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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural influences on the long-term adaptation process, as well as the mental health status among the survivors of the Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake which occurred on the 17th of January, 1995. Based upon the inductive research perspective, an ethnographic approach with in-depth semi-structured interviews was employed in this study. Two years after the natural disaster, face-to-face interviews by Japanese nationals were conducted with 20 survivors, who received serious damages such as family death, collapse of residence, and loss of property. The results found several unique cultural roles that might impact on the survivors' coping strategies and adjustment processes. These cultural roles include: fatalism, the concept of Karma, rigid family boundary, self-sacrifice, endurance, and social comparison processes. These factors also played a significant role for the process of meaning attribution to the disaster and the survivors' help-seeking patterns. This study also summarized the future research implications as well as clinical implications in order to develop more culturally-sensitive social work methodologies to support the long-term adjustment process of the survivors.