



Economic Structure Effects on Domestic Life Recovery after Catastrophe: A Case Study in Wenchuan and Beichuan Counties in China

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Across the world, post-disaster assistance in most countries is oriented to each affected household or each disaster victim: according to the loss experienced during the disaster, the affected households are sorted, and then the same relief is provided. For example, the government provided each household whose house was badly damaged with 20,000 RMB in relief funds after the 2008 China Ms 8.0 earthquake. However, in this way, there was a large difference among the regions because the government ignored regional differences. A deeper understanding of the impacts of regional economies on domestic life recovery is needed to develop better post-disaster recovery plans and policies. Using longitudinal, parcel-level data on household units gathered in a survey in Wenchuan (N=363) and Beichuan (N=373), which were most affected by the 2008 China Ms 8.0 earthquake, we explored the differences in domestic life recovery in regions with different economic structures and the mechanisms of economic structures that affect domestic life recovery. The results revealed that over 85% of affected households spent approximately 5 years on domestic life recovery and restored the level of pre-earthquake life successfully. Furthermore, during the recovery process, the accumulative domestic life recovery rate of Wenchuan was consistently higher than that of Beichuan because of the different numbers of migrant worker households, whose average recovery rates were much slower than those of local worker households, nearly 2.97% versus 11.35%, respectively. There were more than six times as many migrant worker households in Beichuan (49.02%) than in Wenchuan (6.49%) due to their different regional economic structures. Taking primary industries as the main type of industry, Beichuan had a relatively high surplus labor force led by lower labor productivity in agricultural sectors, the members of which were by necessity migrant workers. Given these results, the government should adopt different standards and measures of post-disaster relief in different affected areas. In poor areas, the government should take the local economic structure into account and increase relief funds appropriately. In addition, assistance from society (e.g., NGO assistance and private assistance from celebrities) should be used to rebuild enterprises to provide long-term employment opportunities for affected people.