

VICTIMS, PRIMARY GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

AFTER THE FRIULI EARTHQUAKE

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Introduction

The sequence of 435 earthquake shocks that occurred over a period of two years in Friuli, a northeastern Italian region, commenced on the night of May 6, 1976, with a severe tremor (4.5 Richter) followed one minute later by an even stronger one (6.4 Richter) which lasted almost one minute. The effects were devastating: 950 persons died and more than 2,500 were severely injured. Twelve thousand houses were destroyed, 25,000 were damaged, and 191 villages were razed to the ground. In analyzing the social response to this catastrophe we can use the scheme suggested by Mileti, Drabek and Haas [1975] which includes behavior of individuals, groups, organizations, community, nation, and international systems in the phases of preparedness, warning, mobilization, immediate post-impact, relief, and reconstruction. Since the first three phases do not apply in this case, we will limit our analysis only to social responses in the phases of post-impact, relief, and reconstruction.

Immediate post-impact

Individuals

It is necessary to distinguish between the response of victims and non-victims. As regards the first group, the literature documents extensively such responses as an absence of panic, an initial narcotizing effect which temporarily prevents people from comprehending the event, altruism, gratitude for assistance, minimization of personal losses, concern for one's family, enthusiastic participation in first aid activities. Concerning the conditions under which the catastrophe occurs, these authors find that maximum social and psychological disruption will emerge from events characterized by: suddenness, high uncertainty, prolonged duration, broad scope of physical destruction, death, and injury particularly when the events occur at night [Mileti, Drabek and Haas 1975]. All these conditions characterized the Friuli earthquake. The only favorable condition appeared to be the less-severe