

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION TOWARD HAZARD OF FIRE AND PARTICIPATION IN PREVENTION OF FIRE DISASTER¹

Adi Fahrudin, Sapora Sipon and Ahmad Rozelan Yunus

Abstract

This paper describes the results of a survey about community perceptions toward hazard of fire and participation in prevention of fire disaster. The study was conducted among communities of Kampung Kawang, Papar, and Kampung Likas at Kota Kinabalu. The result of the study shows that there was awareness of likely fire hazard which would threaten their personal safety though they believe it was unlikely to occur in one's life among the subject. The likely of hazard of fire was also being underestimated and misunderstood by the subject. The study supports the notion that the public frequently have a low personal interest in risk but a high expectation of government responsibility and others people support in the case of disaster..

INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters often result in destruction of property, major economic losses for affected communities, serious injuries, and loss of life (Delamater & Applegate, 2000). The major fire problem in our country is residential. Home fires occur with much greater frequency than fire in public building. Majority of fire victims is death and injuries. Generally, causes of home fires is cigarette and mosquito coil. Others causes are reported as heating, incendiary/suspicious, children playing, cooking, electrical distribution, and all other causes.

In terms of property damage, fires cause by heating equipment account for the biggest monetary losses. Homeowners increasingly use a number of alternative heat sources such as wood stoves and portable electric or kerosene stalled incorrectly, poorly maintained, or misused. Incendiary fires, or those of suspicious origin, also cause significant dollar losses. Many people are surprised to learn that arson is as much a problem in the residential areas as it is in business and industry.

Preparedness for the hazard of fires - that is, house fires, fires in industrial or transport facilities, and wildfires - is obviously very important, given that not only the belongings but the very lives of humans are at risk. In Australia, bushfires in particular are a bigger threat than anywhere else in the world (Pyne, 1991). Consequently, hazard management

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becomes a crucial task. Public authorities are responsible for fire prevention, fire risk information/communication/education and fire emergency management. These tasks need to be addressed not only from a technical but also organizational and socio-psychological perspective.

People who might be exposed to fires need to be optimally informed about the hazard characteristics, preventive measures and appropriate behaviors during the onset of a fire event, and they must understand their own responsibilities. Authorities have to compose pertinent emergency planning, prepare coping strategies, and communicate the relevant information effectively to residents and communities as a whole (Barham, 1996; Chase, 1993; Robertson, 1989). Such tasks go far beyond the 'classic' firefighting missions of fire authorities.

In fact, a shift in the general orientation of fire risk management seems obvious (see, e.g., Smith et al. 1996, Rhodes & Reinholdt 1998). In recent years the Country Fire Authority of Victoria has introduced a novel approach to fire safety, the "Community Fireguard" program, which is based on *community involvement and aims at enhancing individual responsibility* for fire safety and survival strategies (cf. e.g., CFA 1995, Beckingsale 1994, Beckingsale & Petris 1994, Jones 1987, Whelan 1987).

Planned about orientation program of fire risk management based on community participation and enhancing community empowering for fire prevention and survival strategy in our country is not priority. But we aware that government can not solved many problems in our community. Therefore, community participation and empowering which supporting from government are important. We have not more information about community based program in disaster prevention. Therefore, the need for community to be well prepared in areas prone to fire disaster must be ready by government organization rescue.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to present the findings from a field research of community perception and participation in disaster prevention carried out in the State of Sabah from October to November 2001. This study was to identify the characteristics of disaster victims and non-victims, the community perception toward hazard of fire between victims and non-victims. This study also looked and compared their participation in disaster prevention. Finally, the implications of the findings were discussed in the context of disaster management.

METODOLOGY

Research Design and Location

The field study was conducted in Sabah. The subjects were interviewed by trained enumerators. Two identified areas were chosen: Kampung Kawang in Papar and

Kampung Likas in Kota Kinabalu. All these areas were experiencing the natural disaster of fire and previously experience before.

Subject

A total of sixty victims and fifty seven non victims were chosen as subjects. They were chosen using a *purposive sampling technique*. The distribution of the subjects by disaster location is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution for subject by Location

Location	Victims	Non-victims	Total
Kampung Likas	32	26	58
Kampung Kawang	28	31	59
Total	60	57	117

Instruments

One set of questionnaire was used. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section collects demographic data. The second section measures community perception toward hazard of fire. The questionnaire contains two types of response. Close ended question and open-ended question. Instrument for measuring of community perception and community participation in fire disaster prevention was developed based on *Community Attitude Scale* (Bosworth, 1954) and *Chapin's Social Participation Scale* (Chapin, 1955). A pilot study was done and data analysis shows that the coefficient alpha for *Community Perception toward Hazard of Fire Scale* and *Community Participation in Disaster Prevention Scale* are .6754 and .8640.

