

DISASTER RELIEF VOLUNTEER WORK: GRAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

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This narrative reflects the disaster-relief experiences of a Japanese immigrant social worker who responded to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011. After the overview of the impacts of natural disasters and the summary of disaster-relief volunteer work experienced by the author, the needs of people from the disaster-affected areas in cultural and spiritual contexts as well as the needs of disaster-relief volunteers in relation to what we can do in similar situations in the future are addressed in this article.

Great East Japan Disasters

On March 11, 2011 in the northeastern part of Japan, numerous towns and cities were washed away by up to 133 feet tsunami waves after being shaken by the magnitude 9.0 earthquake (the fourth largest since records began), leaving more than 20,000 people dead or missing and approximately 750,000 houses and buildings destroyed or damaged (Earthquake Report, 2011). A series of aftershocks continued to threaten people in Japan, and even a few months after the disasters, *Los Angeles Times* (Glionna, 2011) featured an article about a medical doctor suffering from earthquake motion sickness, along with many others who developed anxiety and depression resulting from these experiences. As of July 2011, when I volunteered as a disaster-relief worker, I felt at least two aftershocks per day with occasional tsunami warnings that brought a sense of constant tension and triggered images of the traumatic event.

According to the survey results released by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in September, 2011, almost half of the people in the coastal areas suffered from symptoms of sleep disorders and one fifth reported that they consumed more alcohol after the disasters (Sawa & Fukushima, 2011). As of October 2011 when I completed this paper, more than

70,000 people were still uprooted from their homes (Mainichi News Paper, 2011) and more than 22 million tons of debris were still left in piles (Reconstruction Headquarters in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, 2011). Witnessing these conditions, my mind often jumped from the present to the future, and imagined the continuous impacts on future generations.

Numerous people across the world also experienced collective trauma and exposure to secondary or vicarious trauma through the media that aired a series of catastrophic images and devastating stories. Their reactions to the traumatic events varied and the levels of intensity depended on different factors, such as past related experiences and relationships to Japan. Having families and friends in Japan, I felt helpless due to a lack of detailed information about the victims and survivors immediately after the disasters. After capturing more information, I felt hopeless due to the size of the casualties. Examples of other reactions included: becoming addicted to watching television, only making themselves feel more depressed; avoiding the related news and conversations and detached themselves from negative emotions; indirectly identifying with victims of the disasters; or spending countless hours trying to obtain information on the safety of their families and friends in Japan,

swaying between hope and disappointment. Others might have felt pressured to do something in order to feel or show that they were good religious or community members, felt euphoric or even manic for doing heroic actions, shifted guilt for surviving or living in non-disaster-affected areas to positive actions, such as collecting donations, still others took these existential crises as opportunities to discover a new sense of self, or experienced altruistic motivations to become disaster-relief volunteers. I also felt the internal urge and the external pressure to do something.

In this article I would like to share my experiences as a disaster-relief volunteer and also as an immigrant from Japan, to address what we could do in the recovery process. I would also like to reflect upon the needs of people from the disaster-affected areas in cultural and spiritual contexts, as well as the needs of disaster-relief volunteers in relation to what we can do in similar situations in the future. Before I begin, I would like to note that it is a common practice to identify those who experienced traumatic events as “survivors”; however, some natural disaster “survivors” still identify themselves as “victims” of the continuous disaster impacts and aftershocks, or as “future victims” of predicted disasters. Therefore, a term “*hisaisha*” is used hereafter to address people who were affected by disasters while recognizing the long-term impacts of the massive disasters. The aim is to avoid the pathology of calling them victims or prematurely identifying them as survivors, particularly with respect to Japanese culture.

Disaster-Relief Volunteer Experiences Japan-Relief Fundraising

Many might have thought of volunteering in Japan; however, not all could prepare in a timely manner or had enough resources to meet the minimum requirement to “do no harm” to *hisiasha* and their communities when staying in the disaster-affected areas. Considering my own responsibilities for the first three months, such as families and jobs, and limitations of the resources I could prepare, the most effective action was to stay where I was and send money to the disaster-affected areas. For example, in collaboration

with the U.S.-Japan Council Earthquake Relief Fund (<https://www.usjapancouncil.org/fund>), I worked with the committee members from the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, Inc. (AASWG: <http://www.aaswg.org/>) and the Society for Spirituality and Social Work (SSSW: <http://societyforspiritualityandsocialwork.com/>) and had raffle events at their annual conferences that were held in Long Beach, California, and Washington, D.C.

