

# Meta-Synthesis: How Are Disasters Studied in Latin America?

## Meta-síntesis: ¿Cómo se estudian los desastres en América Latina?

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### Abstract

Disasters in Latin America are not a new topic, however, the advance of the development of disciplinary knowledge in psychology calls for a systematic qualitative research including a focus on methods and analytical techniques. **Objective:** examine the current state of qualitative disasters research in Latin America, mainly developed from the field of psychology. **Method:** a search was conducted for studies published in scientific journals via the Web of Science and Scielo databases between 2017-2024. Consequently, a meta-synthesis of qualitative research on disasters in Latin America was carried out. A total of 96 studies were identified, of which 19 were selected as they met the selection criteria. **Results:** In this manuscript we provide a characterisation focusing on the impact of disasters and disaster risk. **Conclusions:** It is concluded that these studies include those that examine the profound impact of disasters on identity and socio-spatial relations, and the perception of disaster risk and antecedents that influence it.

**Keywords:** Disasters, qualitative research, psychology, meta-synthesis.

### Resumen

Los desastres en América Latina no son un tema nuevo, sin embargo, el avance del desarrollo del conocimiento disciplinar en psicología exige realizar una revisión sistemática de la investigación cualitativa que atienda a los métodos y técnicas analíticas aplicadas. **Objetivo:** examinar el estado actual de la investigación cualitativa en torno a desastres en Latinoamérica, desarrollada principalmente desde el campo de la psicología. **Método:** Para ello se realizó una búsqueda de estudios publicados en revistas científicas a través de las bases de datos Web of Science y Scielo entre 2017-2024, para así desarrollar un trabajo de metasíntesis de investigaciones cualitativas sobre desastres en América Latina. Se identificaron 96 estudios, de los cuales se seleccionaron 19 por cumplir los criterios de selección. **Resultados:** En este estudio se presenta una caracterización centrada en el impacto de los desastres y el riesgo de desastres. **Conclusión:** Finalmente se concluye que entre estos estudios se encuentran aquellos que examinan el impacto profundo de los desastres en la identidad y las relaciones socioespaciales, así como la percepción del riesgo de desastres y los antecedentes que influyen en ella.

**Palabras clave:** Desastres, investigación cualitativa, psicología, meta-síntesis.

## INTRODUCTION

From colonial times to the present, Latin America, has been particularly exposed to severe disasters, both natural and anthropogenic. Currently, disaster risk is compounded due to, among others, exploitation of non-renewable natural resources, climate change, and political violence (Braga et al., 2018; Cornejo et al., 2018; Gifford, 2014; Padilla & Comas-Díaz, 1987; Páramo, 1996; Pawlik, 1991; Piper-Shafir, 2015; Stern, 1992).

We understand that disasters comprise hazardous events with the potential to disrupt the functioning of a community or society, whereby the dynamics linked to pre-existing conditions of vulnerability, as well as the tools for addressing them, can have significant implications for physical, mental and social well-being, arising from the impact of economic, personal, social and environmental factors in their intensification (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2017). This comprehensive understanding also allows for the identification of different types of disasters, such as natural, anthropogenic and hybrid (Mohamed-Shaluf, 2007), accounting for a heterogeneity that may call upon the discipline to broaden its sensitivity regarding such phenomena.

The frequency of disasters may increasingly necessitate the implementation of drastic social, political, and economic measures that directly impact people's life. In this regard, knowledge of the implications of disasters on everyday life can potentially help informing public policy and may assist in confronting and deconstructing how disasters can shape governmentality (Foucault, 2006).

To achieve such a knowledge base, qualitative studies that contribute to understanding the specificities of disasters' impact on groups, communities, and society are incredibly useful. Here, in an attempt to contribute to the field of psychology and public policy, we explore the methods and insights emerging from such published qualitative studies. We move beyond merely quantifying fragments of experiences and instead focus on studies aimed at understanding meanings, the uniqueness of relationships, experiences, and subjectivity, thereby paying attention to voices of affected communities.

