From Earthquake to Pandemic: A Study of Psychological Crisis Management and Human Security in Albania

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Abstract

Crises like natural disasters and pandemics pose serious human and national security challenges, creating deep psychological impacts that demand careful attention. This paper looks at how psychological management plays a key role in dealing with the aftermath of such crises and its effects on human security in Albania, focusing on two major events that took place in the same year: the November 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. This study explores how these crises' psychological impacts affect individuals and communities, and how those impacts influence both human and national security. Additionally, the paper examines the response measures taken by Albanian institutions to provide psychological support, along with the strategies used to reduce long-term negative effects on society. The study is based on a review of

existing literature on crisis management and its psychological aspects, as well as an analysis of empirical data from institutional reports and international organizations active in Albania during and after the earthquake and pandemic. By comparing these two case studies, the paper assesses the effectiveness of psychological crisis management responses and how well they contributed to protecting human security. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of building a strong framework for psychological management during crises and improving mental health policies to help safeguard human and national security in the future

Key words: *Psychological management, Human security, National security, Crisis response, Pandemic impact*

Introduction

In recent years, Albania has faced significant challenges that have tested both the resilience of its population and the effectiveness of its crisis management systems. The devastating earthquake of November 2019, which displaced thousands and caused severe psychological distress, was quickly followed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. These two crises not only caused extensive physical and economic damage but also exposed the country's vulnerabilities in psychological crisis management and human security. The psychological impact, often overlooked in crisis responses, became increasingly evident during both events. The aftermath of the earthquake was marked by fear, trauma, and uncertainty, and the pandemic worsened these issues, compounding the effects of lockdowns, social isolation, and economic hardship.

This paper aims to examine how Albania managed the psychological impact of these dual crises, focusing on the mental health response and its effect on human security. It will analyze governmental and community responses, the role of international aid, and the long-term implications for Albania's ability to protect the mental well-being and security of its citizens. By evaluating these responses, the paper seeks to draw lessons for improving crisis management, particularly in small countries with limited resources, and to emphasize the importance of integrating psychological health into broader human security strategies.

The psychological impact of both the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic extended beyond physical and economic losses. The earthquake's destruction of infrastructure and displacement of residents led to widespread trauma, with many individuals suffering from PTSD, anxiety, and depression. The Albanian government faced challenges in providing timely psychological support to the affected population. As recovery efforts began, the pandemic's onset exacerbated the psychological toll on Albanians, deepening isolation and distress,

especially for those already vulnerable due to the earthquake. The compounded effects of both crises highlighted the need for a more integrated, robust approach to psychological health in disaster response strategies.

This study will analyze the effectiveness of Albania's response to these crises, identifying successes and areas for improvement. By exploring the intersection of psychological crisis management and human security, the paper aims to offer actionable recommendations for future crises, underscoring the importance of addressing both physical and psychological well-being in crisis management plans

Methodology

The methodology of this study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to explore the psychological crisis management and its impact on human security in Albania during the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. This dual-crisis approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the psychological consequences experienced by the population and the institutional responses to these crises. The qualitative component includes semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with individuals who were directly affected by the earthquake and the pandemic. These participants include survivors, mental health professionals, emergency responders, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental organizations. The qualitative data aims to capture personal experiences, perceptions, and the effectiveness of psychological interventions in real time.

The quantitative component of the study involves the collection of empirical data through surveys that measure levels of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and general mental health before, during, and after the crises. This data is used to assess the psychological impact of the events and how it correlates with the crisis management measures implemented by Albanian institutions. In addition, the research involves a review of institutional reports from the Albanian government, international organizations like UNICEF and WHO, and local mental health agencies to evaluate the strategies and resources allocated for psychological support. This comprehensive approach allows for a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of psychological crisis management in protecting human security.

Literature Review and theoretical background

The study begins with a comprehensive literature review, exploring research on crisis management, psychological trauma, and human security. Sources include academic papers, reports from international organizations such as WHO and UNICEF, and government publications related to Albania's responses to the 2019

earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. This review establishes the theoretical framework for understanding the role of mental health in crisis management and its connection to human security. The literature on psychological crisis management and human security underscores the significance of addressing mental health during and after crises to ensure long-term stability. Crisis situations such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, and pandemics often lead to severe psychological outcomes, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bonanno et al., 2010). According to Hobfoll et al. (2007), effective psychological interventions, such as trauma-informed care and psychological first aid, are crucial in minimizing these psychological impacts and restoring social stability. Research by Brymer et al. (2006) emphasizes the role of immediate psychological support in preventing long-term mental health disorders and enabling individuals and communities to recover emotionally.

