Memories of Children Survivors of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake

**Kaplan’s Typology for Trauma Memories, From Trauma System: The Politics of Fear and the Survival of Children (1984)**

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**Examples**

- **Extreme Physical and Emotional Stress**
  - After several days of being alone, he developed a fever of over 30 degrees with his family
  - The children who survived the 2011 East Japan Earthquake

- **Childhood Experiences and Family Expectations**
  - Anticipatory Responses
  - Secondary Experiences
  - Depression
  - Detailed Visions

**Introduction**

Over 1,700 children were orphaned by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. The Great East Japan Earthquake was one of the most catastrophic natural disasters ever to hit Japan and its damage was enormous and still continues today. Reconstruction Agency, a government agency, reported (2015) that 241 children lost both parents and 1337 children lost a parent in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

- 4 earthquakes with a magnitude of 7 or 9
- Hitting within 40 minutes of each other in Tohoku region
- Followed by a massive tsunami, reaching 128 feet
- Hitting within 40 minutes of each other in Tohoku region

**Proceeding Studies**

Research on the effects of this tragedy are ongoing, tracking children’s healing process and outcome in six time periods – right after the disaster, 3-months later, 1-year later, 5-years later, and now in 2017. The children who experienced the earthquake are now adolescents with mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

- After three to four years following the disaster, when
- The children who survived the earthquake are now adolescents with mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

**How They Heal**

In one of the most devastating natural disasters ever to hit Japan, there has been an outpouring of support to help children recover emotionally. Here are some examples that provide evidence for the victims’ voices – to know more about what actually happened to them.

- **I thought myself, “I had been born at the time, maybe I could have comforted my little son, pushed my grandfather’s wheelchair up the hill, helped my grandmother’s hand run with her...”**
- **I wanted to kill myself several times. Although it was tough, I decided to live on, since so many people died in the earthquake...**
- **Guardian of the tsunami orphan gets six years for embezzling his aid money**
- **Followed by a massive tsunami, reaching 128 feet**
- **Hitting within 40 minutes of each other in Tohoku region**

**Why Is This Important?**

The United Nations defines “trauma” as “a state of disorder arising from the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material and environmental impacts which exceed the ability of the affected people to cope using only their own resources. Various natural disasters occur each year anywhere in the world. This occurs more frequently and at each one appears to be getting bigger and bigger. In Japan, people have prepared for years, following the government’s guideline to stock a 3-day supply of food and other necessities to survive a disaster. However, in this earthquake, it was not enough.”

We need to know when a disaster occurs, that there is support from outside of Japan to provide the necessary assistance during and after the disaster. In the event of a nuclear disaster, we need to be prepared for the worst.

**The Web Proposal**

This project aims to offer opportunities to spread information on this research. The purpose is to obtain the interest of various audience and we will be able to reach more people.

**How Can I Spread the Word?**

There are more than a handful of organizations throughout Long Island, which specialize in helping children in need. A couple of those that are the focus for the victims of Hurricane Sandy. The American Red Cross on Long Island in East Meadow, Association for Mental Health and Wellness in East Setauket, Mental Health Association-NYC in Hicksville are among those. See the code to see the list of local organizations.

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**Acknowledgments**

Professor Peggy E. Christoff, Assistant Chef Miki Hikia Lu, Stuyvesant High School Library

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**References**

- Christoff, P. E. (2011). Beyond Tomorrow: A group of 9/11 survivors and doctors of the Ithaca School of Medicine in Mount Sinai, NY, travels to sites throughout the Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate prefectures, and exchanges their experience and feelings of survivors and families of 9/11 and 3/11 every year. The remarkable point of this program is that doctors continuously examine and evaluate the effectiveness of this type of exchange, based on the FEMA criteria. The doctors organize symposiums and workshops for medical students of NY and Tohoku; and emphasize the importance of long-term support systems. One outcome of this exchanges was a picture book titled Message on a Wrig written in both English and Japanese.