

# “THE CLOSER I GET TO THEM, THE MORE DISTANT I FEEL FROM THEM”

Ryohei MIYAMAE, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University, Japan

## SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS PLAYED VITAL ROLES IN RECOVERING FROM THE 2011 EQ AND TSUNAMI

More than **1.4 million** people participated volunteer activities in Tohoku following the tsunami (Japan Social Welfare Council, 2015).

- Grass-root volunteers (Fisker-Nielsen, 2012; Shaw, 2014), Spontaneous volunteers (Twigg and Mosel, 2017)
- Importance of **improvisation** (Kendra and Wachtendorf, 2006)
  - Every disaster is different and disaster planning cannot predict every situation: real conditions will almost certainly differ from what was planned for, to some extent. This means that disaster managers need to be able to **adapt or improvise** in a crisis to solve new problems collectively, building on their skills, experience, training and knowledge. (Twigg and Mosel, 2017, p.453)

Example: Footbath (e.g. Atsumi and Goltz, 2014)

- putting feet in warm water for 15 to 20 minutes
- A tool for communication between survivors and volunteers
- A volunteer activity to listen to survivors' voices. And it often makes them mentally comfortable.



11/18/2019

## VOLUNTEERS SEEM TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH SURVIVORS --- REALLY?

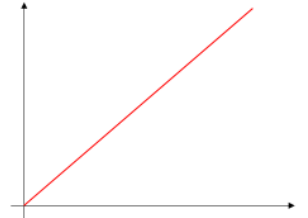
Some of volunteers (especially university students) visit a disaster-affected areas again and again, and they get along with local survivors.

How are they developing their relationship?

- Linear?: Are time to see survivors and intimacy correlation?
- Other model?: if so, how?

Research question

- I explored two research questions.
- How does the intimacy between a volunteer and survivors change?
- How does a volunteer consider the transition of their relationship?



11/18/2019

FORUM 2019 IN NICE, FRANCE 2

## AN INTERVIEW WITH A VOLUNTEER

Interviewee: Ms. A

- She now works a general incorporated association to engage in recovery assistance in Fukushima. She participated in her university's volunteer programme in Fukushima many times. After that, she started to exchange letters with an older woman living in a temporary house there and got friendly with her elderly pen pal. Half and a year after first visiting there, she started to work the association which she now works as a temporary worker for one year when she was a university student. She got married to a local man who works at a town office four days after this interview.

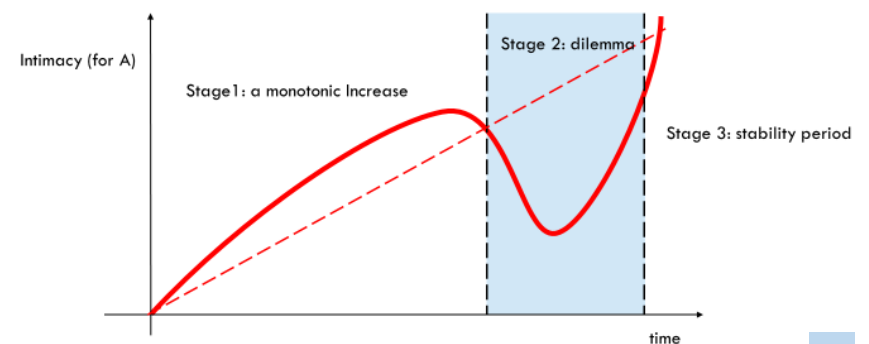
A detail of the interview

- When?: 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2019
- Where?: Her office in Fukushima prefecture
- How long?: about an hour
- How to record: IC recorder

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FORUM 2019 IN NICE, FRANCE 3

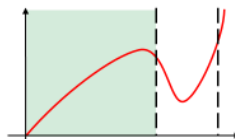
## TRANSITION OF INTIMACY WITH SURVIVORS



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## STAGE 1: A MONOTONIC INCREASE



**This phase is when she participated in volunteer activities in Fukushima and exchanged letters her old pen pal living in a temporary house there.**

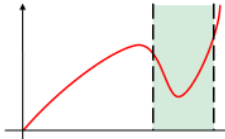
"I visited Fukushima four or five times a year as a volunteer, and I felt I wanted to see survivors in Fukushima not as a volunteer but as a friend or a grandchild for them."

"The letter from an older woman who we made friendship when visiting a temporary house in Fukushima also said difficult things to ask when we met in person. While writing a letter in Kyoto, I thought Fukushima was a bit far away. Then, I realised I was eager to live there!"

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FORUM 2019 IN NICE, FRANCE 5

## STAGE 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL DILEMMA OF VOLUNTEER



**This phase is when she worked as a temporary worker there for one year and she returned to her university in Kyoto.**

"The closer I get to them, the more distant I feel from them"

- Psychological dilemma of volunteer

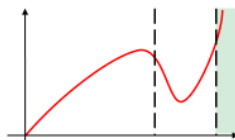
"I thought I was a stranger even though I had lived there for one year. I thought it was very important whether or not I was there when the disaster had happened. I could never be 'a survivor' even how much I empathise them."

**She was in anguish over the dichotomy between survivor and volunteer** (e.g. "I could never be 'a survivor' even how much I empathise them.").

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## STAGE 3: STABILITY PERIOD



**This phase is when she graduated from university and got a job in Fukushima as a full-time worker. She settled down in Fukushima.**

She managed to deal with the dichotomy. She got an identity of Fukushima people because she realised she could move freely from there.

- "I am thinking that I can live here with a little bit of the idea that there is a way to live a life in another town."
- "That is because I feel relieved that I can come back here anytime. Speaking in the extreme, when I die, I will be buried in a grave here."

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## CONCLUSION

I revealed there is a non-linear model of the transition of intimacy between a volunteer and survivors.

A volunteer who I interviewed with felt the dilemma that made their intimacy decrease although she meets them again and again.

The dilemma seems to result from the dichotomy between survivor and helper from outside.

Prospect

- I am going to have more interview with people who have experienced a few or more volunteer activities.

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