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Everyday Life and Risk

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to examine how our minds work in the face of risks threatening our life and their warnings. The background for the examination is the gap between scientific findings-based risk warnings and the lack of corresponding reactions on the part of the majority of ordinary citizens. By examining the two central concepts, everyday life and risk, the essay argues that the gap is attributed to our certain predispositions toward anything that may threaten to disrupt our life.

Relying on some insights from behavioral economics and cognitive psychology, the essay also argues for the need to view our everyday life as the seedbed for the action conducive to preparing for life-disrupting threat of various degrees. We suggest people’s everyday narratives to be the data of critical importance from which to reconstruct people’s contact with risks and their warnings in everyday context.

With this attention to everyday life, the essay emphasizes the importance of our understanding, though often unarticulated, that we do not live on borrowed time preparing only for a life-threatening threat. This is an attempt at providing a new perspective on human security through the lenses of life as lived.

1. Introduction

In our daily parlance, we wish to “return to everyday life” following a major disruption to our life such as a death to a family member. There are two “life”s in this short sentence, suggesting that each may stand for a distinct arena of human concerns. Yet, we often use them interchangeably, though the first seems to carry less weight—less distinct value attached to it—than the second. This may be so due to the fact that “everyday life” slips in and out of our casual conversations readily, whereas “life” has a way of stopping us to ponder even for a second.

Lost in this customary use of the two “life”s is the question of our primary concern: how do we reconcile our everyday life with constant threats to disrupt it, which may even hint at the need for changing the way we live our life?

Everyday life is that which most of us are preoccupied with “living,” as we concern and engage ourselves with things, chores and human contacts that collectively make up a day. If they had not been above constant examinations and re-examinations, that is, if they had not been sufficiently routinized, our everyday would have been nearly chaotic. The smaller the margins for these examinations, the

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greater the sense of stability in, and even of a steady rhythm to, our everyday life. We resort to that rhythm, unbeknownst to ourselves, as part of our resilience as we are exposed to the unexpected and the uncharted of various degrees on a daily basis.

Every one of us, of course, is given one life to live, that which ends with a death, the ultimate disruption. There is another way in which “life” crosses our mind. This is “life” which is formed in our minds as we give ourselves moments of thinking about it. It consists of our selective reflections on how we live everyday life. It is a resume of and an abstraction from our everyday life whose fragments have been and are being stored in our memory. “Life” in this sense does not have its own without everyday life.

Risk, by contrast, has gained a firmer footing in our conversations more recently. The notion must have been with us since time immemorial, but the recent disasters such as the Major Earthquake off Sumatra in 2004, and the Great East Japan Earthquake (3.11) in 2011 have helped the notion secure a prominent spot even in our daily conversations. We pay a little more attention to the signs showing where to evacuate in time of major earthquakes, or to a section in a super market earmarked for emergency food supplies; some of us have updated alarm software to our smartphones, or we may check more often than before if disaster alerts may be updated in the internet.

However, it is one thing that the notion of risk has more traction on our attention and it is entirely another that that traction plays an equally prominent role in the conduct of our everyday life. It is here that we need to call attention to the risk studies’ peculiar twist to the relationship between life and everyday life. Their presentation of risk is such that if life is securely protected, everyday life is freed from extra-pressure of speculations, fears, anxieties, and stresses. It follows that all efforts need to be designed to secure life against any major – life-threatening or life-ending – disruptions. Anything short of that effort on anybody’s part is considered “irrational.”

One problem with the effect especially of the long-term warnings remains unexamined: the disruptions appear to be always imminent and life-threatening. Little or no margin is left to question how imminent the risks turning into reality may be and, when they do, how serious they may be. We wonder, then, if one day spent is one less day left to prepare for life-threatening disruptions. Or, would everyday life have to be merely an investment in the preparations for the eventual life-threatening disruptions?

