

Rescue of chilean miners provides lesson in human resilience, psychologist says

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(PhysOrg.com) -- While many people might assume that the men rescued from the mine in Chile might suffer from psychological problems that require therapy, the miners' survival of the ordeal may actually provide a worldwide lesson on the remarkable strength of human resilience, says a University at Buffalo researcher.

"That doesn't mean being trapped with 32 others in a small chamber 2,296 feet beneath the earth for 69 days in 90-degree heat was easy. It was harrowing, mentally stressful and for some it constituted a medical emergency. But the men had good reason to expect a rare happy ending," says Michael Poulin, PhD, UB assistant professor of psychology and an expert on human response to [stress](#) and adversity.

"The men worked well with one another and with those above ground toward that end, and were successful. So I think they will do very well now, unless the forthcoming media onslaught makes their time underground seem like a reprieve."

For people around the world praying for and celebrating the miners' apparently successful rescue, Poulin says the way the [miners](#) coped with threat to their survival is instructive in understanding how people in general cope with life's difficulties.

"So many of us face stresses like illness, injury, [economic crisis](#), loss of employment, loss of home, which in turn mean a loss of our sense of predictability and control and a loss of the everyday routines that give

our lives meaning.

"The miners' lives also were disrupted in a terrifying and unexpected way. But even in this frightening new environment, they set out to create new routines, sleeping in shifts, and devising a schedule for doing what needed to be done, such as moving rock and earth displaced by the drilling. They adopted new roles -- one miner, for instance, took on the role of spiritual advisor, one was the medic, and so on."

The way the miners approached their particular crisis is instructive of how the rest of us can and should cope with our own crises and stresses, Poulin says, "In fact, it mirrors the advice psychologists give to people whose lives have been disrupted.

"These men could have just sat there, marking time on the wall. But instead, even in a situation unique and terrifying in their lives, they determined what needed to be done, who should do what and when, and set about giving order and meaning to their experience. That practice, as much as anything else, reflected and promoted their mental and emotional well being. It's a lesson for the rest of us."

As the miners' lives return to normal, Poulin expects other insights into human resilience will come to light and the story will continue to play out in the public eye.

"People love stories of redemption, in which something awful happens, the victim endures a long struggle and then is saved," Poulin says.

One of our expectations of a redemption story is that the "redeemed" return stronger and better off than they were in the first place -- we dearly want to believe this. In fact it's a part of the story to which we are particularly attracted," he says.

"So their rescue is not the end of the story. There will be many tales told, published and broadcast of what happened to these men after they were saved."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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