Procedures

The researchers collected basic general demographic information by visiting the affected locations and meeting the headmen and some significant others who became contact persons during the actual fieldwork. These data and information were used to plan the research design and methodology. The contact persons played a very important function during the actual fieldwork in all areas. Ten enumerators were given intensive training on how to interview, how to use the questionnaire and how to collect data. The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was done in in Kawang Village in the district of Papar, and it is about an hour drive from Kota Kinabalu. The fieldwork here took one day. The second phase was in Likas Village; about 20 minutes drive from Kota Kinabalu. It also took one day to complete data collection here.

Data analysis

The data obtained were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson correlation.

RESULT OF THE STUDY

Socio-Demographic of victims and non-victims

Total number of subjects, victims accounted for 51.3 percent (60) while non-victims accounted for 48.7 percent (57). The t-test was used to compare the characteristics of victims and non-victims. The result showed no significant differences between the two groups in all the variables. Therefore subsequent discussion will only focus on the characteristics of the total subjects. The age of the respondents ranges from below 20 to up to 60 years, with a mean of 32.5 years and standard deviation of 14.4 years. Male accounted for 32.5 percent (38) and female for 67.5 percent (79). Thirty-five percent (41) of the respondents had not attended a formal education, 35.9 percent (42) had attended primary school, 12.8 percent (15) had attended secondary school, 12 percent (14) had attended high school, 2.6 (3) had attended college, and only 1.7 percent (2) had attended university level education.

Seventy-five percent (88) of the respondents are self-employed, 19 percent (22) work in private sector, 5.2 percent (6) work in government agencies. Seventy-six percent (89) of the respondents are married, 19 percent (22) still single, 5.4 percent (6) widowed/divorcees. Seventy-four percent (86) of the respondents are ethnic Bajau, 16.2 percent (19) other ethnic like a Kadazan, Sinos, Murut, etc. 6.8 percent Indonesian Bugis (immigrant), and 3.4 percent (4) Brunei-Malay.

Physical damages of fire disaster

A t-test comparing the physical damages of victims and non-victims found no significant difference between the two groups. The following report refers to the total subjects as a whole.

Twenty eight percent (33) reported loss of house, 24.8 percent reported the loss of one item, 15.7 percent (18) reported the loss of cars, 13.7 percent (16) the loss of shop houses, 3.4 percent the loss of furniture and 2 percent (7) reported other small damages which were insignificant.

Number of disaster previously experienced

The t- test was used to compare the number of previously experienced disaster between victims and non-victims. The result showed no significant difference between the two groups. Thus subsequent report will focus only on the total sample.

Thirty three percent (39) of the respondents have no previous experience with disaster, 7 percent (8) experienced one disaster prior to this, 33.9 percent (39) had two previous experiences, 4.3 percent (5) had three experiences, and only 2.6 percent (3) had more than three experiences.

Community Perception toward Hazard of Fire

Table 2 showed that the community perception toward hazard of fire between victim and non-victim are different. On community perception toward hazard of fire, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of victims are found (M=49.8814, SD=10.1167) to be significantly different from the mean and standard deviation of non-victims (M=42.2600,

SD=8.5853) ($t = 4.197, p = .000$). The mean for victims are higher indicating that the victims suffer higher good perception level toward hazard of fire than non-victims.

Table 2: Comparison on community perception toward hazard of fire

Variable	Victim		Non-Victim		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Community perception toward hazard of fire	49.8814	10.8814	42.2600	8.5853	4.197	.000*
Knowledge about prevention and preparedness of fire disaster	14.0000	3.9574	12.2308	2.9280	2.655	.000*
Awareness toward hazard of fire	17.8475	3.8453	14.7273	3.3745	4.591	.000*
Perception toward impact of fire disaster	14.6000	3.5806	11.7193	3.4680	4.417	.000*

* Significant at 0.05 level

With regards to knowledge about prevention and preparedness of fire disaster, the means and standard deviations of victims ($M=, 14.0000$ $SD=3.9574$) and victims ($M=12.2308$, $SD=2.9280$) are found to be significantly different ($t = 2.655, p = .000$). A comparison between the means showed that the mean for the victims is higher, thus indicating that the victims suffer a higher level of good knowledge about prevention and preparedness of fire disaster.

