

# DISASTER AWARENESS AND PREPAREDNESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN DISTRICT SRINAGAR

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## Abstract

Disasters are contingent and unpredicted and can only be dealt by effective disaster management programs. Disaster never happened in the past does not mean, it cannot happen. Students can prove to be useful workforce in disaster situation. College students need to know basic strategies carried out in disaster. The objective of the study is to access the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of college students regarding disaster preparedness. Study design is descriptive, cross-sectional survey. The study population included 400 college students studying in various colleges of district Srinagar of Kashmir valley. The present study was conducted by using a well designed, pretested questionnaire. Students understudy concluded that there is a general lack of information among students regarding disaster awareness and preparedness. This highlights the need for disaster safety education. It is not possible to prevent disasters, but it is possible to be prepared for them. Students can be made aware regarding the impacts of disasters through both formal and informal education. The practices regarding disaster preparedness training and performance of drills were largely negative, and sincere work needs to be done in this direction. Majority of students responded positively to include the disaster training in education program. In short, level of practice was largely negative with acceptable knowledge and positive attitude regarding disaster preparedness in college students of Kashmir valley.

**Keywords:** *Disaster; knowledge; preparedness; Students; Statistics*

## Introduction

Disaster is defined as a natural or human-caused hazard that causes 'a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources' (UNISDR). The concern over natural disasters is increasing globally. During the last two decades, loss of life and property due to disasters has increased. Disasters like floods, earthquakes, fire, etc pose serious threat to people. Disaster education, which includes education on disaster risks, mitigation and preparedness strategies,

is one approach to reducing the negative consequences of disasters (Smith, 1993; Mulyasari et al., 2011). It is imperative to increase the knowledge and attitude of people regarding the natural and man-made disasters in order to make them able to cope up with their adverse effects. For being well aware and prepared for disasters, we need to develop knowledge, skill and values at all level. According to the 2005-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action, the objective of disaster education is 'to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels,' in order to reduce the adverse social and economic impacts of hazards. Over the last decade, emergency management agencies, schools and non-governmental organizations have increasingly targeted children as an audience for disaster education (Lintner, 2006; UNISDR, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2008; NCCD, 2010; Shiwaku and Fernandez, 2011; Sharpe and Kelman, 2011; UNESCO, 2013). Kashmir is a Himalayan mountainous territory, therefore it is extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and is a disaster hotspot of the world. Due to predominant mountainous terrains some of the large rivers on the earth originating from the Himalaya, and due to dominant strong rains snowfall, the country is overwhelmed by floods and landslides. Geologically Kashmir is one of the most earthquake prone regions of the world, which have experienced devastating earthquakes in the past and do expect a large earthquake in future. All over the world, Kashmir is well known for disasters like floods, landslides, and avalanches. The disaster statistics of Kashmir certainly draw a worldwide attention, especially from the disaster scientists and practitioners. The most of the natural disasters which affect people in Kashmir are caused by the weather, floods and fewer disasters are caused by earthquakes. It will not be exaggerating if one says that even a single day is not passing without the news of disasters, in the form of flood or earth quake or any other disaster. These calamities may be due to natural causes such as heavy rain or earth quake where as some others will be due to the carelessness of human being. The present study was one of the attempts made to know the actual level of knowledge and awareness about the disaster preparedness among the college students in district Srinagar of Kashmir Valley.

### **Methodology**

In this study, a well-designed questionnaire was prepared and distributed among 400 students selected randomly from different Colleges of District Srinagar of Kashmir valley. Purpose and method of the study undertaken was explained to the students to get their consent. The instrument of research was a validated self-administered questionnaire based on literature available on the topic. The questionnaire was designed to assess students' knowledge and awareness among students about disaster preparedness. The data collected from the study was tabulated and analyzed using standard statistical tools in which p-value less than 0.05 is considered as significant at 5% level of significance.

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**Results**

Table 1 shows the disaster awareness among the students of Srinagar district on the basis of analysis of the collected data. The Table 1 depicts that all the students who were included in the sample have the concept about disasters, about 82.75% students know about disaster plan, a small percentage of 17.75% know where to find a disaster plan, 39.25% have knowledge about mock drills and about 69.75% students know what disaster preparedness means. So according to the results, the students are not well aware regarding disasters. As per the results depicted in Table 2, students want to be prepared for disasters and they need to take up the appropriate steps for the same like proper planning and management for disasters, training of common masses and preparation of proper disaster plans. Similarly Table 3 shows that no disaster drills and trainings are carried out in the colleges while as on the other hand students want to be well aware and prepared for disasters subject to condition provided the facilities by the concerned authorities. Statistically, there is a significant difference in the responses of the students ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 1: Disaster Awareness among students in Srinagar district**

S.No.	Questions	Yes (%age)	No (%age)	P-value
1.	Do you have idea what a disaster is?	100	0	<0.01
2.	Do you have idea what a disaster plan is?	82.75	17.25	<0.01
3.	Do you have idea where to find the plan?	17.75	82.25	<0.01
4.	Do you know what mock drills are?	39.25	60.75	<0.01
5.	Do you understand your functions during a mock drill?	32.25	67.75	<0.01
6.	Do you have any idea about disaster preparedness?	69.75	30.25	<0.01