We focus in particular on studies that shed light on the mental health implications for individuals affected by these events. The literature on disasters reveals that individual responses to collective trauma are complex and multifaceted, influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors. Exposure to disasters can significantly impact mental health and social well-being. However, there is variability in the post-disaster negative effects on mental health, varying according to factors such as access to housing (Baryshnikova & Pham, 2019; Brown & Perkins, 1992; Garcia & Rime, 2019; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006). Furthermore, some groups are especially vulnerable to be negatively affected by disasters. It is imperative to consider the characteristics of these groups, including structurally disadvantaged populations, indigenous peoples and immigrant populations. Additionally, research on disasters highlights the importance of understanding the experiences, narratives, and responses of directly affected communities or groups. Often reoccurring natural events such as pollution, earthquakes, fires, floods, and droughts, have significant impacts on communities and must focus on the specifics of the communities to better understand the ability of communities to adequately respond (Comas-Díaz et al., 1998; De & Thamarapani, 2022; Gillam & Charles, 2019; Kølves et al., 2013; Lykes, 1994, 2013; Lykes et al., 2007; Lykes & Scheib, 2016; Maskrey, 2011; Masozera et al., 2007; Nagai et al., 2022; Norris, 2006; Norris et al., 2002; Panagioti et al., 2009; Pedersen, 1996; Pedersen et al., 2015; Scheib & Lykes, 2013). Research on the impact of the Covid pandemic—which in countries like Peru, Brazil, and Chile led to high mortality rates—illustrates that it is essential to delve into the specifics of communities affected by disasters. For instance, in the aftermath of the pandemic, it is clear that perspectives on nature influenced individuals' ability to cope with pandemic related adversity (Haas et al., 2021). Research has also shed light on the significant impact of lockdowns and subsequent isolation and lack of social contact opportunities on various populations' mental, physical, and social health (Martinez-Marti et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Gonzalez et al., 2020). Moreover, disasters are also associated with other negative outcomes. For

example, disasters may deepen pre-disaster societal inequalities (Martín-Baró, 1986; Montero, 1991, 2003; Jetten & Peters, 2019).

In the Latin American context these dynamics are highly complex, considering a long colonial heritage with ramifications in the present, which is articulated with the structural violence of inequality in everyday life, building vulnerability of communities and territories (Bustos et al., 2017; Mignolo, 2021; Svampa, 2019). In global terms, it has been analysed that pre-disaster conditions are decisive in this respect, given that they have the potential to exacerbate the vulnerability of specific populations, as well as the response alternatives to the various crises surrounding disasters (Di Giminiani et al., 2016; Jetten et al., 2021; Lazzarato, 2024; Martínez-Gómez & Parraguéz-Camus, 2021; Sandoval, 2020; Sawyer, 2004).

In consideration of the above, this study aims to examine and map out the current state of qualitative disaster research in Latin America, primarily from a psychological perspective. To achieve this, we conducted a search for studies published in scientific journals in the Web of Science and Scielo. The goal was to systematically map out the various methodological considerations and address the challenges arising from existing contributions, enriching both disciplinary and socio-political knowledge in the face of disasters in present day Latin America.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Design**

This meta-synthesis is grounded in the need to conduct a systematic review of the current state of published qualitative research to foster new knowledge by integrating available information. It aims to ensure that knowledge derived from qualitative methods receives the recognition it deserves, countering its often devalued status in the broader literature (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Given the complexity of this social phenomenon, a broad perspective is imperative, integrating diverse perspectives and acknowledging their particularities. This is particularly pertinent

given the wide range of theoretical frameworks, methodologies, participants, geographical contexts, and research teams used to study disasters. Hence, synthesizing information from qualitative research without oversimplifying its complexity is essential, ensuring that no single article dominates (Bilbao-Nieva, 2021). In this way, this synthesis has the potential to contribute to understanding the phenomenon under study more holistically (Thorne, 2017).

### **Search and Selection Strategy**

The focus of this review was on studies examining disasters with a significant qualitative research component, encompassing both pure qualitative studies and those with mixed methods designs. Information gathering and review were conducted by the principal author, leading to the identification of the main categories, which were subsequently explored in greater depth through joint analysis. The information search process took place over two distinct periods: the first was undertaken during the second half of 2023 and included the search period between 2017 and 2022, whilst the second occurred during the first half of 2025, which enabled us to incorporate the years 2023 and 2024 respectively into the search process and construct a review with up-to-date studies.