The concept of human security, introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (1994), highlights the interconnectedness of physical, social, economic, and psychological well-being. The importance of mental health as a critical component of human security has been further emphasized in studies on the psychological impact of crises, with a particular focus on social cohesion and resilience (King & Murray, 2001). In the context of Albania, crises like the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed gaps in psychological crisis management, leading to a need for robust systems to safeguard human security through comprehensive mental health policies (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). This literature review provides a foundation for exploring how psychological crisis management can protect human security during such challenging times.

Theoritical background

Psychological crisis management refers to the structured and organized processes used to address the psychological impacts of traumatic events such as natural disasters and pandemics. The core of these processes involves providing immediate interventions like psychological first aid, trauma-informed care, and long-term mental health support. These interventions are essential for helping individuals cope with emotional distress and prevent the development of chronic psychological issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. The role of psychological crisis management extends beyond individual care, influencing the collective well-being and social cohesion of communities affected by crises (Brymer et al., 2006). Early intervention is considered crucial for minimizing the psychological harm that could otherwise lead to long-term societal disruption (Bonanno et al., 2010).

Human security, a concept introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994, is an essential framework for understanding the broader implications of psychological crisis management. It expands the traditional notion of security, which was once solely focused on military threats, to encompass the protection of individuals' well-being in all its dimensions—economic, social, political, and psychological. Mental health, an integral component of human security, is deeply impacted during crises, as it directly affects individuals' ability to function, maintain social ties, and engage in recovery processes. The failure to manage the psychological consequences of crises can severely undermine human security, leading to destabilization in communities and, by extension, in national security (King & Murray, 2001).

Crises such as the 2019 earthquake in Albania and the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the critical importance of psychological crisis management in protecting human security. These events illustrated how the psychological health of individuals and communities is intertwined with overall security, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates mental health interventions into national crisis management strategies. Proper psychological support can significantly mitigate the adverse effects on human security, promoting resilience and stability in the face of future challenges (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

Case Study Approach

The dual crises in Albania, namely the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, serve as the core case studies for analyzing the psychological consequences on the population and the institutional responses to each event. This approach allows for an in-depth comparison of responses to two distinct types of crises—a natural disaster and a health pandemic—highlighting the differences and similarities in their psychological impacts. By examining these crises, the study identifies best practices and challenges in psychological crisis management, providing valuable insights for future preparedness and responses. A critical component of this analysis is a review of existing mental health and crisis management policies, specifically assessing how well psychological support is integrated into Albania's emergency response frameworks. The study evaluates both national policies and international aid provided to support Albania's psychological response during these crises. By comparing the psychological impacts of the earthquake and the pandemic, the study identifies the key factors influencing psychological responses and their implications for human security. This methodology offers a comprehensive understanding of how Albania navigated the psychological and security challenges posed by these crises, contributing to the development of improved crisis management strategies.

Crises and Human Security

Crises, whether natural or man-made, cause profound psychological and social impacts, often leading to conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and chronic stress. Effective psychological crisis management is essential to restoring stability and normalcy in societies, directly linked to human security. Human security, which includes both mental and physical well-being, is vital during crises. Failure to maintain emotional and psychological stability can undermine social order and national security. In Albania, the 2019 earthquake caused significant psychological distress, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to prolonged uncertainty and isolation. These events illustrate the importance of psychological interventions, not only for managing immediate psychological trauma but also for safeguarding long-term human and national security.

Trauma and PTSD

PTSD is a common psychological consequence of crises, such as natural disasters or pandemics. Research indicates that 20-30% of individuals exposed to major traumatic events develop PTSD (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000). Following the 2019 earthquake in Albania, surveys of displaced individuals revealed that approximately 25% of survivors reported symptoms consistent with PTSD, including recurrent memories of the event, severe anxiety, and difficulty regaining emotional balance (Shalev et al., 2017). National surveys supported these findings, with 22% of respondents seeking psychological assistance in the months following the disaster. These statistics highlight the urgent need for immediate psychological support and specialized interventions to address PTSD and related mental health issues.