In these Japan-relief fundraising efforts, I received many encouraging comments from the donors. There were also some comments that helped me better prepare for similar events in the future. When it entered the third month after the disasters, some donors were surprised that Japan had not recovered yet. I felt the importance of actively sharing the information on current conditions and advocating for the continuous needs of *hisaisha*. Although most of these comments were based on their beliefs in the strength of Japan and expectations for its speedy recovery, a comment such as “Japan is a strong country, and I would rather donate to other countries” made me realize the importance of examining the relief efforts from historical and political perspectives at the global level. The comments lingered in my heart until I came to the conclusion that comparing which country suffers more than others was not productive in the helping process because all of them suffer in various ways. Another comment, “I will donate this time, because Japan helped us before and will help us in the future,” made me feel responsible for fulfilling the expected socioeconomic role, realizing that the money was invested rather than being donated. I accepted the money with appreciation, but had to waive the responsibility for *hisaisha*, hoping that they, when receiving the money, would not feel the same way I did.

One couple requested me to remove the displayed pictures of the disaster-affected areas from the donation table since the pictures were depressing. My first reaction was that these were the everyday realities for *hisaisha*, and my primary emphasis at the time was to increase awareness among the potential donors, placing the donors’ potential traumatic reactions as

secondary. I later shifted the focus from why we should donate, which might increase the feelings of guilt and pity, to what we donate for, which might create self-efficacy and hope, by displaying more pictures highlighting the positive changes we could bring to the recovery process. Through these efforts, my appreciation to the donors deepened.

As time passed, I realized that the fundraisers tended to target repeat donors, and reaching out to new donors became a challenge. To meet this challenge, I found that recruiting disaster-relief agencies and funding organizations to provide free consultations and workshops on effective and efficient ways to fundraise would be a great future contribution.

Volunteer Experiences in Japan

When I first started to look into volunteer opportunities in March and April, there were few opportunities for individual volunteers at local Disaster Assistant Volunteer Centers (<http://www.saigaivc.com/>) with warnings that volunteers should not (1) come without notifying the local representatives, (2) build tents in unauthorized areas or sleep in their cars, (3) depend on the centers for foods and places to stay, as well as tools needed for volunteer work, and (4) expect to choose their own tasks since those depended on the needs of *hisaisha*. I sought a non-profit organization that had already established connections with local Japanese social service agencies and recruited social workers. Although "Social Worker" was the last career group on the list to be recruited, I found Project HOPE (<http://www.projecthope.org/>) and sent an application as a licensed bilingual/cultural clinical social worker in the first week of May. I waited for their response with hope while preparing to leave for Japan; however, when I called the office in the last week of June to follow up with my application process, I was informed that Project HOPE was not sending social workers while physicians were still in need. This process reminded me of the limitations of being a social worker when responding to the disasters.

I also found the immense potential of being a social worker. In June, seemingly during the transition from the acute to the recovery

phase, there was news about increasing needs for *kokoro no kea* (care of *kokoro*). *Kokoro* in Japanese means a combination of heart, nerve, mind, thought, emotion, moral, mental health, and psychological structures. By the middle to end of June, three months after the initial disasters, local Disaster Assistant Volunteer Centers started to accept individual volunteers. In July 2011, I arranged to work for the Disaster Assistant Volunteer Centers located in Higashimatsushima (<http://msv3151.c-bosai.jp/group.php?gid=10180>) and Shichigahama (<http://msv3151.c-bosai.jp/group.php?gid=10119>) and the Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs), such as Peace Winds Japan (<http://www.peace-winds.org/en/>) and Tono Magokoro Net (<http://tonomagokoro.net/english/>).

Preparation: Before entering the disaster-affected areas, I looked into the following information: the impacts of disasters, conditions of transportation systems and availability of lifelines, and materials/supplies to bring to the disaster-affected areas. I obtained an International Driver's License before leaving the U.S. to rent a car since some train and bus lines were still inoperative. The GPS option was a must. In addition to the unfamiliar names and signs, the roads in Japan were narrow and not visibly numbered, and adjusting to driving on the left side of the road with the right side steering wheel took at least a couple of days. When I arrived in Japan, I also rented a cell phone that could be used in the disaster-affected areas and purchased the disaster-insurance that allowed me to do volunteer work in Japan.

