


# Chapter 10

## Psychological and Social Impact of Natural Disasters: A Case Study of Wayanad District of India

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### ABSTRACT

*Kerala's geographic vulnerability to natural disasters, particularly in Wayanad, has been identified by the Centre for Earth Science Studies as one of the most landslide-prone areas in the state, significantly impacting residents' mental health. This study explores the psychological issues arising from such disasters, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety, which often persist for years due to displacement, loss of social support, emotional instability, and chronic distress. Landslides, in particular, have devastating consequences, orphaning children, fracturing families, and disrupting communities. While immediate rescue efforts prioritize physical safety, addressing psychological needs is crucial for long-term recovery. The study highlights the urgent need for increased psychological support, awareness, and policy initiatives to address the mental health challenges faced by disaster survivors. By*

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*integrating mental health into disaster management strategies, stakeholders can promote sustainable recovery and well-being for affected individuals and communities in Wayanad.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Natural disasters happen as a result of natural processes and often lead to social distress and loss of lives and property with deep physical and psychological impacts on the survivors. Natural calamities elicit a wide range of emotions, such as fear, helplessness, anxiety, worry, and tension. Serious psychosocial problems will emerge post-disaster, which will affect the health and productivity of the community at large. Further, co-morbid conditions can arise as a result of natural disasters and mental disorders. Studies show that psychological disorders can be two times more prevalent among affected populations when compared to others. Floods and landslides are very common natural disasters globally. There have been nearly 53,000 deaths due to floods in previous decades (Doocy et al., 2013). Similarly, in India the India Space Research Organization (ISRO) updated its “*Land Slide Atlas*” on July 31, 2024; it shows that Wayanad district stands for 13<sup>th</sup> position among 147 districts in India in terms of socioeconomic indicators linked to landslide vulnerability, and within Kerala, Wayanad stands for the first position. Official records related to landslide deaths show that Kerala witnessed the highest number of casualties in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

The various reports highlighted that the mental health effects among these communities face elevated rates of psychological distress, anxiety, somatization, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Stake et al., 2012; Fernandez et al., 2015). These types of mental health issues may continue for years, with higher enduring being reported 2-5 years after the disaster (Kessler et al., 1995; Goldmann and Galea., 2014). In a small minority, exposure to disaster may cause a high range of mental illnesses. People experience vulnerability because of their greater need for support networks and supply chains (WHO, 2005). Reducing mental health issues is important to address the overall well-being of the Individuals.

The natural disaster affected all age groups; in the case of children, they become orphans, which affects their total mental health for a long time; adults lose their social networking, which affects their social life and leads them to trauma and isolation. Old age people lose their support system, which affects the rest of their lives. So, these previous data revealed that it is very important to address the mental health of disaster survivors. They need immediate psychological first aid (PFA) to get emotional support to reduce distress for their future life. Early interventions, such as psychological support and counselling, can reduce more severe mental health

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