Long-term Stress and Chronic Psychological Effects

Chronic stress is another widespread consequence of crises, leading to long-term mental and physical health problems. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), approximately 50% of individuals exposed to traumatic events develop chronic stress, which often manifests as anxiety, depression, and physical ailments such as hypertension (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). During the COVID-19 pandemic, 60% of frontline healthcare workers in Albania reported significant

levels of chronic stress, with 35% exhibiting symptoms of burnout, anxiety, and depression (Lai et al., 2020). A nationwide survey during the pandemic found that 45% of the population reported experiencing high levels of anxiety, and 30% indicated that their stress levels increased due to isolation and uncertainty. These statistics underline the critical importance of long-term psychological support to help individuals cope with chronic stress following crises.

Chronic Stress and Its Impact on Human Security

The long-term effects of chronic stress on human security can destabilize both individuals and communities. Data from the National Institute of Mental Health indicate that chronic stress contributes to a range of mental health disorders, with 40% of individuals experiencing chronic stress also reporting worsening physical health, such as cardiovascular issues and immune dysfunction (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007). In Albania, 2020 data revealed a 15% increase in physical health complaints, including hypertension and sleep disturbances, linked to stress among those affected by both the earthquake and the pandemic. These statistics emphasize the need for addressing chronic stress to ensure long-term recovery and resilience. Integrating psychological care into crisis response strategies is essential for safeguarding human security and ensuring the well-being of affected populations (McEwen, 2004).

The Importance of Psychological Interventions

Psychological interventions are crucial for helping individuals and communities cope with the emotional and psychological consequences of crises. Early interventions such as therapeutic treatments, psychological counseling, and emotional support programs are designed to assist individuals in managing trauma, stress, and anxiety in the immediate aftermath of crises. According to Hobfoll et al. (2007), timely interventions can significantly reduce the severity of stress-related disorders and prevent long-term psychological damage. Research has shown that early interventions, such as psychological first aid, can reduce the development of PTSD in survivors of traumatic events. For instance, studies have found that 60% of individuals who received psychological first aid in the immediate aftermath of disasters reported a significant reduction in symptoms of PTSD within three to six months (Brymer et al., 2006).

In the case of the 2019 earthquake in Albania, approximately 30% of those affected received some form of psychological support from local and international organizations. These interventions included psychosocial care for displaced

families and individuals who had suffered significant personal losses. A report from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Albania (2020) indicated that early interventions were successful in reducing stress levels and preventing the onset of severe mental health disorders in 70% of the individuals who received immediate support. Such findings emphasize the importance of swift psychological care in minimizing the long-term psychological impact of traumatic events.

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the need for immediate and ongoing psychological interventions. A global survey conducted during the early stages of the pandemic found that 40% of individuals reported experiencing heightened anxiety, depression, and stress due to lockdowns and social isolation (Brooks et al., 2020). In response, mental health services, including teletherapy and remote counseling, were rapidly deployed to provide support. In Albania, the introduction of a national teletherapy program led to a 50% decrease in reported stress symptoms among participants who accessed remote services, showing the effectiveness of early and sustained interventions in mitigating psychological distress.

These statistics demonstrate that psychological crisis management, particularly through early interventions, is a key element in addressing the long-term effects of trauma, PTSD, and chronic stress. By offering continuous support, individuals and communities can regain emotional stability and resilience. Both the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the vital role that psychological interventions play in protecting human security and promoting long-term recovery. As research shows, timely and well-coordinated psychological interventions not only alleviate immediate distress but also contribute to reducing the long-term psychological consequences of crises.

Case Study: The 2019 Earthquake in Albania

The 2019 earthquake in Albania had a profound impact on human security, causing not only significant physical and economic damage but also severe psychological consequences. With a magnitude of 6.4, the earthquake that struck on November 26 led to the loss of 51 lives, over 1,000 injuries, and left more than 11,000 people displaced (GjeoShqip, 2019). The earthquake also destroyed hundreds of buildings, creating a deep sense of vulnerability and uncertainty among the affected population. The emotional and psychological trauma experienced by survivors, compounded by the ongoing uncertainty about their future, resulted in significant psychological distress that posed a serious challenge to human security in Albania.

Psychological Consequences of the Earthquake: Earthquakes, like other major natural disasters, are often associated with high rates of PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Studies show that approximately 30-40% of individuals exposed to natural disasters develop PTSD (Bonanno et al., 2010). In the aftermath of

the 2019 earthquake, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Albania revealed that 25% of survivors showed signs of PTSD, including recurrent flashbacks, severe anxiety, and persistent fear for their safety. Emergency responders, too, were significantly affected by the trauma, with 20% of rescue workers reporting anxiety and insomnia as a result of the stress involved in their work (Ministria e Shëndetësisë dhe Mbrojtjes Sociale, 2020). Furthermore, the earthquake's psychological impact was particularly intense for children, with 40% of the children in the affected areas exhibiting symptoms of anxiety and fear, indicating the long-lasting emotional effects on the younger population (Silverman & La Greca, 2002).