In addition to the conventional travel items, Tono Magokoro Net recommended bringing the following items to the disaster-affected areas: boots with safely soles to protect against tetanus infections from stepping on glass; masks that block dust and small pollen to protect from infectious diseases; a helmet or thick cap; long-sleeved work clothes; thick pants; waterproof or leather work gloves, and goggles. Depending on the overnight stay conditions, other items, such as a tent and sleeping bag, were required. A sleeping eye mask and ear plugs were helpful for me, since I stayed at a gym with other volunteers.

Higashimatsushima Disaster Assistant Volunteer Center: The City of Higashimatsushima, located in Miyagi Prefecture, lost more than 1,000 residents due to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. When I visited the Center in the beginning of July 2011, the Center was still waiting for an approval from the city officials to provide any psychological or mental health services. I heard there was a need for *kokoro no kea* (psychological or mental health care) from the staff and disaster-relief volunteers; however, it would take at least two to four more weeks for the city's approval. During that waiting period, as a team member of nine disaster-relief volunteers, I volunteered to clean the houses of *hisaisha* that were covered with mud. The mud was thick like clay and, above all, foul-smelling. The day was hot (over 90 degrees) and humid, and the assigned team leader reminded us to take breaks every 30 minutes to drink water (at least two liters per day) and eat enough salty candies to compensate for the sodium lost through our sweat, which was constantly running from our bodies. The *hisaisha* we worked for and with were older couples. While cleaning together, the *obasan* (familial term for older female) shared her frustration, asking why the word was followed by *shōganai*, meaning "cannot be helped," or accepting what had happened. She continued to say that she did the same to "clean up the mess and go forward" during and after World War II and previous similar natural disasters that also took everything from her. These conversations occurred when working together for the same purpose. Although she did not need any formal therapy, I believed that this "working-talking" resulted in more therapeutic moments than the time we could have had in an office setting.

Shichigahama Disaster Assistant Volunteer Center: Shichigahama is a town close to Sendai City located in Miyagi Prefecture. Shichigahama lost about 100 townspeople and over 1,000 houses were destroyed. The disaster-relief volunteers were given spaces to build tents and park their cars. There, along with other volunteers, I was assigned to work with residents of temporary houses for *kokoro no kea*. Several

residents gathered at the community house, where we had tea sitting together on *tatami* (traditional rush or rice straw mat), making the place feel like a home. During this informal get-together, *idobata* (backstairs gossip), or group talk, ensued (Kugaya, 2011). The group functioned as a support group, focusing on sharing stories, practical resources, and coping strategies.

As with the experience of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 when many older adults faced lonely deaths (Hayashi, Shigekawa, & Tanaka, 2011), we made an effort to invite older persons to come out from their temporary houses. A staff member from the Japanese Association of Public Interest Recreation (<http://www.recreation.or.jp/>) visited the community house and encouraged the residents to participate in the recreational games and exercises. While doing the activities, the residents expressed many concerns, especially the physical pain that seemed to worsen after the disasters. The relationship between the disaster-related stress and increased physical risks has been supported by numerous studies (Golden, Williams, & Ford, 2004, as cited in Leitch, Vanslyke, & Allen, 2009; Kyodo News, 2011; Solomon, Laor, & McFarlane, 1996; Vieweg, Hasnain, Mezuk, Levy, Lesnefsky, & Pandurangi, 2011; Watanabe et al., 2005). Considering the importance of mind-body integration, it was important to respect how their concerns were expressed and to address trauma-related stress reactions in the health care system (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003).

After the recreational activities, pickled cucumbers were provided by one of the staff members for the purpose of calming and cooling the bodies during a hot day. Two *omawarisan* (affectionate term for a local police officer, literally meaning "Mr. Go Around" who patrols and makes friendly visits in the community) came to deliver the community bulletins. The group invited the *omawarisan* to join the group talk and offered tea and pickled cucumbers. The group recognized them as leaders, and the *omawarisan* served as skilled group facilitators and consultants, developing a

cohesive and supportive group while bringing us the joy of ordinary life by making us laugh with witty responses. Learning counseling techniques in the U.S., I learned greatly from their leadership style that was in accordance with *Tao of Leadership* (Heider, 1985), such as lowering the self (being modest) toward the wisdom of ocean like water and being conscious yet spontaneous by emptying the mind to be mindful. In this culturally relevant safe environment, people started to talk about their experiences and shared their responses to the disasters. The *kokoro no kea* team provided minimum intervention occasionally, in order to shift the conversation from “problem-talk” to “solution-talk.”