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2 Risk studies covers a wide range of issues and disciplines wherever elements of uncertainties matter. One sample which shows this almost boundaryless expanse may be the homepage of Cambridge University’s Centre for Risk Studies, https://www.cam.ac.uk/affiliations/centre-for-risk-studies, where efforts are shown to track nearly all sources of market disruptions. Our concern here, however, is both how perceived risks may work on our mind, and how the way we live works on the perception of risks.
This raises another problem. The experts with their own scientific backgrounds are easily found, dispersed among many distinct areas of our everyday life as in life-threatening health issues, life-threatening natural disasters, life-threatening traffic accidents, and the like. However, given the limited resources invested in sustaining everyday life, attention we give to one risk as demanded by one expert may be less attention to another. In the absence of everyday life experts, the choice of which risk to allocate our attention to is left almost entirely with us, “amateurs,” in that risk area, compounding what Urlich Beck calls the problem of “individualization” of the ultimate responsibility. (Urlich Beck, 1992, Pt II)

Our attention here to “everyday” of everyday life is a call for an examination of an uninvestigated – our predisposition toward serious disruptions as our life is shaped and reshaped through our daily interactions with our living environment and with others. It is also a search for the conditions under which we transition ourselves into risk-aversive (or -preventive) behaviors without compromising the rhythm of our everyday life. Here, our concern finds a resonating voice in some of the human security documents that the key freedom is one to pursue life that is worth living.³

2. Conceptualizing Everyday Life

2.1 Everyday life as we live it

What is everyday life? A sense of stability runs through it as we do things in a certain way. Occasional changes and adjustments in the way we do things and in things we do are prompted by that sense of stability. That is, the sense of stability in everyday life is the source of resistance not to compromise it too readily under the pressures to do so. Only when part or parts of things we do come unhinged for one reason or another, we would go through what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann call an “extreme transition” (Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, 1967, p. 26,) a wholesale evaluation of things we do and the way we do things. But occasions for that are rare.

One reason why we rarely deviate from things we do every day is that it is we who find it meaningful to do so. We value everyday life because it is an ensemble of things we find meaningful to do, and not just because it is freed from life-threatening threats and want.

One may choose to be a vegetarian or prefer white meat to red meat. He loves coffee, not tea,

³ Since 1994 Human Development Report, Human security is usually identified as freedom from the threat of violence and of want. We have no qualms about this obvious. However, we are more strongly inclined to think of human security as something that is rooted in our daily life, in what we do through everyday life (Rob McRae, 2001, p.15.) Hence this notion of freedom to pursue life worth living, the point which we find in other key human security documents such as Human Security Commission’s 2003 report, (Human Security Commission, 2003, passim.)
though he drinks tea when coffee runs out. He loves detective novels over romantic ones. He prefers outdoor activities than playing musical instruments. He’d rather work as a freelancer than take over the family business. He marries A, but not B whom he may love more. He works better only at coffee shops, but not at home.

What matters here is that the meaning attached to each of these choice behaviors is the making of our own, that is, an exercise of our subjective preferences. Lack of consistency across these behaviors matters little, since in our own subjective way of viewing things, they are integral parts of everyday life, “a coherent world” (Ibid., p.19) in its own right. The important implication is a realization that a substantial change in any one of many things we do would have to have its impact scattered among the rest of them.

Another point to note is that our subjective preferences for behavior by no means suggest that we live life of self-satisfaction. Our preferences are not dictated solely by the attributes we are born with and/or have acquired alone; they are shaped and re-shaped throughout the course of our development. Factors that come into play are indeed many: our biological conditions, our physical conditions, our upbringings (family, education, culture), our living environment, even our own self-image which heavily owes the interactions with others for its formation, among others (Erving Goffman, 1956, and Sheldon Stryker, especially Chapter 3.) In other words, our preferences are at least open to a plenty of opportunities for re-evaluations.

In sum, everyday life may be change-resistant, but is by no means inelastic. We negotiate every day our preferences, that is, the meaning we attach to a given behavior of ours as it interacts with others, with the environment in which the behavior is taken, and with the other things we do. Only when minor adjustments or incremental changes in our behavior no longer make the conditions of our everyday life negotiable for our preferences, the possibility of an “extreme transition” to a drastically altered course of life would loom large with considerable collateral damages to many of the other things we do.

2.2 Everyday life as the ‘reality par excellence’

Everyday life is an elusive notion. For one thing, it lends itself so readily to our casual conversations as if it were merely a superfluous adjective. For another, we may also find it too existentialist an effort to question what we usually do naturally. This elusiveness allows an assumption to creep into our minds easily: we are unmindful of things we do routinely. Berger and Luckman (1966) take an issue with that assumption.

As we have seen above, everyday life is a bundle of things we find meaningful to do for days on
end. However, that does not mean that we take things we do for granted and stop paying attention to them. We are in fact alert to anything that comes close to prompting us to re-evaluate what we do usually. Take for example, a slight drizzle in the early morning may halt us in the hallway before stepping out and prod us to think of bringing out an umbrella; a secondary news of food poisoning gives us a second to pose at our regular supermarket; or even a trivial thing like forgetting to take daily supplements nags our minds.

