

The Magical Strength of *Nrimo* and *Gotong-Royong* A Quick Response Report Following the May 27, 2006 Earthquake in Yogyakarta

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Abstract. People's response and ways of coping to disasters vary across events. This quick response report aims to learn about the life reconstruction of the survivors within the 1st week following the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake. Initial unstructured interviews and observations were used during the emergency phase, and followed up with a quick survey of 677 survivors. Descriptive analysis and follow-up interviews were undertaken to verify the results. During the first three days after the disaster, survivors seemed to be in a period of shock. They accepted the event as determined by God (*nrimo*=accepting). The survey showed more than 90% believed that God will help them, but also that more than 90% started doing something. Local slogans can be widely observed, e.g., "Dlingo-Bangkit" (Revive-Dlingo!!). The local belief in *nrimo* seemed to yield positive energy, which enabled survivors to revive in a relatively short time. The "culture-of-waiting" seemed to function as a way to unify energy in "Gotong-Royong" (or mutual assistance).

Key words: disaster, Yogyakarta, local culture, revive, mutual assistance, positive energy

Abstrak. Respons dan cara menghadapi bencana sangat bervariasi dalam setiap kejadian. Studi "respons cepat" ini bertujuan untuk mempelajari proses kebangkitan kembali para penderita dalam minggu pertama setelah mengalami gempa bumi. Wawancara dan observasi tak-terstruktur dilakukan pada masa darurat, diikuti dengan survei cepat pada 677 orang yang terselamatkan. Analisis deskriptif dan wawancara verifikasi dilakukan setelah survei. Periode "terguncang" dialami pada 3 hari pertama. Masyarakat menerima kejadian tersebut sebagai sesuatu yang telah ditentukan oleh Allah (menerima = "*nrimo*"). Hasil survei menunjukkan bahwa lebih dari 90% percaya bahwa Allah pasti menolong mereka, bahkan lebih dari 90% telah melakukan sesuatu untuk bangkit kembali. Slogan "Dlingo Bangkit" banyak dijumpai di Desa Dlingo dan Turi. Tampaknya kepercayaan lokal dalam "*nrimo*" menyimpan energi positif, sedangkan "Gotong Royong" merupakan penyatuan energi positif dari para *survivor*, karenanya mereka bangkit dalam waktu yang relatif singkat.

Kata kunci: bencana, Yogyakarta, *nrimo*, bangkit, gotong royong, energi positif

Living with risk brings to light the urgent need for action to be taken—and the people who are doing so—in building sustainable societies in an increasingly disaster prone-world. Indonesia, as an archipelago country, has overwhelming potentials for disaster. Within the last three years Indonesia has experienced five major natural disasters across the country. The series of disaster has left psychological problems behind, in addition to economical

and physical destruction. While many people are aware of the terrible impact of disasters throughout the world, few realize that this is a problem that we can do something about. Colossal systematic efforts are required to identify and address the risks and to minimize potential disaster effects. There is a limited amount of research examining psychological responses to disasters in countries other than the United States and European (Green, 1998; Sattler, Preston, Kaiser, Olivera, Valdez, & Schlueter, 2002). This was due to a number of substantial hurdles in conducting this kind of research (Sattler et al., 2002). With regard to the need of learning the strength and weakness part of the society, this field study, which was conducted in Yogyakarta following the earthquake on May 27th, 2006, aimed to explore pattern of sur-

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vivors' life reconstruction focusing on life sufficiency right after disaster, especially the current earthquakes (May 27, 2006).

Methods

This study basically consisted of a qualitative and a quantitative phase (quick survey). Unstructured interviews and observation were employed during the qualitative phase to record experiences shared by the community and to learn the behavior observed in the community during the first week after the earthquake. Results from the qualitative phase were used to develop items for the quick survey. The survey covered issues on self-responsibility, self-initiative, and self-confidence in surviving and reviving post disaster. Descriptive analysis was run to learn the pattern of survivors' life reconstruction following the earthquake. Due to the nature of the chaotic circumstances, no scientific reviews were made deliberately before the action of data collection, however scientific and theoretical discussions were made afterwards.