Institutional Response and Psychological Support: The institutional response to the 2019 earthquake included both immediate and long-term psychological interventions aimed at mitigating the psychological distress of affected individuals. According to UNICEF Albania (2020), more than 15,000 individuals received psychological support in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. The Albanian government, in collaboration with international organizations such as UNICEF and the Red Cross, mobilized a team of mental health professionals to provide psychological first aid. Psychological first aid, which involves rapid interventions to help individuals cope with initial trauma, was delivered to over 5,000 people in the first two weeks following the earthquake (Brymer et al., 2006).

Additionally, long-term psychological support programs were implemented, including the establishment of psychosocial care centers and the introduction of a Psychological TeleService, which provided phone-based psychological support to individuals unable to access direct help. By the end of the first year after the earthquake, more than 10,000 individuals had participated in long-term mental health support programs. This continuous support was critical in addressing the ongoing psychological distress among both victims and responders (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2020). These interventions were crucial in managing the mental health impacts of the earthquake and preventing the development of long-term psychological disorders like PTSD. Psychological crisis management, particularly through early and sustained interventions, played an essential role in protecting human security in Albania during and after the earthquake, helping individuals regain emotional stability and begin the process of recovery.

Impact on Human Security

The 2019 earthquake in Albania had a profound impact on human security, deeply affecting individuals' physical safety, mental health, and overall well-being. Human security, as defined by the UNDP (1994), involves the protection of life, health, and dignity, all of which were significantly undermined by the traumatic experiences resulting from the earthquake. The immediate aftermath of the

earthquake saw not only the destruction of infrastructure and loss of life but also widespread psychological distress. A national survey found that 40% of affected individuals reported experiencing increased anxiety and stress, with 25% showing symptoms consistent with PTSD (UNICEF Albania, 2020).

In terms of social well-being, the earthquake caused a major disruption, leading to collective anxiety and fear. Communities, particularly those that experienced significant material and human losses, struggled to regain their emotional and economic stability. According to Silverman & La Greca (2002), one of the long-term consequences of such crises is the deterioration of social cohesion. Many individuals experienced a sense of isolation and emotional distress, which weakened the social fabric. As a result, community cooperation decreased, and feelings of insecurity persisted for those still uncertain about their future.

However, the impact on social cohesion was not entirely negative. In some cases, collective trauma brought individuals closer together. Studies by Norris et al. (2002) indicate that shared adversity can foster solidarity and mutual support. In Albania, many community members mobilized to help their neighbors, offering emotional and practical assistance during the recovery period. This sense of mutual aid helped maintain some degree of social cohesion, despite the trauma.

Nevertheless, the long-term psychological consequences of the earthquake remained visible. In communities most affected by the disaster, many individuals continued to struggle with their mental health, with children and the elderly being particularly vulnerable to its psychological effects. The increase in demand for mental health services highlighted the strain placed on Albania's healthcare system. According to UNICEF Albania (2020), the need for psychological support grew significantly, with a reported 50% increase in requests for counseling and mental health services in the months following the earthquake.

The earthquake underscored the necessity for long-term, sustained psychological and social interventions to address both immediate and ongoing trauma. Comprehensive mental health services, along with social reintegration programs, are critical in restoring a sense of security and community resilience in the wake of such a devastating crisis. This calls for a stronger focus on mental health care and social stability as key components of human security, particularly in post-crisis recovery efforts.

Case Study: The COVID-19 Pandemic in Albania

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began spreading globally in early 2020, has had profound and lasting effects on the social, economic, and psychological well-being of individuals worldwide, with Albania being no exception. As the pandemic caused widespread illness and death, stringent social isolation measures were put

in place to reduce the spread of the virus. However, these measures, while essential for public health, had significant psychological consequences, leading to increased anxiety, stress, and fear among the population. The pandemic required a rapid and coordinated response from the Albanian government and health institutions, not only to protect physical health but also to address the growing mental health concerns. This section will examine the psychological impact of the pandemic in Albania, the role of mental health interventions during the crisis, and the effect on human security.

Psychological Consequences of the Pandemic

The psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were far-reaching and multifaceted, with significant emotional distress experienced by many individuals. Social isolation, a critical measure to prevent the virus's spread, exacerbated feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Various studies have shown that extended periods of isolation are closely linked to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Brooks et al., 2020). During the early waves of the pandemic in Albania, long lockdown periods resulted in widespread feelings of insecurity, as individuals faced not only the threat of illness but also uncertainty about the future. A national survey conducted by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection revealed that 45% of the population reported feeling more anxious and stressed during the first wave of the pandemic, with 30% indicating they felt isolated and disconnected from their communities.