Therefore, we included studies published as full articles between 2017 and 2024, sourced from the “Web of Science” Core Collection and “Scielo” databases. These databases were selected for their scope and capacity to identify both international and regional academic production and dissemination, which provides a perspective consistent with the purpose of our review, helping to make visible the efforts, methods and findings of different research teams in the field. The keyword “disaster” was employed in the search, in English or Spanish, in both singular and plural forms. These studies had to pertain to disasters occurring in Latin America, with priority given to those within the field of psychology, as per the search criteria applied in the respective databases. The strategy used comprised the PRISMA model (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff et al., 2009).

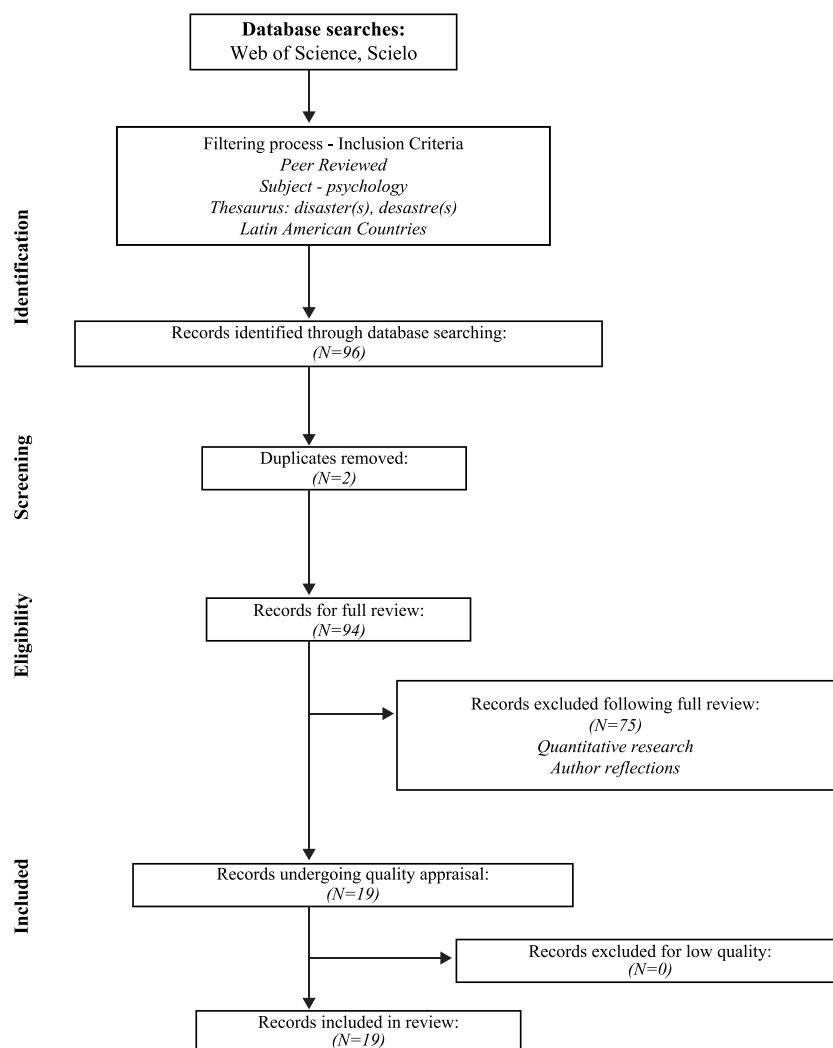
The above means that the specified database filters were utilised, particularly the search criteria applied to the database filters, which integrated peer-reviewed scientific articles, Latin American countries and the thematic area of psychology, and which included the word 'disaster'. Countries and years that did not correspond to those specified, journals from other thematic areas according to the indicated databases, as well as review articles and duplicates, were excluded through the filtering process. Subsequently, a review of the identified articles was carried out to ensure they corresponded to qualitative studies, followed

by the application of quality assessment criteria as a descriptive tool rather than exclusion criteria, with the purpose of identifying dimensions related to sampling design, population, information production technique and information analysis technique in particular.

Initially, the search yielded a total of 96 studies, which underwent initial screening based on their titles, abstracts, and methodologies. Subsequently, they were assessed against the inclusion criteria, resulting in the selection of 19 articles included in this meta-synthesis (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

*Phases of screening.*



Source: Own elaboration.

## Quality Appraisal

Subsequent to this phase, the full texts of the selected articles underwent review, during which methodological aspects of interest were identified and evaluated using the CASP criteria (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018). This approach considers rigour without excluding articles based on predetermined quality classifications. The focus of the review was on assessing the strategies and techniques employed in the selected studies, while also identifying recurring patterns and contributions evident in qualitative research on disasters in Latin America.