Participants and Site of the Study

The qualitative phase was initiated by 24 students working voluntarily undertaking the unstructured observation and interviews. These students were volunteers for logistic dropping during the emergency phase after the earthquake, students of the Faculty of Psychology Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. They covered 14 location points of logistics distribution of the State-Owned Enterprises, having four different regions namely Bantul, Yogyakarta downtown, Sleman, and Klaten. Location points in Bantul were Sewon, Pajangan, Dlingo, Pundong, Kretek, Pandak, Banguntapan, Pleret and Jetis. The rest were Umbulharjo (Downtown Yogyakarta), Berbah (Sleman), and Gantiwarno (Klaten). Among the survivors, 15 were interviewed (11 men and 4 women). Their age ranged between 14 to 55 years old. Among 15 interviewees, four were significant stakeholders (*Pamong Praja and Ketua RT*).

The quantitative phase (quick survey) covered 677 participants from the above 14 location points of logistics distribution. Among 677 participants, 401 were men, 158 were women. The remainder did not put their sex identity, or this information was simply

not recorded due to field circumstances. Their age were between 19 to 81 years. Around 90% of the participants were between 19 to 50 years, and 10% were above 60 years old. The recorded education background were 10% elementary school, 23% secondary school, 50% senior high school, and 15% higher education (between 3 years or longer of college). They participated voluntarily; no particular sampling technique was employed in this quick survey.

Materials

An interview guide was used during the qualitative phase. However, due to the circumstances (during emergency phase after the disaster), this research allowed for unstructured utility of the guide. The interview guide covered issues on (1) demographic data (e.g., "*May I know how old are you Sir?*"); (2) signs of self-responsibility (e.g., "*Who do you think should be responsible to bring the situation back to the normal circumstances?*"); (3) signs of self-initiative (e.g., "*Do you have any plan to get things better Sir/ Madam?*"); and (4) signs of self-confidence (e.g., "*How would you deal with this by yourself Sir/ Madam?*"). Field notes recording all conversation and impression, in addition to what they have observed in the field during the logistic distribution, were recorded and used complementarily to the interview data. Informal conversations with groups of people in the surrounding during the data collection were recorded as well.

All of the data from different resources (interviews, observations, informal conversations and field notes) were compiled to develop a form of survey, a kind of questionnaire, to record pattern of life sufficiency of the survivors. The self-sufficiency questionnaire initially had three theoretical constructs, phrased in unfavorable and favorable statements developed by the author, namely self-responsibility (e.g., "*I don't know what to do if I don't get help*"), self initiative (e.g., "*I've started cleaning up these ruined yard*") and self-confidence (e.g., "*I'm not confidence thinking of my future at all*"). These domains were also used for the interviews' guide.

During the initial part of the questionnaire trial, self-determination was found to be important as well, and was therefore added into the questionnaire (e.g., "*I have plans to do*"). Items were derived based on the qualitative data and using the local language (Javanese) and local expression. Participants were asked, at

their convenient time, to rate if the statement in the item matched to what they had felt or experienced. Four options were provided to rate how well the statement represents their real condition.

Procedure

All research activities were attached to the activities of logistic distribution during the emergency phase (this included the distribution of utensils or other materials such as tents, *pacul* (hoe), brooms, and other household's utensils during the transition phase). Field observations were carried out during the logistic dropping. The research team reported daily all observations and field notes after distributing logistic to the targeted survivors. The whole study's activities were organized within the timeframe of the 3rd to 12th day post-disaster. Research assistants (24 students) were all psychology students recruited on a voluntarily basis and then trained and exposed to knowledge relevant to the psychological experience of survivors. They were also trained in skills of interview and data collection during disaster. Role playing on interview was practiced before going to the field. Sharing experiences were accommodated every evening following the data collection. Any inconvenient or conflicting experiences during the data collection were shared and solved during the evening for sharing and evaluation.

