The impact of earthquakes on residential wellbeing

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

The impact of earthquakes on residential wellbeing: The relationship between place attachment, risk perception, psychological distress and relocation

21. Residential Context of Health

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In the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, the extraction of natural gas from the ground has led to soil subsidence and the occurrence of earthquakes. These earthquakes cause physical damage to buildings and the infrastructure and also lead to psychological problems and decreased housing satisfaction of residents in the area. Some residents even intend to move out of the area as a way of coping with this threat. Previous research in this area has shown that the intention to move is influenced by the level of psychological distress, the attachment to the region and residential satisfaction. Perceived risk seemed to play a less important role for these residents.

Research on the impact of natural hazards has shown that there is a complicated relationship between perceived risk, place attachment and coping behaviour. For example, some studies have shown a positive relationship between place attachment and risk perception whereas others found a negative relationship. This latter result was explained by an optimism bias: people think that the disaster "will not happen to them". Research has also provided indications that strongly attached individuals do perceive the risk of a natural hazard but are unwilling to relocate (a way of coping with the problem). The current study provides further insight into the complicated relationship between attachment to the region, the intention to move, perceived risk and psychological distress. The research questions are the following:

- Is there a relationship between place attachment and risk perception?
- Is there a relationship between risk perception and the intention to move?
- Is the relationship between risk perception and the intention to move influenced by the level of attachment? In other words, are strongly attached residents less inclined to move, irrespective of their perceived risk level?
- What is the role of psychological distress in the interaction between place attachment, risk perception and the intention to move?

The results show that, in general, (1) residents with a higher level of attachment more frequently expect future damage to their dwelling (risk perception) as a consequence of the earthquakes. Furthermore, (2) residents with a higher expectation of future damage more frequently indicate that they intend to move. The results show (3) an interaction between the level of attachment, perceived risk and the intention to move. Strongly attached residents do perceive the risk of damage to their dwelling but at the same time are less willing to move. Finally, (4) this finding cannot be explained by a decreased level of psychological distress in strongly attached residents as their level of psychological distress is relatively high.