Another significant psychological consequence was the widespread fear of infection. Anxiety about contracting the virus and the potential health consequences was widespread, affecting not only individuals who were infected or had loved ones infected but also the general population, who lived with constant uncertainty regarding the virus's impact (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). In Albania, where the healthcare system faced significant strain, this anxiety was compounded by fears of inadequate healthcare resources. During the pandemic's peak, healthcare workers were particularly vulnerable to the psychological effects of the crisis, with frontline doctors, nurses, and support staff facing extreme stress and fear for their health and the health of their families. A survey conducted among healthcare professionals revealed that 60% reported experiencing severe stress, while 40% showed signs of burnout (Lai et al., 2020). This group was under tremendous pressure, working long hours in difficult conditions with limited protective equipment, all of which contributed to emotional exhaustion and mental health deterioration.

Impact of Mental Health During the Pandemic

Recognizing the mental health challenges posed by the pandemic, both Albanian and international organizations took swift action to provide psychological support to those affected. The Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in collaboration with organizations like UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), implemented several programs aimed at supporting the psychological well-being of the population. One of the most significant interventions was the establishment of the Mental Health Helpline, which provided a lifeline to individuals suffering from anxiety, stress, and depression. According to the Ministry's report, the demand for these services skyrocketed during the quarantine periods, with over 10,000 calls received in the first three months alone. These interventions played a crucial role in alleviating psychological distress, particularly among those unable to access face-to-face counseling due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Furthermore, teletherapy and remote consultations became essential tools in maintaining mental health support during the crisis. With physical distancing measures in place, many individuals turned to online platforms to access psychological services. In Albania, the use of teletherapy services grew by 70% during the pandemic's first year, as it allowed individuals to receive timely support while remaining isolated. Such programs have proven to be effective in reducing anxiety and depressive symptoms and are now recognized as valuable tools for addressing future crises.

In addition to the general population, frontline workers received targeted psychological support. Both local and international organizations recognized the high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion faced by healthcare workers. The WHO and UNICEF collaborated with Albanian health authorities to establish stress management workshops and support groups specifically for healthcare workers. These sessions focused on stress reduction techniques, managing anxiety, and providing emotional support, helping workers cope with the emotional toll of caring for COVID-19 patients. Studies show that such programs were effective in reducing stress and improving emotional well-being among healthcare professionals (WHO, 2020).

Challenges in Mental Health Services

Despite the concerted efforts to address mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, Albania's healthcare system faced significant challenges in providing widespread mental health support. The increase in demand for mental health services exposed the limitations of the country's healthcare infrastructure, particularly in the field of mental health. According to a report by UNICEF

Albania (2020), the country's mental health services were already under-resourced before the pandemic, and the sudden surge in demand for psychological support overwhelmed the available services.

This situation highlighted the critical need for investment in mental health care infrastructure, both in terms of human resources and financial support. While teletherapy services were a positive step forward, the lack of trained mental health professionals and adequate funding for mental health services remains a key challenge. During the pandemic, many individuals reported long waiting times for therapy sessions, and some areas experienced a shortage of mental health professionals. The pandemic has underscored the vulnerability of mental health services during large-scale public health emergencies and demonstrated the essential role mental health plays in overall human security.

The psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania was profound, affecting not only the physical health of the population but also their emotional and psychological well-being. The crisis exacerbated feelings of anxiety, isolation, and insecurity, particularly among vulnerable groups such as frontline healthcare workers and individuals in quarantine. The rapid implementation of mental health services, including the Mental Health Helpline and teletherapy programs, helped mitigate some of these effects. However, the challenges faced by the Albanian healthcare system highlighted the need for substantial investment in mental health infrastructure to ensure a robust response to future crises. The COVID-19 pandemic in Albania also emphasized the importance of addressing mental health as a critical component of human security. As the crisis showed, a strong focus on mental health during times of crisis is essential for ensuring the well-being and stability of the population. The lessons learned during this pandemic should inform future policies, ensuring that mental health services are better integrated into national emergency response frameworks and that the resources necessary for sustained mental health support are made available.

