Mental Health and Support-Seeking in Online Forums After Natural Disasters

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Natural disasters affect mental health and disrupt psychological functioning. Individuals experiencing disaster-related distress often turn to online social support as a coping strategy to manage emotional and cognitive strain. To investigate support-seeking types across various disaster contexts and mental health concerns, this study conducted a quantitative content analysis of 767 Reddit posts. Findings revealed that emotional and informational support-seeking were the most prevalent, whereas tangible support-seeking appeared infrequently. Informational support-seeking was most common regarding stress and general mental health concerns and appeared frequently in disaster contexts characterized by uncertainty, such as volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. Emotional support-seeking appeared most prevalent in posts involving conditions marked by emotion dysregulation, including depression and borderline personality disorder (BPD), and did not vary systematically by disaster type. These findings clarify how individuals manage disaster-related distress through distinct types of support-seeking.

Keywords: online support-seeking, emotional support, informational support, natural disasters, mental health