## Analytical Strategy

This process involved a series of steps inspired by Thematic Synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Initially, the texts were coded to develop descriptive themes, followed by the generation of analytical themes. Articles were coded based on their descriptive content, facilitating the construction of analytical themes integral to understanding the phenomenon under study. Additionally, the analytical process was augmented by the generation of notes and memos associated with the respective articles, providing observations and interpretations that enriched the organization and analytical exercise (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, the studies can be categorized into two main topics: “Disaster Impact” and “Disaster Risk” and findings will be reported under these headers.

## RESULTS

The primary findings of this meta-synthesis, aimed at determining the current state of qualitative research on disasters in Latin America, are presented below. At a descriptive level, the majority of the analysed studies (Table 1) focus on disasters in Chile (42.1%), followed by Brazil (21%), Cuba (10.5%), Haiti (5.26%), Ecuador (5.26%), Colombia (5.26%), Venezuela (5.26%) and Costa Rica (5.26%), respectively. In Chile, the events associated with disasters include earthquakes, tsunamis, mega-fires, floods, and state terrorism. In Brazil, the studies explore communities affected by environmental crimes, the experiences of professionals attending to disaster victims, and communities at risk of disasters—themes also present in studies from Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Cuba. Additionally, in Cuba, research includes an exploration of the experiences of professionals providing aid in disaster situations. Another study delves into the impact of the earthquake in Haiti and subsequent immigration (Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018). In the majority of the studies, the sample comprises individuals or communities directly affected by a disaster (Alcota & Aravena, 2020; Atallah et al., 2018; Barreto et al., 2020; Berroeta & Carvalho, 2020; Berroeta et al., 2021; Faúndez et al., 2020; Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018; González-Palta et al., 2021; Sandoval-Díaz et al., 2020), with a smaller proportion focusing on individuals involved in providing support to the affected population (Alvarado et al., 2019; Pozo-Madera et al., 2019; Vasconcelos & Cury, 2017).



Table 1.  
*Studies included in review.*

Author	Population Country	Event	Declared Sampling	Population	Information Production Technique	Information Analysis Technique
Alcota & Aravena, 2020	Chile	- Earthquake and Tsunami - State Terrorism	Purposive	General population	- Interview - Observation	-Thematic Analysis
Alvarado et al., 2019	Chile	- Flood	Purposive	General population	- Interview - Group Discussion	-Grounded Theory
Atallah et al., 2018	Chile	- Racist Structural Violence	Convenience	Indigenous peoples	- Interview - Observation	-Decolonial Analysis -Intersectional Analysis -Reflective and Relational Analysis
Barreto et al., 2020	Brazil	- Environmental Crime	No Data	General population	- Interview - Observation	No Data
Berroeta & Carvalho, 2020	Chile	- Earthquake - Volcanic Eruption	Purposive	General population	- Focus Group	-Grounded Theory
Berroeta et al., 2021	Chile	- Mega-fire	Convenience	General population	- Interview - Observation	-Thematic Analysis
Faúndez et al., 2020	Chile	- State Terrorism	No Data	General population	- Focus Group	-Textual Analysis
Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018	Haiti	- Earthquake	Purposive	Immigrant	- Interview	-Content Analysis
González-Palta et al., 2021	Chile	- Earthquake and Tsunami	Convenience	General population	- Interview	-Descriptive Analysis -Relational Analysis
Noal et al., 2024	Brazil	- Flood	No Data	- Indigenous peoples - Public health professionals	- Documental analysis	-No Data
Pineda-López et al., 2022	Colombia	- Disaster Risk	Theoretical	General population	- Interview	-Grounded Theory
Pozo-Madera et al., 2019	Cuba <sup>1</sup>	- Experiences of post-disaster professionals	Purposive	General population	- Survey	-Historical Dialectical
Rosales-Veíta & Marcano, 2024	Venezuela	- Earthquake - Mass movements	Criterion	General population	- Interview	-Hermeneutic Analysis
Salazar & Ordóñez, 2021	Ecuador	- Disaster Risk	No Data	General population	- Observation	-Historical-Logical Analysis
Sandoval-Díaz et al., 2020	Chile	- Flood	Theoretical	General population	- Interview	-Grounded Theory
Segura-Román & Ortega-Moreno, 2023	Costa Rica	- Disaster Risk	Convenience	Workers in public institutions	- Interview - Observation	-Content Analysis
Silva & Menezes, 2020	Brazil	- Disaster Risk	No Data	General population	- Interview	-Discourse Analysis
Vasconcelos & Cury, 2017	Brazil	- Experiences of post-disaster professionals	No Data	General population	- Interview	-Narrative Hermeneutic Analysis
Vázquez-Lugo et al., 2017	Cuba	- Disaster Risk	Randomised	General population	No Data	No Data

Source: Own elaboration.