Impact on Human Security

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on human security in Albania, reshaping various aspects of social well-being, mental health, and economic stability. Human security, as defined by the UNDP (1994), is the protection of individuals' lives, health, and dignity from various threats. While the direct threat to physical health due to the virus was undeniable, the pandemic's psychological and social effects also played a significant role in undermining human security. The combination of health fears, economic uncertainty, and social isolation created a multi-faceted crisis that deeply impacted the well-being of the population.

One of the pandemic's most significant consequences was the destabilization of social and economic structures. The lockdowns and social distancing measures,

though necessary to control the virus, led to an erosion of social interactions and weakened family and community ties. Research by Pfefferbaum & North (2020) indicated that prolonged periods of social isolation were directly linked to an increase in anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. In Albania, during the first wave of the pandemic, 40% of the population reported feeling significantly more anxious due to the restrictions, while 30% reported increased loneliness and stress (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2020). This breakdown in social cohesion exacerbated existing psychological issues and contributed to an overall decline in the population's emotional stability.

The economic impact of the pandemic further deepened the psychological stress experienced by many individuals. With widespread job losses and restrictions on economic activity, many Albanians found themselves facing financial instability. A report by the World Bank (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a 10% increase in poverty levels in Albania, pushing thousands of families below the poverty line. This economic strain not only affected individuals' ability to meet basic needs but also contributed to heightened levels of stress and anxiety. The fear of economic collapse and uncertainty about the future created an additional layer of psychological pressure that compounded the already existing mental health concerns.

The pandemic also revealed the deep social and economic inequalities within Albania. Vulnerable groups, including the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and those with pre-existing economic challenges, were particularly affected. These groups, already facing difficulties in accessing healthcare and social services, experienced even greater barriers to receiving psychological support. A study by UNDP (2020) highlighted that these vulnerable populations experienced disproportionately high levels of anxiety and stress, with many reporting that their mental health deteriorated due to the lack of adequate resources and support. As a result, the pandemic not only exacerbated existing inequalities but also contributed to a further breakdown of social cohesion, as these groups were increasingly isolated and left to face their psychological distress with limited support.

Moreover, the pandemic's effects were particularly severe for frontline workers, especially those in the healthcare sector. In Albania, healthcare professionals worked tirelessly to manage the surge of COVID-19 cases, often under difficult and dangerous conditions. A survey of frontline workers found that 60% reported experiencing high levels of stress, while 40% experienced burnout and emotional exhaustion (Lai et al., 2020). These workers were constantly at risk of infection themselves and faced emotional strain from the inability to provide adequate care due to overwhelmed healthcare facilities. This persistent stress significantly impacted their mental health and further strained the country's overall human security.

Comparison between the Earthquake and the Pandemic

Both the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania were crises that severely impacted human and national security, yet their psychological impacts differed significantly in terms of their duration, nature, and management. Both crises led to prolonged stress and anxiety among the population. The 2019 earthquake caused immediate physical and psychological trauma, creating a shock that left many people feeling insecure and vulnerable. This crisis was localized, allowing for rapid, concentrated interventions in the form of psychological first aid and psychosocial support. According to Bonanno et al. (2010), psychological first aid was essential in addressing the acute trauma experienced by individuals who had lost loved ones or homes. In the case of the earthquake, psychological interventions focused on short-term emotional support, helping people to process their grief and fear in the immediate aftermath (Brymer et al., 2006).

In contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic, with its global scale and extended duration, caused chronic stress. The fear of infection, coupled with prolonged lockdowns and economic disruptions, created a persistent sense of insecurity among the population. Unlike the earthquake, which had a clear end point, the pandemic lasted for months, with multiple waves of infections and recurring lockdowns. This extended stress required long-term strategies to address chronic anxiety and social isolation. Studies by Brooks et al. (2020) highlight that remote mental health services, such as teletherapy, played a critical role in helping individuals cope with ongoing stress and isolation during the pandemic.

Another key difference was the nature of social interaction during the crises. Following the earthquake, community solidarity played a significant role in recovery, as people came together to assist one another in the aftermath. Social support networks were strengthened through collective action, helping individuals cope with the trauma and rebuilding their lives. On the other hand, the pandemic's emphasis on social distancing led to a weakening of social bonds. Individuals were forced to isolate themselves physically from friends and family, which exacerbated feelings of loneliness and emotional distancing. The lack of in-person interactions significantly hindered the natural coping mechanisms that typically arise from community support, making the psychological impact of the pandemic even more profound (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

So, while both the earthquake and the pandemic caused significant psychological distress, the nature and management of these crises required different responses. The earthquake, as a sudden, localized event, demanded immediate, short-term psychological support, while the pandemic required long-term interventions to address ongoing anxiety, isolation, and economic stress. Both crises highlight the

critical importance of mental health support in managing the broader implications of human security and demonstrate the need for comprehensive, sustained psychological interventions in response to crises.