Results and Discussion

The earthquakes led to countless losses. Survivors not only experienced financial losses, but also lost relatives, families and significant others. Regardless those who were actively searching for help, during the very first-3-day emergency phase, however, unlike it was reported by Goltz, Russel, and Borque (1992) that people generally behave in an active and adaptive fashion during and after disaster impact, a number of survivors were observed to be less active compared to those in other countries like in the US (event of the WTC), Germany (floods in Dresden), and El Salvador (earthquakes) (reports on television).

Observation during the logistic dropping showed that there were groups of people sitting along the streets asking for donation. At some places, people in groups were waiting to get logistic from others or from the government (seemed like "indicating" lack

in self-initiative). Most of them stated that they were shocked and confused and not knowing what to do in the next days. Some said that the government should have helped them to recover (seemed to be indicating lack of self-responsibility). Little attention has been given to studying the effects personality characteristics on emergency response (Tierney, Lindell & Perry, 2001). Questions on the pattern of life reconstruction of the people began at this stage. Theoretically, this covered issues on self-sufficiency, which is supposed to be constructed by self-responsibility to make their own life getting recovered, self-initiative to search and explore any possible steps in making their life better, and self-confidence to go through them all. Please note, the word "indicating" during the qualitative phase refers to theoretical possibility. It might not be necessarily true, and therefore a field elaboration was conducted.

During the emergency phase, within the 1st 3 days, it was also observed that the logistic dropping was prioritized to get a broader coverage rather than working on the psychological strength of the shocking survivors. It was done without efforts of injecting motivation to the survivors to get stronger, and neither advocacy in showing ways of getting resources to improve their condition in terms of logistic and medication. Theoretically, it put the survivors in the subordinate position and so creating a sort of attitude of dependency. This may subsequently lead to the decrease of inner strength of the survivors with regard to their self-responsibility, self-initiative, and self-confidence. Logically, it might increase dependency and decrease the ability of survivors related to their self-sufficiency. Having this in mind, the need of having a team of advocacy to motivate survivors was becoming more obvious. However, no information existed about the extent to which this circumstance occurred in the field. There were also differences on characters of the community in different regions. Therefore, a quick survey on the life-sufficiency of the survivors was required to enable suitable advocacy for survivors in different regions.

Preliminary data from the qualitative phase showed that during the 1st 3 days after disaster, survivors seemed to be in the period of shock. In this phase, survivors indicated high dependency to others, most were less active (preferred to wait and tend to follow others), and simply accepted the disaster as given and determined by God (*nrimo* = accepting).

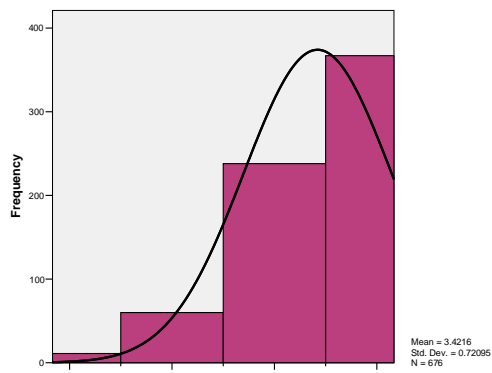


Figure 1. The government has to be responsible in helping survivors over coming the current situation.



Figure 4. We should be able to be responsible for ourselves without getting helps from others.

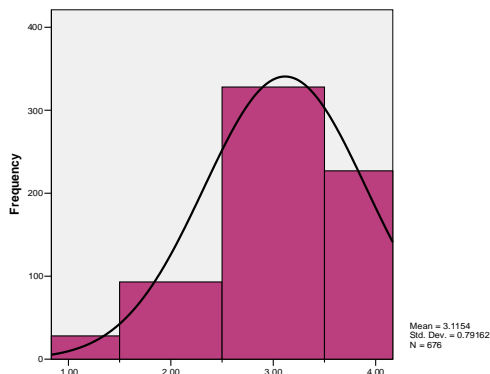


Figure 2. We need helps for our daily life.