<sup>1</sup> In this case, they were Cubans providing support in the face of anthropic disasters associated with international war conflicts, in a larger context in which Cuba is experiencing the disaster of the economic war directed against them.

In relation to methodological considerations, out of the total number of studies analysed, 68% report the sampling technique utilised. Furthermore, interviews and observations emerge as the primary methodologies. In terms of analytical techniques, the diversity of analytical strategies is notable, although it is worth mentioning that 21% of studies employ the grounded theory method.

Regarding the main results by topic (Table 2), specifically focusing on studies on the impact of disasters and disaster risk, it is notable that not all of them report the gender of the participants. In this

sense, only about half of them specify the gender proportions among participants in their respective research. Some studies provide detailed accounts of the representativeness of their sample for the broader population under investigation (Alcota & Aravena, 2020; Alvarado et al., 2019; Atallah et al., 2018; Faúndez et al., 2020; González-Palta et al., 2021; Pineda-López et al., 2022; Silva & Menezes, 2020; Vasconcelos & Cury, 2017). Additionally, two studies explore the impact of disasters on indigenous peoples (Atallah et al., 2018; Noal et al., 2024), while another focuses on immigrants (Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018).

Table 2.

*Studies by topic and distribution.*

Author	Topic	Proportion Female Researchers	Proportion Female Population
Alcota & Aravena, 2020	Disaster Impact	50%	40%
Alvarado et al., 2019	Disaster Impact	40%	45%
Atallah et al., 2018	Disaster Impact	40%	40%
Barreto et al., 2020	Disaster Impact	100%	No Data
Berroeta & Carvalho, 2020	Disaster Impact	50%	No Data
Berroeta et al., 2021	Disaster Impact	25%	No Data
Faúndez et al., 2020	Disaster Impact	40%	55%
Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018	Disaster Impact	100%	No Data
González-Palta et al., 2021	Disaster Impact	40%	69%
Noal et al., 2024	Disaster Impact	57%	No Data
Pineda-López et al., 2022	Disaster Risk	67%	40%
Pozo-Madera et al., 2019	Disaster Impact	100%	No Data
Rosales-Veíta & Marcano, 2024	Disaster Risk	50%	No Data
Salazar & Ordóñez, 2021	Disaster Risk	50%	No Data
Sandoval-Díaz et al., 2020	Disaster Impact	83%	No Data
Segura-Román & Ortega-Moreno, 2023	Disaster Risk	50%	No Data
Silva & Menezes, 2020	Disaster Risk	100%	80%
Vasconcelos & Cury, 2017	Disaster Impact	100%	67%
Vázquez-Lugo et al., 2017	Disaster Risk	50%	No Data

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of the composition of research groups, 63% of the studies are led by female researchers as principal authors, and on average, 42% of the studies included in the review were mostly composed of female authors. Notably, 83% of the studies on disaster risk are led by female researchers.

## Disaster Impact

Studies falling in this category primarily explored the implications of natural and anthropogenic events, such as earthquakes, floods, or political-social violence, occurring in Latin America, affecting various populations. In the majority of cases, these studies focus on Chile. The damage inflicted on communities not only affects their material reality but also plays a crucial role in shaping identity and socio-spatial relations within these communities. More specifically, studies in this category delve into the life trajectories of affected groups and communities, examining the damage incurred, responses to rebuild destroyed areas, socio-spatial relations, and the economic, political, and socio-cultural barriers exacerbating the impact of disasters (Alcota & Aravena, 2020; Alvarado et al., 2019; Atallah et al., 2018; Barreto et al., 2020; Berroeta & Carvalho, 2020; Berroeta et al., 2021; Faúndez et al., 2020; Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018; González-Palta et al., 2021; Noal et al., 2024; Pozo-Madera et al., 2019; Sandoval-Díaz et al., 2020; Vasconcelos & Cury, 2017).

