

## Introduction

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake occurred near Fukushima, Japan, triggering a tsunami and nuclear power plant meltdown leading to evacuation of 470,000 people.

Since 2012, a group of volunteer docents from the 9/11 Tribute Center in New York City, has traveled to Nagomi Mental Health Care Center in Soma, Kara-Koro Station in Ishinomaki, and Ogatsu Rose Factory Garden as part of an intercultural exchange that relied on outreach to promote post-traumatic recovery from 3/11.

**Our study evaluated the psychological impact of participation in an intercultural exchange with survivors of the 3/11 disaster on 9/11 docents.**



The remains of the Crisis Management Center after the 3/11

## The Photovoice Process

Photovoice is a community-based participatory research method utilizing documentary photography. Participants engaged in two sessions of photo-taking over the course of one week. For first round was guided by two framing question that were developed via group discussion:

- 1) How can we tell the impact that we're having, or the impact of this trip?
- 2) How are we being perceived?

The second round of photo-taking was guided by the two preceding questions, as well as a new question:

- 3) How do we believe this trip will impact our experience as docents?

Each participant was interviewed about the photos they took in relation to the framing question. These interviews were recorded for later analysis of shared themes.

## Methods

Three members of our team coded interview transcripts independently, and as a group we identified the inductive codes that guided further analysis. Two senior researchers also coded the transcripts and assisted with data analysis.

## Results



**"We really bonded together, and I felt comfortable. I felt that she was like a grandmother to me. I was holding her, squeezing her, and she was excited."**

**Theme: The significance of human connection and bonds**

Axial and selective coding of individual interviews yielded nine key themes:

- (1) the utility of sharing for processing trauma,
- (2) tribulations of the recovery process,
- (3) modeling sharing and breaking barriers to sharing,
- (4) the importance of being present,
- (5) the role of a docent in spreading awareness and keeping experiences alive,
- (6) the significance of human connection and bonds, both in trauma and beyond,
- (7) feeling inspired and rejuvenated,
- (8) teaching and interpreting hope, and
- (9) feeling as though Photovoice helped generate group discussion and internal reflection.



**"The gentleman who I hugged shared with me that listening to my story gave him the strength to come out..."**

**Theme: The utility of sharing for processing trauma**

## Results (continued)



**"We helped her understand the tragedy that we went through, and that helped her open up and talk about their hardships."**

**Theme: The recovery process**



**"It gave me a feeling of elation to realize that our support work there really made a difference in someone's life, and...she expressed that to us."**

**Theme: The utility of sharing for processing trauma**

## Discussion

Participant interviews attested to the ability of an intercultural exchange to instill feelings of resilience among 9/11 docents reaching out to another disaster-stricken community.

Participants not only acquired a deeper appreciation of their own ability to overcome adversity but also experienced a gratifying desire to help 3/11 survivors better cope with their experiences.

As research continues to explore the nature and impact of post-disaster outreach, the benefits to those doing the outreach reflects a further area for study and for planning.

## Acknowledgements and References

1. C. Wang & Burris, 1997.

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