Otherwise, the study found that the community awareness toward hazard of fire between the victims and non-victims to be significantly different ($t = 4.591, p = .000$). The mean and standard deviation for the non-victims are 17.8475 and 3.8453 respectively while the mean and standard deviation for non-victims are 14.7273 and 3.4680 respectively. The community awareness toward hazard of fire of victims is found to be higher than the level for victims indicating that the victims awareness higher level of community awareness toward hazard of fire when compared with the non-victims.

On community perception toward impact of disaster, the mean and standard deviations of non-victims ($M=14.6000$, $SD = 3.5806$) and victims ($M=11.7193$, $SD=11.7193$) are found to be significant different ($t = 4.417, p = .000$). The participation in prevention level of non-victim to be higher than the level of victims. Overall, the community perception of fire disaster has been found to be significantly different for non-victims than for the victims in the three aspects studied.

Community Participation in Fire Disaster Prevention

Table 3 show that the differences on community participation in fire disaster prevention between victim and non-victim. On community participation, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of victims ($M=45.9474$, $SD=7.9269$) are found to be significantly

different from the mean and standard deviation of non-victims ($M=37.5000$, $SD=7.1716$) ($t = 5.814$, $p = .000$). The mean for victims are higher indicating that the victims suffer higher participation level than non-victims.

Table 3: Community participation between victim and non-victim

Variable	Victim		Non-victim		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Community participation	45.9474	7.9269	37.5000	7.1716	5.814	.000 *
Participation in prevention	22.7193	4.1908	21.8302	4.5351	1.069	.288
Participation in recovery	8.9492	2.1044	8.4909	1.8942	1.219	.225
Provide assistance to other peoples	16.4211	3.6398	15.4906	4.5346	1.191	.236

* Significant at 0.05 level

Based on table 3, the participation in prevention sub scale means and standard deviations of victims ($M=22.7193$, $SD=4.1908$) and non-victims ($M=21.8303$, $SD=4.5351$) are found to be significantly different ($t = 1.069$, $p = .288$). A comparison between the means showed that the mean for the victims and non-victims are not different experiencing related participation in prevention to fire disaster.

The study also found the participation in recovery level of victims and non-victims to be significantly different ($t = 1.219$, $p = .225$). The mean and standard deviation for the victims are 8.9492 and 2.1044 respectively while the mean and standard deviation for non-victims are 8.4909 and 1.8942 respectively.

The result of t-test indicating participation in recovery level between victims and non-victim are not different. The provide assistance to other peoples sub scale refers to. On this sub scale, the mean and standard deviations of victims ($M=16.4211$, $SD=3.6398$) and non-victims ($M=15.4906$, $SD=4.5346$) are found to be not significant different ($t = 1.191$, $p = .236$). The mean for victims and non victim are indicating that the victims provide assistance to other people level than non-victims are same. Overall, the community participation in disaster has been found to be significantly higher for victims than for non-victims. But in three aspect (sub scale) studied are not very significant different between victims and non-victim of fire disaster.

Relationship between community perception and community participation

The Pearson correlation test was used to correlate community perception with community participation in disaster as show on table 4.

Table 4: Correlation inter variables

No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Community perception	-	.842**	.868**	.872**	.459**	.317**	.138	.323**
2.	Knowledge about hazard	.842**	-	.585**	.626**	.424**	.357**	.091	.397**
3.	Awareness toward hazard	.868**	.585**	-	.655**	.438**	.277*	.146	.271**
4.	Perception toward impact	.872**	.626**	.655**	-	.377**	.243**	.156	.220*
5.	Community participation	.459**	.424**	.438**	.377**	-	.773**	.428**	.719**
6.	Participation in prevention	.317**	.357**	.277**	.243*	.773**	-	.488**	.874**
7.	Participation in recovery	.138	.091	.146	.156	.428**	.488**	-	.067
8.	Provide assistance to others	.323**	.397**	.271**	.220*	.719**	.874**	.067	-

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Base on table 4. community perception has significant correlations with seven variables, but no correlation with participation in recovery. Variable participation in recovery just has correlation with community participation and participation in prevention. In correlation with perception toward impact it has correlation $r=.220$ at 0.01 level only. Generally, this variable found that not significant correlation with another aspect.