These studies show that the consequences of disasters on affected communities extend beyond the consequences of the event itself. For example, impacts also encompass the disruption of material foundations that underpin community identity (Faúndez et al., 2020; González-Palta et al., 2021) and the construction of place—a concept central to the establishment of socio-spatial relationships and potential sources of communal friction (Barreto et al., 2020; Berroeta et al., 2021).

In the case study of the Mapuche community (Atallah et al., 2018), the research reveals that the disaster's ramifications are exacerbated by persistent structural existing societal impediments. Conversely, community's resilience is bolstered by a complex interplay of social,

political, and socio-cultural practices. This dichotomy illuminates the multifaceted nature of disaster impact and community response within indigenous contexts. In this sense, the Brazilian study highlights the importance of the articulation between the experiences of indigenous peoples and health professionals after a disaster (Noal et al., 2024).

Studies on the impact of disasters can also be categorised according to the temporal relationship between the event under investigation and the formal publication date in the respective journal. This temporal and typological categorisation provides a framework for understanding the diverse approaches to disaster impact research.

First, there are studies primarily addressing short-term events impact in the first 5 years following mostly natural disasters. These studies focus on socio-spatial ties, coping strategies and prosocial behaviour (Alvarado et al., 2019; Barreto et al., 2020; Berroeta & Carvalho, 2020; Berroeta et al., 2021; Noal et al., 2024; Sandoval-Díaz et al., 2020). Second, medium-term impact studies (5 to 10 years after the disaster) encompass natural disasters and an anthropogenic disaster associated with state violence. Here, studies mainly address collective memory processes, changes in socio-spatial ties and survivors' mental health implications with a focus on persistent negative emotions or feeling of helplessness (Alcota & Aravena, 2020; Fernandes & Martins-Borges, 2018; González-Palta et al., 2021). Finally, long-term impact studies (more than 10 years after the disaster) concentrate on the ramifications of anthropogenic disasters, with a particular emphasis on state-perpetrated violence. In this case the studies mainly focus strongly on collective memory, psychosocial trauma and community resilience (Atallah et al., 2018; Faúndez et al., 2020; Pozo-Madera et al., 2019). This temporal and typological categorisation provides a framework for understanding the diverse approaches to disaster impact research.



