social context, including the beliefs of general population about trauma, can also play an important role in the development of PTSD.

Research on mental health literacy (lay people's knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention) has made considerable progress over the past 15-20 years, but it has been mainly focused on depression and schizophrenia. Very little research has been done on post-traumatic stress disorder, especially, on which sort of psychological reactions are common after a disaster and how to overcome them.

A recent study, conducted by the applicant researcher and the research team of Complutense University of Madrid tried to specifically analyze those myths related to trauma and disasters in the general population of Madrid (Spain). Based on a sample of 1,456 Spanish adults selected from general population the study showed that even though Spanish lay people are reasonably knowledgeable on how people are supposed to respond to disasters, some misconceptions about trauma responses still prevail among the Spanish general public. In addition, misconceptions about the universal need of psychological therapy, the universal need of talking about everything that happened and the healing power of time also still prevail among the Spanish general public.

Despite the usefulness of this information, this study has some limitations, for instance, the lack of consideration of cultural aspects that are also essential in the development of PTSD, according to the Socio-interpersonal models (e. g. Maercker & Horn, 2012, Maercker & Hecker, 2016).

The main purpose of this ARTS research project will be the multicultural approach to the study of myths about trauma related to disasters. In practice, this study will imply the replication of the procedure already used in the Spanish study but adapted and applied in different countries by a multicultural group of members of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP).

Therefore, this research project shows three main strengths: Firstly, its feasibility is assured since it is a continuation of a previous scientific work already conducted by the research applicant. Secondly, this research tries to be multicultural and inclusive, representing the underlying philosophy of the IAAP itself. Finally, this research has clear clinical applications because it will allow the design of self-help guides and educational materials aimed at the general public of all over the world. Considering disasters as a global phenomenon, this should be an imperative.