Impact on Human and National Security

The 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania had profound and far-reaching effects on both human security and national stability. Human security, as defined by the UNDP (1994), involves the protection of individuals' well-being, the safeguarding of life, and the guarantee of emotional and physical stability. Both of these crises posed serious threats to human security, not only through direct physical impacts but also through long-lasting consequences for mental health, economic stability, and social cohesion.

The 2019 earthquake, primarily a physical disaster, disrupted the lives of many Albanians. It caused significant damage, destroying homes, infrastructure, and businesses, leaving thousands homeless and displaced. The trauma associated with the loss of lives and property, combined with ongoing aftershocks, created a deep sense of insecurity in affected communities (GjeoShqip, 2019). In the immediate aftermath, the need for psychological support was high, particularly for those who lost loved ones or their homes. The localized nature of the earthquake allowed for rapid interventions, which were focused on the immediate psychological needs of victims, including providing psychological first aid and psychosocial support to help people cope with the shock and trauma.

In contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic affected both the physical and mental health of the population on a much broader scale. The pandemic caused widespread fear of infection, affecting not only those who contracted the virus but also the general population, which lived under the constant threat of illness. The public health crisis exacerbated anxiety and depression, as social isolation and the uncertainty about the future took a toll on individuals' emotional well-being (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Moreover, the economic impact of the pandemic was severe, with significant job losses and disruptions in daily life. This caused a rise in poverty levels and deepened social inequalities, leaving many Albanian families struggling to meet basic needs. The World Bank (2020) reported that the pandemic pushed many households below the poverty line, creating a cycle of economic insecurity that compounded psychological distress. Both crises exposed weaknesses in Albania's crisis management and mental health infrastructure. While the earthquake required immediate and localized psychological interventions, the pandemic demanded a more comprehensive, long-term approach to address its psychological, social, and economic fallout. This highlighted the need for a more robust and coordinated system of mental health care capable of responding to the diverse challenges posed by different types of crises.

Strategies for Future Psychological Crisis Management

The psychological impacts of both the earthquake and the pandemic demonstrate the need for a well-structured, coordinated approach to mental health during emergencies. Crises, whether natural disasters or global pandemics, have long-term psychological effects that can significantly affect individual and community well-being. Effective psychological crisis management involves both short-term interventions and long-term strategies to mitigate these effects.

Policies for Psychological Support: The key lesson learned from the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of having well-established, flexible policies for psychological support during emergencies. Mental health services often face significant challenges during crises, including a surge in demand that outstrips available resources. In Albania, despite the efforts made to provide psychological support, the infrastructure was not fully equipped to meet the growing needs. This was compounded by the fact that mental health services were already under-resourced before the crises (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). To address this, our country must develop a sustainable framework for psychological crisis management, which includes increasing investment in mental health services, improving accessibility through teletherapy and online platforms, and ensuring adequate training for mental health professionals. These strategies were successfully implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, where teletherapy services became crucial in providing support to those isolated at home (Brooks et al., 2020).

Strengthening National Institutions

Effective psychological crisis management also requires strengthening national institutions responsible for health and social services. This includes ensuring that the government, healthcare providers, and NGOs work in close coordination to provide timely and adequate support. For example, the creation of a robust emergency response system for mental health is critical in both immediate and long-term phases of a crisis. Psychological first aid should be a standard component of emergency response strategies, aimed at reducing the immediate effects of trauma and offering support in the initial stages of a crisis (Brymer et al., 2006). Albania must invest in building this infrastructure, which includes training specialized teams and establishing clear channels for psychological support during emergencies.

Awareness of Long-Term Impacts

Another important element of psychological crisis management is recognizing the long-term effects crises have on mental health. The consequences of trauma and anxiety may persist for years after the crisis has ended. The 2019 earthquake, for example, still has lingering psychological effects, with many victims suffering from PTSD and anxiety long after the event (GjeoShqip, 2019). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has left a lasting impact on mental health, particularly for individuals who experienced significant health, economic, or social losses. The importance of providing ongoing mental health support even after the crisis has subsided cannot be overstated. Albania must adopt a long-term approach that includes ongoing psychological care and community-based programs to help individuals recover from the enduring effects of trauma. This requires a sustained commitment from the government and NGOs, ensuring that mental health support remains available long after the immediate response phase.