DISCUSSION

Result of the study show that these was a significant of different community perception toward hazard of fire between victims of fire disaster and those who were not from two location of the study. Although the victim used to experience that kind of disaster, their participation was still not so better than non victim. In all three aspect of participations there were not significant difference between victims and non-victims, especially participation in prevention, recovery and participation in provided assistance to others people

However, studied show that there was significant a different between victims and non-victim on awareness of the recurrent of hazard of fire disaster. The mean difference indicated that awareness of the victim is higher than non-victim. It showed that how experience form knowledge and awareness regarding the hazard of fire disaster. There is also a significant difference the aspect of perception on fire disaster impact among victims and non-victim whereby the victims mean was found higher than the non-victims. The difference indicated that perception on impact of hazard of fire among victims was higher concerning their previous experiences in dealing with disaster.

These finding was theoretically parallel, since those who have undergone such experience were more alert with their condition and their environments. One big issue which is debatable here is whether the finding of the study convinced assumption of most people that attitudes and behavior are formed in accordance to that of previous experience (Ajzen, 1993). Secondly, the issues of community participation in prevention, recovery and provide assistance to others people. This study found that there was no significant difference between the two groups in three aspects studied. Result of this study against to

many study in developing countries which show that peoples from developing countries are high participation in development program (Bamberger & Sham, 1989).

These finding indicated victims who were given attention and assistance from the government, political members, NGO's, or other relief on other parties. Questions arise here, whether low participations indicated that victims have subsidy mentality or dependency from outsider or not supposed resources. If not supposed resources in community to provide to others people, in the fact that participation not supposed to be in the form of materials (Cary, 1970). Participation in the context of fire disaster prevention in one village, for example, could be in form of thought and non material assistance especially in the prevention, recovery and rehabilitation aspects.

If dependency attitude on subsidy occurred among victims and non-victims, empowering which is being hoped by government hard to real. Probably in their mind have such assumptions that the victim will set assistance and sympathy from other people. This situation was believed if they are being given attention by the media. Therefore, the self reliance and the need to take care of their asset did not exist. Further more; the awareness of fire disaster would happen in no time in their place have been totally neglected. These finding was accordance to Oakley (1991) that dependency mentality prevent to self reliance and empowering people to develop them selves and their community.

IMPLICATION ON EMPOWERING COMMUNITY IN DEALING WITH FIRE DISASTER

One of the approaches that have been done by any parties if disaster happen is that gives immediate assistance. Theses assistance is not only rescue effort such as of food, clothes, but also house re-buildings. This matter happens frequently till now and it has been called as the traditional problem solving approach. However, in modern problem solving, the approach used is not meant to weaken up the victims and turned them into becoming dependency, helplessness, and powerless. Therefore, based on this study, one action plan was proposed in order to make community especially the victim more independent, self help, and empowering in prevention of fire disaster. Public authorities are responsible for fire prevention, fire risk information/ communication/education and fire emergency management. These tasks need to be addressed not only from a technical but also economic, management, organizational and socio-psychological perspective. Based on ours research, we suggest that action plan of fire prevention education program. The action plan concerns the following steps:

Collaborative partner

Both government and people suffer when they have an unrealistic reverence for government expertise. This view saddles government with false sense of their own omnipotence and traps clients into a culture of dependency. Empowerment presumes actives, collaborative roles for clients-partners.

Forming Partnership

Collaborative effort has been done not only when disaster happen. Education and to give information how to prevent, to cope, and to reduce risk and impact of fire disaster should be give to those disaster victims so as they have preparation, knowledge, and alertness over hazard of fire that always treat to them. In this matter, information giving to the community is very important to ensure everyone possess adequate knowledge about disaster management.

The Nature of Community Participation

Community participation in fire disaster prevention, recovery and rehabilitation is most important. Without community participation, disaster prevention program are unsuccessfully. In the context of fire disaster prevention, community participation is an important component to community aware to the hazard of fire disaster.

Articulating Challenges

An articulating of community challenges and disaster potential are also needed. Frequently our community didn't know challenges, danger resources, and disaster potential. Therefore, fire disaster prevention education is important and must be to teach to our community.

Identifying Strengths

We need to identify of resources and strengths in community which used to prevent, recovery and rehabilitation of disaster. Community potential can be maximum utilized and we hope that people not dependency to outsider people. Assistance from outsider is complementary to resources and potential in community. Community strengths are integration, cooperation, tolerance, and working together spirit among the peoples. This is a potential and strengths in community which important in disaster management.

