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Presentation

Don't panic! Helping society overcome its fear of the crowd

Speaker

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Abstract

Traditional approaches to crowds emphasise their vulnerable nature and propensity for disorder and/or mass panic in times of stress such as mass emergencies. However, this notion of vulnerability is not supported by current empirical work and a wealth of research suggests instead that people and communities affected by disasters are more likely to show collective resilience than vulnerability. Furthermore, assuming that crowds will behave in a vulnerable way can influence more authoritarian and less facilitative forms of crowd management by the authorities, as crowds in emergencies will be seen as a potential problem rather than as possible partners in any emergency response. Social Psychological approaches, such as the Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience (SIMCR) argues that disasters can create a common identity through a sense of shared fate which encourages co-operative rather than selfish behaviour. This is supported by evidence from studies of mass emergencies (eg. Drury, 2011; Cocking, 2013). Implications for emergency planning and management are discussed. I will also mention my current research that explores whether there is any enduring nature to collective resilience amongst those exposed to chronic occupational stress (such as emergency healthcare workers).