

## Miners' Mental Health Remains Bright

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With all 33 Chilean miners now safely back on the Earth's surface, Charles Figley, who holds the Paul Henry Kurzweg Chair in Disaster Mental Health in the Tulane School of Social Work, says the miners' future is uncertain yet bright.



Miner Raul Bustos, left, receives an embrace after being rescued from the San Jose gold and copper mine where he had been trapped with 32 other miners near Copiapo, Chile. (AP Photo/Chilean Government, Hugo Infante)

"The reality is that we don't know exactly what they are going to go through because we've never had anything like this happen before," says Figley. "In many ways, they have entertained the possibility that they may not survive, and that is a life-altering change in and of itself."

But there were signs the miners would be mentally sound and resilient even before they were released.

"They actually sent back food that they didn't like, so it showed that they have adapted very well to harsh conditions," [Figley](#) says. "It is an indication of thriving and self (group) care and control. One of the main reasons they did that was to show

they could communicate with other people.”

Despite being trapped 2,300 feet underground since Aug. 5, Figley doubts the miners will develop post-traumatic stress disorder from the ordeal because of the sociality that emerged among the men.

“Being trapped below is certainly a traumatic experience but they had 70 days to process that through one of the most specialized support groups you can find ? each other,” he says. “When we suggest these miners have a mental disorder already, it undermines what they have done. There is every reason to believe they are going to grow and thrive from this experience, and to suggest otherwise is disrespectful in my opinion.”

As for the future, Figley believes those closest in the mining community will help the men return to a normal life if they choose to do so.

“These men have a choice in how they handle their fame, and I think they are going to be okay because the mining community there is very close.”

*Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.*