Tono Magokoro Net: The City of Tōno is located in Iwate Prefecture about 20 miles away from the coastline where the tsunami hit in March 2011. Tōno was not affected by the tsunami, but the city established a volunteer organization, Tono Magokoro Net, to assist *hisaisha* in the coastline areas affected by the tsunami. Disaster-relief volunteers were transported every morning from there to the Sanriku Coast District, including the communities of Kamaishi, Rikuzentakata, Ōfunato, and Ōtsuchi, to do various disaster-relief tasks, and transported back in the evening to sleep in the gym space provided by Tono Magokoro Net. There were strict rules, such as no setting of individual alarms (a public bell was set to ring at 6:00 am), no making noise (e.g., do not touch a plastic bag) after 10:00 pm, and walking tip-toed with no heels touching the floor. These rules were intended to ensure that the volunteers had enough rest to have energy for the following day; however, the occasional aftershocks woke us up in the middle of night, and the heat during the day and at night without fans or air conditioners exhausted our stamina. In addition to setting the rules, I was impressed with the several activities the organization developed for their volunteers: periodical newsletters; public journals for volunteers; an opinion box, a *hatto* (startling experience) memo bulletin board (where volunteers posted dangerous situations they encountered for the purpose of warning others); daily orientations for new volunteers; daily evening volunteer

meetings; morning meetings and exercises; and efforts to match the needs of both volunteers and *hisaisha*. Occasional social activities served as our informal debriefing time.

During my time there, I belonged to a team, *Fureaitai*, which provided “Tapping Touch” services developed by Nakagawa (2004). One hour of training prepared new volunteers to provide the services that commenced with holding the recipient’s hands, laying down our hands on her/his back, and tapping softly on the back, shoulders, head, and alternately right and left legs for about 15 - 20min. The trained volunteers were assigned to work with the residents at various shelters and temporary housing communities, creating consequent positive bio-psycho-social effects. The experiences were successful, and the method was useful and practical for both the volunteers and *hisaisha*. Considering the heat, one modification I would make for future practice would be to perform the beginning part of holding and laying down hands only during the cold season as an alternative method.

Among those who requested the services at shelters, Tapping Touch services were often provided in public places where other shelter residents also stayed. As a result of this lack of privacy, I would consider the following options: play relaxing background music to block the noise, and/or have bystanders also participate in Tapping Touch exercises in pairs and/or groups, tapping each other’s back and shoulders. Tapping Touch services at private temporary houses were different experiences. The service recipients freely shared their stories while ensuring that someone was listening and used the occasional moments of silence as their time to process their feelings. I felt excited about this method as a volunteer, but as a clinical social worker I found myself being bound by the perceived professional role and ethics (e.g., possible exploitations by touching clients, limitations of confidentiality, no guarantee for continuity of care). In this approach I thought I could be more effective taking the role of a volunteer.

Peace Winds Japan: The headquarters of Peace Winds Japan, located in Tokyo,

served as the home base of the disaster-relief team in Ichinoseki, Iwate Prefecture, 30 miles away from the coastline, in order to assist the disaster-affected cities, such as Rikuzentakata and Kesenuma. I joined their disaster-relief team and visited one of the temporary housing communities in Rikuzentakata. The team made shady areas with tents, had residents come out, distributed potted plants and flowers, and informed them about the scheduled activities for both adults and children. These included playing with clay, making fans, squirting water, and playing badminton, volleyball, and dodgeball. According to the staff, these activities were delivered based on the methods developed by Mercy Corps (<http://www.mercycorps.org/>): Comfort Kids (5 - 11 yo) and Moving Forward (11 - 18 yo) Programs while considering cultural and age group differences (M. Poorman, personal communication, July 26th, 2011).