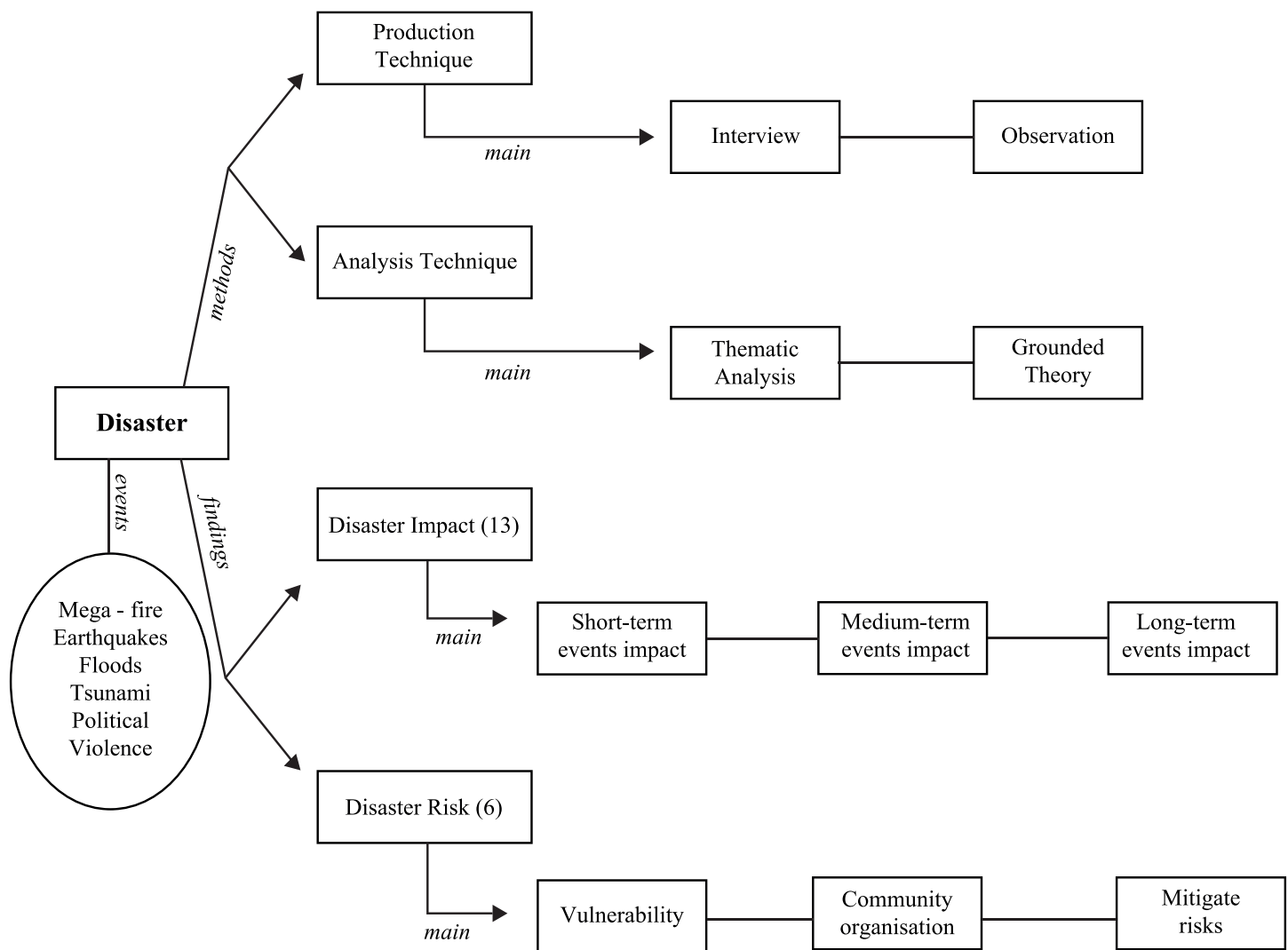
## Disaster Risk

Studies in this category address disaster risk (Pineda-López et al., 2022; Rosales-Veíta & Marcano, 2024; Salazar & Ordóñez, 2021; Segura-Román & Ortega-Moreno, 2023; Silva & Menezes, 2020; Vázquez-Lugo et al., 2017) in territories or localities at risk due to characteristics of the environment. The studies, conducted in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela and Costa Rica, highlight the limited preparedness for disasters among exposed communities, as well as the challenges in accessing basic services and structural impoverishment exacerbating vulnerability. Flood disasters are a central theme (Pineda-López et al., 2022; Salazar & Ordóñez, 2021; Vázquez-Lugo et al., 2017), with studies emphasising the need for organised community responses and the importance of engaging with state institutions to mitigate risks effectively. Additionally, one study explores the concept of ‘risk hierarchisation’ (Silva & Menezes, 2020) showing that communities pay more attention to certain risk factors than to others, based on their experiences with varied and recurrent dangers, such as economic instability and social inequality. The persistent structural inequalities compel these communities to systematically prioritise their immediate economic survival and basic housing needs over others potential disaster risks. Their daily reality revolves around resolving financial hardship and securing shelter, as failure to address these pressing concerns would significantly heighten the existential threats to individuals, families, and the broader community. Consequently, the eventuality of other disaster types—such as a landslide potentially affecting their dwellings—becomes a secondary consideration in their risk assessment hierarchy.

In other words, the findings (Figure 2) of this review makes clear that, in the eyes of those that are affected by the disaster, the most pressing peril is not necessarily the disaster itself, but rather the looming threat of homelessness precipitated by economic instability, profound societal inequalities, and the erosion of social rights. These vulnerabilities are further intensified during periods of social upheaval. In light

of this precarious landscape, scholars emphasise the imperative for psychology and allied disciplines to engage in the political discourse surrounding disaster risk management. This engagement is particularly crucial given the structural vulnerabilities faced by communities who have no choice but to establish their dwellings in high-risk territories, often due to socio-economic constraints. These studies are motivated by a desire to potentially inform more equitable and effective disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies, whilst addressing the underlying structural inequalities that exacerbate disaster vulnerability.

Figure 2.  
 Summary of findings.



Source: Own elaboration.

