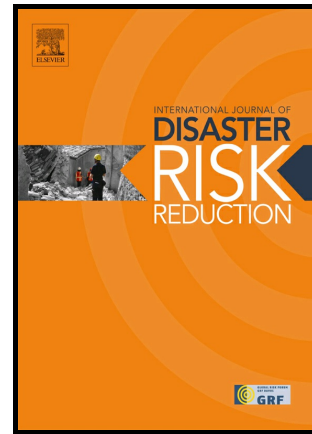


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Social Vulnerability of Marginalized People in Times of Disaster: Case of Thai Women in Japan Tsunami 2011

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Abstract

Although Japan has a long history of disaster response experience with comprehensive disaster preparedness plans and management, the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami generated an unexpected and massively devastating tsunami that affected the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011. This led to catastrophic destruction in the coastal areas of the Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. Besides massive physical destruction, the tsunami disaster also created significant socio-economic impacts on people and put them into vulnerable situations. Among the tsunami victims, there was a small group of Thai women who lived in Ishinomaki city, one of the worst tsunami-affected areas. They were struggling with their life, actually even before the tsunami disaster happened. Findings from this exploratory study conducted through qualitative research provide understanding of the pre-existing socio-cultural conditions of Thai women in Ishinomaki. Their conditions of living were addressed which lead to understanding conditions of degrees of social vulnerability in times of disaster as a 'double vulnerability' for Thai women in this case. They needed assistance in both the physical aspect to reboot their living condition and mental assistance to recover from the stress of the tsunami experience. There is a discussion on intersecting issues found in this case including gender inequality, limited access to information and assistance, language barriers, immigration statuses, and even limited social network for support as all these issues are vulnerabilities threatening marginalized people. Implications from this exploratory study could help to raise awareness and understanding of marginalization in disaster management by considering the importance of social vulnerability in relation to the diversity issue and marginalized people as it can become significant challenge of disaster management. Government, aid agencies, and other related authorities and organizations, then, would be able to identify a resilient strategy for those marginalized in times of disaster recovery and management.

Keywords

Marginalization, Thai women, tsunami disaster, vulnerability

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