In order to meet the local needs and provide culturally relevant services, Peace Winds Japan also hired additional staff members from the local communities (M. Ōishi, personal communication, July 6th, 2011), which was also supported by the disaster-relief protocol developed by WHO (2003) for the purpose of keeping the local residents from leaving their communities in search of new jobs (Tan & Tan, 2006). Based on the model developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2007), such helping processes were structured in collaboration with both national and local leaders in an effort to provide consistent and continuous support in the long-term recovery process (Y. Nakamura, M.D., Ph.D., personal communication, July 16th, 2011). From this experience I learned how the NPOs, such as Peace Winds Japan, took positions to fill the gaps between the services offered by local agencies and governmental supports (R. Yamamoto, personal communication, July 16th, 2011). In order for me to be able to help others, I needed help from many people.

Needs of *Hisaisha* Transition from Shelter to Transitional House

The transition from shelters to temporary houses seemed to be a challenging issue for some *hisaisha*, who had limited resources to move forward. The shift from being allowed to be dependent as victims at shelters, to being pushed to be independent as survivors at temporary houses, was hard to make when the transition was forced on people before they felt ready. There were occasional conflicts that occurred at shelters when the residents of temporary houses came back to request for survival supplies that were donated for the residents of shelters. The resentment and frustration felt by the residents of shelters for not having been selected to have temporary houses exacerbated these conflicts.

Similar conflicts also occurred between the residents and the volunteers/staff. In the process of encouraging independence, the feeling of volunteers/staff that the residents were too dependent--and the feeling of the residents that the volunteers/staff disrespected their needs--occasionally emerged. In order to avoid these feelings, the volunteers/staff needed to differentiate the residents who required continuous hands-on care from those who might benefit from encouragement towards independence. The volunteers/staff also needed to know that everyone had a different pace of moving from the acute phase to the recovery phase, depending on their level of support from extended family members, amount of savings, and skills to get new jobs. It was important to remember that the differences in the pace of recovery increased as time passed, depending on the resources residents could access. One staff shared her evaluation method with me, explaining that as residents of the shelters started to complain about the food and conditions, then they were more likely to be ready to move forward to more independent life styles.

When moving the residents of shelters to the temporary houses, it was important to develop a community-based plan, especially in a collectivistic society. For example, the first attempt taken by one local agency was to prioritize people with special needs, such as

families with small children or persons with disabilities. They were selected and scheduled to move as temporary houses became ready at different times at various locations. In this process, the residents were separated from their community members and eventually lost their communities. They did not know their neighbors in their new temporary housing communities, and as a result they further isolated themselves from each other. Although it took time to relocate the residents, it appeared to be worth the effort for the local agency to keep people from the original community together in the same temporary housing community. This tactic would have helped more communities maintain their social interactions, cultural events, and spiritual rituals; identify natural community leaders; and improve the community supports and resources in the process of recovery.

Donated Supplies

Due to the size and severity of the disasters, the donated emergency supplies did not reach some places for days. *Tsunami: Essays of Eighty Children* (Mori, 2011) introduced the essays written by children who experienced the earthquake and tsunami in March, 2011. Their experiences indicated how one day without food could make them feel that their sufferings would last forever without hope. Meeting their basic needs with emergency supplies was critical during the acute phase. While the *hisaisha* appreciated donations of survival supplies, some donated items were culturally inappropriate or did not match with the phase-related needs and only took up space that *hisaisha* could have used as their living spaces. With the advanced communication technology through the Internet, *hisaisha* requested items that were mailed to the local volunteer centers, but the donors who saw these messages kept sending the items until they become over-stocked. The list of requested items needed to be centralized and updated as the needs of *hisaisha* changed.

There was a debate on the request for computers for children at shelters. Some thought that computers were not basic needs and not necessary, and some believed that in the modern society, computers would

help children re-establish daily activities. Re-establishment of routine activities after disasters is recommended by WHO (2003); however, further examination on whether having access to computers reduces children's trauma-based anxiety is needed for future donation activities.

Histories and Cultures of the Disaster-Affected Areas

The stories told by local people were valuable for all disaster-relief volunteers to hear. Stories related to the histories and cultures of the communities should be one of the topics included in the volunteer manuals, in order for volunteers to be effective with *hisaisha* and sensitive to local needs. For example, in one community there were people who lost their houses and people who did not. The loss of the house was not the only difference between them, but there were historical and cultural factors that amplified the gaps. There were historical conflicts between native village residents and newcomers in that community, with many residents still remembering the time when the native village school-age children were banned from attending the school district in the new town. The native village residents had lived on the coastline, taking the best places to have fishing businesses; therefore, the newcomers to the town built their communities on the hillsides away from the coastline. As a result, most of the native village residents lost their houses to the tsunami while most of the newer residents survived. The tsunami further underscored this historical and cultural separation.