## DISCUSSION

Latin America experiences numerous disasters, and the studies presented in this meta-synthesis represent only a fraction of the existing research. The qualitative research reviewed offers valuable insights into the way socio-spatial relationships are affected by disasters and the way communities' histories affect responses to disasters. In global terms, the relevance of these studies with a qualitative approach demonstrates the importance of exploring case-by-case situations, singularities and historical dimensions of meaning-making in which the aforementioned events take place, based on understanding the meanings and particularities of groups or communities regarding experiences that affect the trajectories of social subjects within a disaster framework. In this regard, the qualitative studies analysed possess the potential to position the interpretative human dimension of experiences that have marked a turning point as a central element, providing contextual tools for understanding the processes of subjectification, discomfort and well-being—considerations that collectively prove of great value to psychology. A few observations emerging from this review are noteworthy.

First, surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic was not included as a disaster in these qualitative studies. This does not imply that no research has been carried out on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather, authors have not labelled the pandemic as a disaster. This is an interesting observation from a discourse and constructionist perspective (Foucault, 2002, 2008; Gergen, 1996). In this sense, it might be fruitful to examine the available evidence on the impact of the pandemic through the lens of disaster risk and management (Haas et al., 2021; Martinez-Marti et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Gonzalez et al., 2020).

Second, the heterogeneity of disasters studied in Chile underscores the exposure of the population to various types of disasters. However, unlike in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, and Cuba, there were hardly any studies in Chile exploring disaster risk perception or preparedness. This presents an opportunity to increase qualitative studies to systematically examine and expose the implications of known disasters in these countries.

Third, the findings regarding the impact of disasters and disaster risk highlight the importance of addressing underlying historical and material conditions as well as political decisions to mitigate disaster effects (Baryshnikova & Pham, 2019; Brown & Perkins, 1992; Gillam & Charles, 2019; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006). However, there remains a scarcity of research focusing on indigenous and immigrant populations, presenting an opportunity for psychology to explore cultural dimensions of disasters recovery within these communities. More specifically, while the literature underscores the importance of understanding the particularities of disaster-affected populations (Comas-Díaz et al., 1998; Kölves et al., 2013; Lykes, 1994, 2013; Lykes et al., 2007; Lykes & Scheib, 2016; Maskrey, 2011; Masozera et al., 2007; Norris, 2006; Norris et al., 2002; Panagioti et al., 2009; Pedersen, 1996; Pedersen et al., 2015; Scheib & Lykes, 2013), this meta-synthesis found only a handful of studies dedicated to indigenous peoples and immigrant populations. With only a proportion of studies explicitly stating the sampling technique used, future research should focus on strengthening methodological rigor. Moreover, the predominance of interviews and observations as information production techniques highlights the importance of ethical precautions in recording disaster-related information. A decolonial and critical stance can further deepen understanding in this area.

Fourth, similarly, concerning gender, the efforts of female researchers are noteworthy, not only for studying the impact of disasters, but also for addressing disaster risks, which constitutes a fundamental component for understanding them, contributing knowledge that can support the construction of preparation and action plans in this regard. Likewise, the gender dimension can contribute to identifying the composition of groups or communities participating in studies, thereby making visible the dynamics of how structural oppression manifests itself in disaster contexts, according to the groups that participate in the respective studies.

Fifth, in terms of data analysis techniques, their heterogeneity reflects the methodological choices made by research groups, posing both challenges and opportunities associated with integrating research findings, and the description of analytical processes.

Finally, moving forward, further qualitative research is needed across different regions of Latin America affected by disasters to inform public policies that are collaboratively developed with communities. Sensitivity to regional, communal, and group specifics is essential for transformative and agency-building research which allows us to build knowledge and guide action (Ibáñez, 2014). In turn, whilst recognising the contributions of the present review and the opportunities observed in perspective, we also identify limitations, such as those concerning studies that could not be identified or included in this review due to the application of filters in the respective databases during the search process. There may exist interdisciplinary qualitative studies published in other disciplinary areas, or in other databases, which could also contribute to the understanding of disasters. Therefore, the findings should be considered bearing these limitations in mind.

## **CONCLUSION**

This meta-synthesis offers insights into disaster studies, highlighting the relevance of considering structural societal conditions and relational dynamics in understanding disaster impacts and risks. Beyond the material damage, disasters affect identity and socio-spatial relations, underscoring the need for a nuanced analysis. In order to inform transformative policies and actions, future research should focus on addressing gaps in our understanding and exploring cultural dimensions of disasters, guided by a decolonial and critical perspective.

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## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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