



Letter to the Editor

Volunteering, millennials and post-traumatic stress. Mexico City earthquake[☆]



Voluntariado, millenials y estrés postraumático. Terremoto en la ciudad de México

The earthquake that took place on 19 September 2017 in Mexico City, 32 years to the day after one occurred on the same date and in the same place,¹ was met with a powerful response in the form of volunteering by the so-called millennial generation. Social networks invited people to become involved and locate the geographic areas most in need of support in terms of man-power and supplies, with an exemplary rallying power and spirit of solidarity, exceeding the numbers sought for these activities.²

Analysing this phenomenon means answering the following question: is the millennial generation the best prepared to face a disaster of this magnitude?

Various aspects need to be considered; this generation has been criticised in the past for showing little interest in public issues, being absorbed with their own needs, having poor verbal communication skills and only partial responsibility towards what has traditionally been considered an obligation: permanent employment, target-setting, commitment, sacrifice, hard work, etc.³

Most of the volunteers who answered the call demonstrated a high sense of responsibility, as well as exemplary civic-mindedness, although it seems some saw an opportunity to take photos and tag themselves as altruists after a brief stint clearing rubble.

A generation with little exposure to life's tragedies: death, war, epidemics, social unrest, etc. can face emotional conflict caused by the sights commonly seen in disaster situations due to earthquakes: dead bodies, injuries, structural damage, gas/chemical leaks, lack of clear plans and so on. Not everyone has the temperament and level-headedness to be a doctor, fire-fighter, paramedic, nurse or rescuer.

There were cases of people putting in long working days (>24 h) without sleeping, eating or resting, most of whom had no emotional and/or geographic ties to the place where they were working; from a humanitarian point of view, solidarity actions of this magnitude are to be applauded, but the little or no preparation of many of the younger contingent who promptly and spontaneously give assistance in a disaster situation ends up being the first step on the road to a large number of patients with the condition called post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴

There is a need to define a system of minimum requirements that are necessary in order to be a volunteer in an earthquake-prone region, for example, age, preparation and experience, among others.

A runaway volunteer response to a need for immediate aid can become counter-productive to the physical and mental well-being of those volunteers.

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