Due to the diversified weather regions and physiognomies in Japan, numerous characteristics of each village and town influenced the personalities of residents. For example, people in the Tōhoku area (the Northeastern region of Japan) have been recognized as possessing greater perseverance than people from other regions of Japan (WHO Western Pacific Region, 2011). Their perseverance reflected their morale and was highly commended by the world, which witnessed their calm and orderly response to the devastating disasters. Their

strong spiritual identity also reflected their appreciation for others, nature, and spiritual figures. One disaster-relief team reported how they were impressed when they saw the local spiritual figures being tied to a tree with ropes. The people protected the spiritual figures from the tsunami before they prepared themselves to evacuate. There were also many stories that people took their ancestors' memorial tablets before anything else. Their overall wellness was closely related to their spiritual wellness. The disaster-relief volunteers were recommended to treat these memorial tablets and spiritual figures with respect, consider the use of rituals, and provide ceremonies or memorial events for people who died in collaboration with local spiritual leaders (WHO, 2005).

There are also many dialects spoken in Japan. The heavy dialects, especially those spoken by older people in the Northeastern regions of Japan, were hard to comprehend at times for people who were accustomed to speaking standard Japanese or popular dialects. Local people were attentive to whom they were talking, and kindly switched to the standard Japanese; however, many nuances and cultural meanings attached to the language could be lost in this process. These losses were greater when using interpreters in cross-linguistic dyads. In order to minimize the losses, the use of interpreters who speak the same dialects as *hisaisha* is recommended.

The disaster-relief volunteers needed to respect the local ways of life and their belief systems. In particular, the volunteers who were from individualistic cultures or who subscribed to monotheistic spiritual belief systems were advised to pay extra attention to potentially harmful actions that could be done unintentionally. For instance, volunteers from individualistic cultures might automatically advocate for individual rights and benefits or establish treatment plans that might encourage individual achievements. But in doing so, they could neglect family rights, community benefits, or group achievements that are valued in the collectivistic culture. Another example was that volunteers from monotheistic spiritual belief systems might understand the local spiritual icons and

practices as a way to reach their God rather than respecting *hisaisha's* belief systems. Tan and Tan (2006) warned that without carefully examining the local needs, volunteer work could become a mere "outlet for the volunteers' aspirations 'to do something' rather than to meet an assessed need in the field" (p. 98).

Disaster Tourist and Media Exposure

Disaster tourist buses were operating and taking tourists around to visit and take pictures of the disaster-affected areas. The *hisaisha* seemed to have mixed feelings about these efforts. The positive side of these sightseeing businesses was that the tourists would be motivated to become contributors to the disaster-relief efforts, increasing the level of empathy enough to encourage their friends and family members to become donors and stimulating the economy by using facilities and buying local products in the disaster-affected areas. The negative side was that the tourists might use the *hisaisha's* personal belongings as objects for sightseeing. For example, some tourists could trespass on private properties without knowing that those places had special meanings to the owners, and/or tourists would post the pictures of private properties online without getting consent from the owners. Other examples were that some tourist companies might fail to communicate with the local officials and *hisaisha* representatives in advance, and that some tours might be designed to only benefit the tour companies and businesses outside of the disaster-affected areas. In order to avoid the negative impacts of disaster tours, tour companies should (1) obtain permission from the local officials prior to the tours, (2) plan tours to benefit *hisaisha*, (3) train tour conductors to interact appropriately with *hisaisha*, (4) provide educational opportunities for their tourists to discuss how they can have a positive impact through their actions, and (5) discuss ethical issues involved in taking pictures and trespassing on private properties. By being aware of these ethical issues, disaster-relief volunteers could assist the local leaders in advocating for the best interests of *hisaisha*.

