

Assessing disaster preparedness in areas in Sri Lanka prone to natural disasters

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Sri Lanka is a nation frequently exposed to natural disasters such as floods, landslides, and occasional cyclones. This study explored the preparedness and awareness of natural disasters among people in areas prone to such disasters. Acknowledging the critical need for an effective disaster management, the research evaluated the success of existing disaster education and awareness programs while aiming at identifying gaps in knowledge and preparedness within these vulnerable communities. The study was driven by the questions of how well-prepared and aware the rural communities are in the face of natural disasters and what the critical factors influencing these levels of preparedness are. Employing a qualitative approach, the research integrated participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies encompassing 50 households to gather insights, with a focus on two specific regions, namely 504 Kelanimulla area in the Kolonnawa Divisional Secretariat (DS) and 132A Malalpola area in the Kegalle Divisional Secretariat (KDS). Data analysis was carried out using a narrative style, grounded in ethnographic methods. The findings revealed that while there was a basic awareness of natural disasters, substantial deficiencies in preparedness existed, particularly in remote areas where access to crucial information and resources was severely limited. This underscored the urgent need for disaster preparedness programs that are not only targeted and contextually relevant but also culturally sensitive, integrating traditional local knowledge with modern disaster management practices. By doing so, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of disaster preparedness in developing countries and emphasized the essential role of community-based approaches in enhancing resilience and mitigating the impact of natural disasters on vulnerable populations.

Keywords: Disaster preparedness, Community resilience, Rural communities

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