Analyzing Community Resources Capabilities: improving fire prevention and Preparedness education

Within hazard management, providing and utilizing pertinent information in an interactive manner is a core process (refers to table 5). But important to this are fire prevention education and public relations. A large part of fire education and public relations is to develop public awareness and secure community cooperation in maintaining safe conditions (Bever, 1996). An inspection program offered to homeowners is an excellent mean of establishing a rapport between fire services personnel and the community. The fire department public relation officers can enhance the image of the department by carefully explaining the responsibilities and duties of fire fighters to the public. Once the public becomes familiar with role of the fire department in the community, fire service personnel can concentrate on their primary duty –to prevent loss of life and property from fire. Fire prevention education has resulted in a measurable decrease in fire losses and in greater safety.

Table 5: Tasks and Means of the Fire Prevention Education

Primary types of risk communication aims

- Advancing/changing knowledge and attitudes regarding hazards & risk-taking of disaster
- Modifying risk-related behavior of people exposed to hazards of fire
- Promoting community participation in hazard of fire disaster
- Facilitating and joint cooperation to prevention of fire disaster
- Developing disaster preparedness and emergency management

Communication means & channels

- Print material (e.g., fliers & brochures), distributed by institutions/agencies
- Product information, machine operating instructions, etc
- Public information services, 'hot lines', etc
- Educational video/film/computer products
- Info presented via broadcasting, television, newspapers, journals & the internet
- Expert presentations (at meetings, trainings, drills etc)
- Warning sirens (or messages through villages security post or mosque loudspeakers)

Adapted from Rohrmann, (1995). *Community-Based Fire Preparedness Programmes: An Empirical Evaluation*.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The research undertaken has the following limitations:

1. The research deals only with fire disaster. The results have limited external validity and therefore cannot be readily generalized to all disaster situations.
2. The scales needs to be revised and more reliability and validity studies done to assure its quality.
3. Data collection technique should also include in-depth interview with victims and non-victims.

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psychological resolution of the individual's immediate crisis and restoration to at least the level of functioning that existed before the crisis period". The goal is a limited one: "The individual must either solve the problem or adapt to nonsolution" For example, if the crisis was precipitated by loss of a job; the finding another job is a solution. If the crisis was precipitated by spouse's decision to move out of the house, there is potential for either mending the relationship or coming to accept that the spouse is gone. In the case of the death of a significant other, the only alternative available for resolving the crisis is acceptance of the loss and adaptation to life without that person.

The focus of crisis intervention work is the immediate problem, not the totality of the clients' personality or life issues. In fact, the counselor must guard against allowing the sessions to ramble onto other issues that might distract attention from resolving the event that has resulted in the client's dis-equilibrium. Crisis intervention is oriented in the present: it involves the client's developmental history only to illuminate an understanding of the specific crisis and to gain knowledge of coping abilities that have served the client in previous situations.

COUNSELING STEPS IN CRISIS INTERVENTION

Aguilera (1998) describes crisis intervention as offering "the immediate help that a person in crisis needs to reestablish equilibrium". To help a client deal with an acute (or situational) crisis, a series of steps is necessary. Refer to counseling perspective, the client will progress through the following procedures and steps:

Step 1: Establish a Helping Relationship

The goals of the relationship-building portion the crisis intervention are to help the client feel understood, to reduce the client's emotional arousal through venting, and to reestablish some level of cognitive control on the part of the client (Hoff, 1989; Slaikeu, 1990). These goals can be attained through catharsis and sharing and through the communication of support, caring, respect, and safety. Relationship building is an important component of the crisis intervention process because it ensures that client and counselor establish a bond and make psychological contact. Only if clients feel some attachment to their clinicians (however, tenuous and temporary), will they be responsive to the clinician's interventions. Thus, the relationship-building phase cannot be undervalued. This is also the reason why relationship building and psychological contact remain important throughout the entire intervention.

In crisis intervention, the counselor must develop a clear understanding of the event that precipitated the crisis and the meaning of the event to the client. At the same time, the client needs to feel the support that grows from being understood. According to Gilliland and James (1997), "Basic listening and responding skills are the prerequisites for the opening gateways to all other therapeutic modalities". Therefore, the basic relationship building skills, including active listening and the core conditions of empathy, positive regard, genuineness, and concreteness, form the bedrock on which crisis intervention is