**Table 2: Attitude regarding disaster preparedness among students in Srinagar district**

S.No.	Statement	Agree (%age)	Disagree (%age)	Not Sure (%age)	P-value
1.	I need to know about disaster plans?	90.75	2	7.25	<0.01
2.	Management should be adequately prepared when a disaster occurs?	92.75	3.5	3.75	<0.01
3.	Disaster planning is for a few people in the district?	9.75	84.5	5.75	<0.01
4.	Potential hazards likely to cause disaster should be identified and deal with?	82.25	3.25	14.5	<0.01

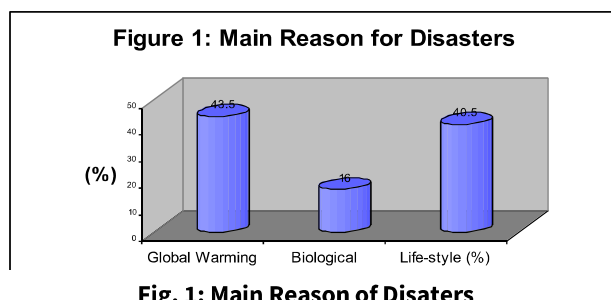
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5.	Training is necessary for all students	90.25	3.75	6	<0.01
6.	Do you think it is necessary to have a disaster plan?	90.75	2.25	7	<0.01
7.	Disaster plans need to be regularly updated?	84.25	2.75	13	<0.01
8.	Disasters are unlikely to happen in our district?	2.25	83	14.75	<0.01
9.	Disaster management is important for educated people only?	3.75	71.75	24.5	<0.01
10.	Drills should be conducted in the district?	74.25	2.75	23	<0.01

**Table 3: Practice regarding disaster preparedness among students in Srinagar district**

S.No.	Questions	Yes (%age)	No (%age)	Don't know (%age)	P-value
1.	Are disaster drills done at your college/school?	2.25	90.75	7	<0.01
2.	If yes, Is drill done useful?	2.25	0	97.75	<0.01
3.	Is there any training going on in your college at any time in a year?	1.75	86.75	11.5	<0.01
4.	Is the disaster plan periodically updated by authority?	0	94.75	5.25	<0.01
5.	Have you ever faced any disaster?	63.25	29.75	7	<0.01
6.	Have you ever been a worker for disaster management team?	2.75	81.75	15.5	<0.01
7.	Do you know about the latest disaster your district faced?	93.25	1.75	5	<0.01
8.	Do you believe your practice for disaster preparedness is insufficient?	91.75	2	6.25	<0.01
9.	Disaster training should be a part of education system?	94.25	1	4.75	<0.01

The data presented in Figure 1 shows that majority of the respondents (43.5%) believe that main reason behind any disaster is global warming, followed by life-style (40.5%) then by biological disasters (18%). Students believe that pure life-style can decrease natural disasters.



### Conclusions and Suggestions

The data collected through questionnaires was carefully analyzed and the conclusions were drawn on the basis of the interpretation made by using appropriate statistical tools. As per the study carried out, it can be concluded that there is a general lack of information among students regarding disaster awareness and preparedness. This highlights the need for disaster safety education. It is not possible to prevent disasters, but it is possible to be prepared for them. Students can be made aware regarding the impacts of disasters through both formal and informal education. It is important we change our lifestyle and if we do not change our ways at both the mental and spiritual level, it is inevitable that we will continue to experience the effects of unprecedented natural disasters. Only spiritual practice can transform the polluted human mind into a pure one. Hence, it is imperative that we understand the basic root causes of natural disasters and take appropriate steps. This way we can truly benefit the humankind. We find through spiritual research that the cause behind most biological disasters such as the deadly viruses on Earth, like: AIDS, Ebola and Bird-flu is because of deviation from religious path. The viruses that have been created on earth however will remain on Earth and cures need to be found for them. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *“Take precautions as everybody is guided to that which has been destined for him.”* As for you should drink to quench your thirst. If something bad comes, it is because of our bad doings and if something good reaches us then it is from Almighty Allah's grace. Almighty Allah (SWT) says: *“What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself.”* [Quran 4:79]

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following suggestions were given:

1. Subject of disaster management should be included in the curriculum.
2. Training manuals and booklets on Disaster Awareness should be developed.
3. College authorities should collaborate with concerned agencies to raise awareness among the college teachers too so that they guide the students accordingly.
4. Disaster awareness and preparedness messages can be circulated among students using posters and magazines.
5. Documentaries and videos can be used to transmit knowledge and create awareness.
6. Students should be involved in competitions (drawing and writing), cultural activities in order to increase their interest in the subject.
7. Mock drills and evacuation drills should be exercised periodically in all the colleges in collaboration with the concerned authorities and students should be actively involved in those drills.

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