

Sustainability through Resilience: How Emergency Responders Cope with Stressors

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Abstract : Striving for sustainability brings a lot of challenges for different fields of interest, e. g. security or health concerns. In Germany, civil protection is predominantly carried out by emergency responders who perform essential tasks of civil protection. Based on theoretical concepts of different psychological stress theories this contribution focuses on the question, how the resilience of emergency responders can be improved. The goal is to identify resources and successful coping strategies that help to prevent and reduce negative outcomes during or after stressful events. The paper will present results from a qualitative analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 20 emergency responders. These results provide insights into the complexity of coping processes (e. g. controlling the situation, downplaying perceived personal threats through humor) and show the diversity of stressors (like complexity of the disastrous situation, intrusive press and media, or lack of social support within the organization). Self-efficacy expectation was a very important resource for coping with stressful situations. The results served as a starting point for a quantitative survey (that was conducted in March 2017), the development of education and training tools for emergency responders and the improvement of critical incident stress management processes. First results from the quantitative study with more than 700 participants show that, e. g., the emergency responders use social coping within their private social network and also within their aid organization and that both are correlated to resilience. Moreover, missing information, bureaucratic problems and social conflicts within the organization are events that the majority of the participants considered very onerous. Further results from regression analysis will be presented. The proposed paper will combine findings from the qualitative study with the quantitative results, illustrating figures and correlations with respective statements from the interviews. At the end, suggestions for the improvement of the emergency responder's resilience are given and it is discussed how this can make a contribution to strive for civil security and furthermore a sustainable development.

Keywords : civil security, emergency responders, stress, resilience, resources

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