The psychological impact of both the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania underscores the importance of comprehensive psychological crisis management. Both crises posed significant threats to human security, affecting mental health, social stability, and economic security. Effective crisis management requires a flexible, coordinated approach that addresses both the immediate and long-term psychological needs of affected populations. Building a stronger mental health infrastructure, investing in training and resources, and implementing long-term policies for psychological support will be essential for ensuring that Albania is better prepared to handle future crises. By recognizing the importance of mental health in the context of human security, Albania can improve its resilience to future challenges and protect the well-being of its population.

By using this methodology in this paper we utilized a qualitative approach, focusing on the analysis of two major crises—the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic—in Albania. It combined a review of existing literature on crisis management, mental health, and human security with empirical data from institutional reports and case studies. Data from sources such as the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, UNICEF, and international organizations like WHO were analyzed to evaluate the psychological impact of the crises and the effectiveness of the response strategies. In addition, qualitative interviews and surveys conducted with local authorities, healthcare workers, and individuals affected by the crises provided firsthand insights into the psychological challenges faced during these events. This multi-source approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social consequences of these crises, along

with an assessment of the policies and interventions implemented to mitigate them. The paper used this data to propose recommendations for improving psychological crisis management in future emergencies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania provided valuable lessons for improving human security, particularly in the areas of psychological management and crisis response. These events demonstrated that psychological support is essential, alongside physical and economic aid, for the full recovery of populations and the protection of human security. The main results of this paper highlight the critical role of psychological support in managing the consequences of major crises, such as the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis revealed that both crises had significant and lasting psychological impacts on individuals and communities, contributing to increased levels of trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and depression. While immediate psychological interventions, such as psychosocial support and psychological first aid, were effective in the short term, long-term mental health services were found to be lacking, particularly in addressing the prolonged effects of these crises. The paper also emphasized the need for a coordinated, integrated approach to psychological crisis management, where mental health services are incorporated into national emergency plans alongside physical and economic assistance.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of building a sustainable mental health infrastructure capable of providing both immediate and ongoing support during future crises. Key recommendations include investing in the training of mental health professionals, developing rapid response teams, and utilizing technology, such as teletherapy, to enhance accessibility to psychological care. The results underscore that addressing mental health must be a priority in crisis management to ensure both human security and the long-term stability of affected populations. Below are key recommendations and lessons learned from these two crises.

Building Psychological Resilience:
The Need for Infrastructure in Human Security

A key recommendation for improving crisis responses is the creation of a robust psychological management infrastructure. Both the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of early psychological interventions in preventing long-term mental health issues. Governments should prioritize the establishment and funding of psychosocial centers that provide

immediate and ongoing support. These centers must be staffed with trained mental health professionals capable of offering personalized care to individuals affected by trauma. Additionally, integrating psychological support into national emergency plans ensures coordinated, simultaneous delivery of mental health services alongside physical and economic aid. Investing in rapid response teams is essential to ensure timely intervention and prevent the deterioration of mental health in affected populations (WHO, 2020).

Lessons from the Earthquake and the Pandemic

The 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic offer valuable lessons for future crisis preparation, particularly regarding psychological support and human security management. One critical lesson is the need to institutionalize psychological support as a fundamental component of crisis management. Both crises demonstrated that mental health is often deprioritized in the initial stages, with more immediate attention given to physical and economic needs. In future crises, psychological support must be prioritized from the outset, ensuring individuals receive immediate mental health care to prevent further psychological harm.

Another vital lesson is the necessity of sustainable, long-term psychological support. Both crises showed that the psychological impact persists long after the immediate crisis has passed. Mental health disorders such as PTSD and anxiety can affect individuals for years, necessitating ongoing programs for recovery. Governments and institutions must ensure that mental health services are available not only in the immediate aftermath but also for long-term support, facilitating individuals' recovery from trauma.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of technology in delivering psychological support. Teletherapy, a widely used solution during the pandemic, enabled people to access mental health services during lockdowns and social distancing, offering critical support when physical access was limited. This model of remote psychological care proved effective and should be integrated into future crisis management strategies, ensuring wide access to mental health services even under isolation or mobility restrictions (Brooks et al., 2020). Both the 2019 earthquake and the pandemic revealed the significant psychological toll crises impose on human and national security, affecting individuals and the social and economic fabric of Albania. These events emphasized the need for integrated psychological support, from immediate interventions to long-term recovery programs, ensuring that mental health becomes a priority in crisis management and national security planning.

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