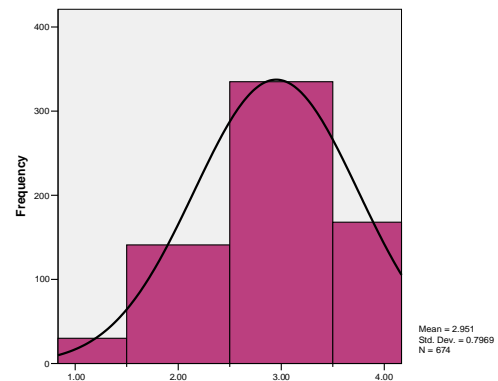


Figure 5. I have planned to get back to work.

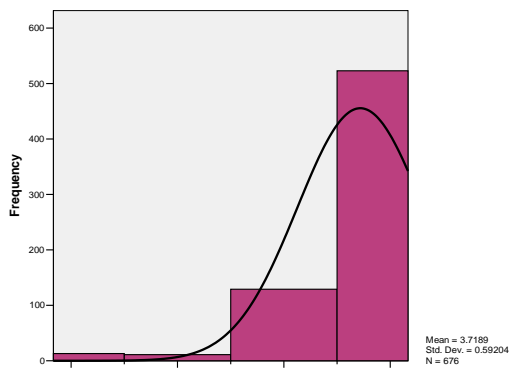


Figure 3. God for sure will give us the best way to get recovered.

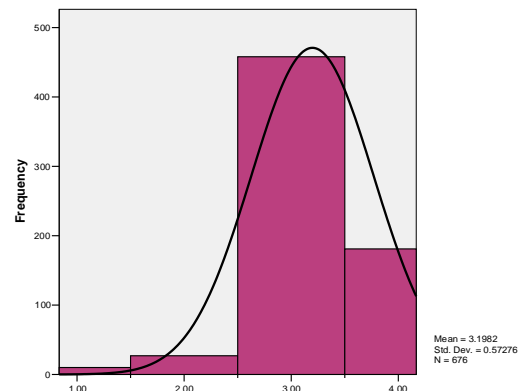


Figure 6. I have recollected all of my stuffs.

However, the survey produced a different picture compared to these observations. With regard to self-responsibility, God and the government seemed regarded as being responsible for making their life better.

This finding is consistent with studies of pre and post-disaster behavior by Lindell and Perry (1992), Quarantelli and Dynes (1972), and Taylor (1977). These authors stated that behavior in emergency

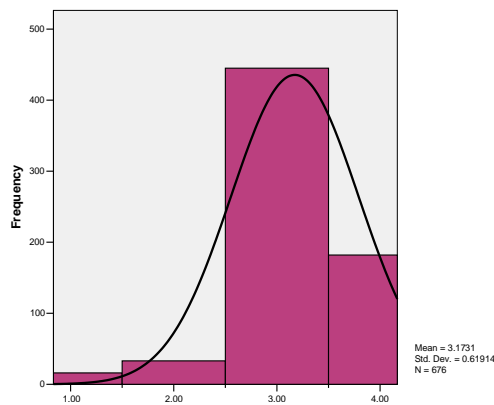


Figure 7. I have cleaned up all the broken tricks.