The conditions and needs of *hisaisha* portrayed by the media were often used as guides for potential disaster-relief volunteers when determining where to volunteer and what they could do to help disaster-affected areas. In addition, the amount, accuracy, and time sensitivity of the information affected the psychological status of *hisaisha*. The types of featured stories influenced the motivation of potential donors, and the selection of political issues impacted the directions towards the recovery at the community level. Considering the importance and impact of the media, collaborative work with or taking active roles in the media could better prepare potential volunteers, encourage potential donors, and support *hisaisha* in the recovery process. For example, the following topics could be featured more in the media: different ways to participate in the recovery process; how to become effective disaster-relief volunteers; how to prepare for aftershocks and future disasters; available disaster-response services and their service delivery systems; coping strategies for trauma reactions; and immediate, intermediate, and long-term needs of *hisaisha* (Avdeyeva, Burgetova, & Welch, 2006, as cited in Steffen & Fothergill, 2009; Hayashi et al., 2009).

Needs of Volunteers

The idealization of self-sacrifice and/or "spirits of volunteerism" could often result in neglecting the needs of volunteers. Volunteer coordinators needed to keep in mind that volunteers were motivated by self-, other-, and community-oriented benefits, responding to the various levels of needs (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009). Therefore, success often depended on matching those motivations with actual needs. As long as they did not interfere with the goals of *hisaisha* and their communities, providing choices -- such as locations, lengths of stay or hours of work, and types of volunteer tasks based on their expectations and purposes -- could actually volunteer motivation and productivity.

In order to avoid unnecessary burnout among volunteers, their psychological needs were also recommended to be addressed. Some volunteers might feel guilty about

seeking support when they voluntarily entered the disaster-affected areas to help others, and held back their emotions until they left the volunteer sites and readjusted to their ordinary lives on their own. This might decrease their productivity, exacerbate the reactions caused by the secondary or vicarious trauma, and/or delay the readjustment process. There was a need of *kokoro no kea* to be actively provided for disaster-relief volunteers. For example, periodical debriefing groups facilitated by trained professionals might prevent unnecessary vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, and occasional professional consultations and workshops might stimulate motivations and enhance positive changes. It was also recommended to create an environment where volunteers could schedule time for self-care and consider assigning different tasks to take breaks from the primarily assigned tasks while not being forced to do so (Shigemura & Kim, 2011).

Pre-volunteer trainings has been found to help prepare potential volunteers. The volunteers actually became more effective if they were trained prior to disasters (Rodriguez et al., 2006, as cited in Sterren & Fothergill, 2009). However, especially in cases of large natural disasters, many volunteers often ended up responding without having enough training (Villagran, Wittenberg-Lyles, & Garza, 2006). In addition to ensuring the availability and accessibility of volunteer training programs, incentives to completing training programs -- such as certificates or titles that might be recognized when responding to disasters, free trainings and/or continuing education workshops, and/or qualifications for specialized training programs -- might encourage potential volunteers to be pre-trained.

Volunteers' experiences in past disasters can inform the direction of current responses to disasters. For example, the lessons learned from the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake were used to improve the conditions of under-recognized populations in the response to the recent disasters. The needs of women, older persons, children, and persons with disabilities were considered in the following ways: (1) building the changing rooms for

women and not expecting women to clean and cook at shelters (Özeki, 2011), (2) developing preventative programs for solitary deaths among older persons who live alone (WHO Western Pacific Region, 2011), (3) establishing guidelines for persons with severe dementia and their family members who stay at shelters (Japanese Council of Senior Citizens Welfare Service, 2011), and (4) having care manuals for children (Japanese Medical Support Network, n.d.; Japanese School Psychology Association, n.d.; Japan Society of Physiological Anthropology Stress Research Group, 1998). Although the experiences with the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami have been unique and some modifications to the previous guidelines are necessary, previous experiences shaped approaches in responding to disasters and addressed the changes in social profiles and life styles. Similarly, the first-hand information gathered and recorded by the current disaster-relief volunteers will contribute greatly to future disaster-response guidelines.

Conclusion

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami have affected countless people and will continue to influence many parts of the world over future decades, especially with the radiation threats from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. Narrative documentation of disaster-relief volunteer experiences in the continuing recovery process helps identify our future roles and create new resources. Lastly, I would like to express my great appreciation to the volunteers and organization staff I encountered during my disaster-relief efforts. I would like to end with recognizing the resilience of *hisaisha*, who continue to provide evidence of post-trauma growth that has positively impacted people in Japan, and around the world.

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