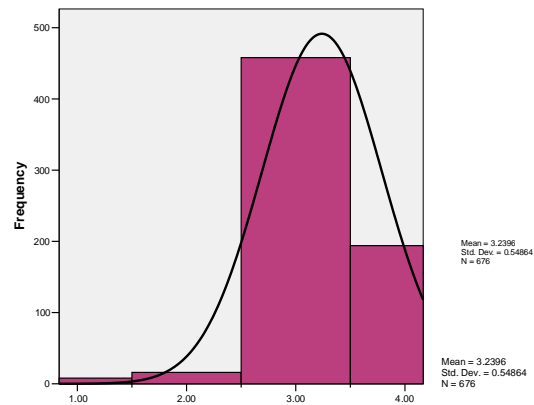


Figure 9. I have re-organized all of the left behind materials.

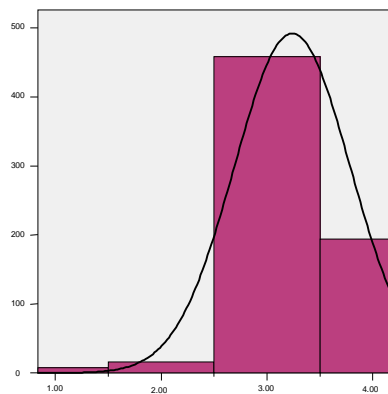


Figure 8. I have got plans to get back to work soon.

situations is strongly influenced by pre-emergency behavioral patterns. Most Indonesian believe in God, and this was reflected in the behavior of survivors.

More than 89% stated that the government has to be responsible in helping survivors to overcome the current situation (Figure 1). Similar expression was stated, for example 82% of the respondents expressed that they need help for their daily needs (Figure 2). With regard to survivors' spirituality, more than 96% reported that God, for sure, will give them the best way to recover (Figure 3). Nevertheless, 69% of the survivors stated that they should be responsible without getting help from others (Figure 4). This allows us to think that although "more" than 80% of the survivors placed responsibility of their life to the government and God, "more" than 50% of them realized that their life was their own responsibility.

The word "more" is written between apostrophes to remind us that the data was collected during an emergency phase, so that frequencies reported here might not be precise.

Surprisingly, survey on the self-initiative of the survivors reported that more than 90% of the respondents had started initiating doing something to help themselves. These were identified in their expression that 91% of the participants were already initiating to get help for their people, and more than 95% of the respondents stated that they had started collecting anything which can still be useful for their life (Figures 6, 7, & 9), even 90% of the participants reported that they have planned to get back to work as soon as possible (Figure 5,8).

The dynamics of findings in this study seemed to be relevant to the theory of Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) stated by Karanci, Nuray, and Acarturk (2005). They stated that the experience of a traumatic event might lead to the growth of new energy of learning and making significant move to change into a new perspective of direction, which can be applied to the rapid switch of the survivors from "waiting for help" to "standing to revive". It can also be due to positive attitude which was expressed in accepting help and problem solving (Nelson, 2008; Wachtendorf, Brown, & Nickle, 2008). This positive attitude was expressed in the local practice of "*Gotong Royong*" and "smiles" among themselves, even during emergency phase.

Unlike the results of the qualitative phase, data from the survey reported that more than 90% of the respondents stated that they had started doing something to help themselves, and more than 60% reported that they

had made a plan for themselves. The verification stage of the survey, which was carried out during the dropping more utensils within the transition phase, reported that survivors in some villages, like Dlingo and Turi appeared to be very active in reconstructing their chaotic homes and environments by themselves. Local slogans were wide spread, e.g., “*Dlingo Bangkit*” (Revive Dlingo!!). Hypothetically, the local belief in “*nrimo*” seemed to function as a mechanism of positive energy saving, which enabled survivors to revive in a relatively short time. The culture of waiting seemed to be a way of unifying energy in *Gotong Royong* (= mutual assistance). Acceptance (instead of rejecting) the disaster is perceived as positive energy, in accordance with mutual assistance, strengthening the community to get revived. A follow-up study to verify these hypothetical results was conducted, but reported in a separate article. Cultural models and disaster-related behavior seem to be important to get an integrated understanding of the community and to enable us to provide culturally sensitive and suitable assistance in other circumstances.

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