These instances are the evidence of how our minds are mindful of anything deviating from the daily routines. In other words, things we usually do every day are consuming our attention. As Berger and Luckmann see it, everyday life is demanding our “highest tension of consciousness,” and, in that sense, is the reality par excellence (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 21).

In this new light, everyday life takes on a new meaning. Everyday life is a theater where a crash or at least a competition may take place among different realities par excellence. A medical doctor’s reality may easily crash with that of a high-strung office manager: the former views everything in others from his “consciousness” that health matters the most, whereas the latter, perfectly healthy, may be exhausting every effort of his in generating a working environment conducive to higher office performance. For any words of warning from the medical doctor to make sense, they would have to go through the screening by the office manager’s attention which may be nearly consumed by, for example, the signs of subtle personality crash in the office. The mutual understanding is usually replaced by the mutual tolerance, a polite way of ignoring each other, leaving either of them often uninfluenced by the other. This is a reminder that everyday life is sitting on a balance between our conviction that everything is fine and a doubt that everything may not be so fine.

2.3 Everyday life as the learning process

In the previous sections, we have come to recognize that everyday life is not an accident in time and space that is merely liberated from the “threats and want.” It is filled with things we find meaningful to do. We also note that it often comes across the occasions for us to think if the things we do remain meaningful and if there are margins for change in them.

Such conceptualization of everyday life opens up an important question: how are we making our everyday life receptive to the need for change?

We know that if we need to run a careful calculation of cost and benefit of everything we do, it defeats the very purpose of calculation since there are too many things involved even for one day. We brush our teeth every morning and evening; some of us may go to the gym for workout once a week; nearly all of us go through medical check-up twice a year; we may drive or take a train or a bus to our
work place five days a week. We call these things we do on a regular basis a habit or a routine, with little or no margin for “thought or planning” (Don Norman, 2013, p.124.) We are very much aware that the greater the extent to which this habit permeates the things we do every day, the less psychological pressure on us, and the greater our preparedness for such calculations on an unexpected turn of events. Everyday life is loaded with occasions in which we learn the value of routinization of things we do and, by the same token, of the cost of failure to do so.

The question above can be rephrased: how do the changes find their way into our everyday life? The answer lies in the fact that we are also a quick learner. What sustains this learning process is the reinforced sense of efficacy of our action, as a behavioral economist, Daniel Kahneman, observes: we are “guided by the immediate … impact of gains and losses, and not by long term prospects of wealth and global utility” (Daniel Kahneman, 2011, pp.286-7.)

Going to school for a 6-year old may be traumatic and involve a mentally costly decision every morning for the first few weeks as it takes away from him at least parts of a familiar and routinized life. However, the same act of going to school is awarded repeatedly with the likes of fun time with new friends, exciting stories by the teachers, or a lunch away from home. In due time, the initial trauma diminishes and the habit of going to school settles in and the motivation shifts to a simpler, task-finishing act.

This habitualization or routinization both liberates us from the burdens of constant decision-making and gives the taste of what it is like to leave behind some of the previous routines of everyday life. It does not need to be a 6-year-old to go through this double-faceted process. Learning-unlearning does take place for a new college graduate who steps into his assigned office with a new suit on; a mid-career white color who is sent to a distant city; a chemical engineer at a company’s lab newly assigned to a sales section. With a differing degree of difficulty, every one of these individuals would go through the process of learning a new habit of doing things, and on its flip side, the process of unlearning and the pain of doing so.

Of course, not everything we do has gone through this dual learning-unlearning process. Still, a selective reflection on what we do helps us see an entrance for changes to step into our everyday life. We need to keep one point in mind: we do many things which are often so closely interconnected even when they appear otherwise in the eyes of others. It is we, seeing the meaningful connection among them, who make sure that they remain so. In other words, routinization is such that disruption in one thing we do is likely to disrupt other things we do.

It is for this reason that often times the learning process may not be so smoothly synchronized with the accompanying unlearning process, making the routinization process often hazardous. A
personnel manager sees in one of the office workers an unusual talent in generating consensus among his office mates and sends him off to another office where the collective performance has a lot to be desired. But the subordinate finds the transfer especially disruptive as his consensus-generating talent may be integral to other things he does which may be unrelated to the intra-office human relationship. A consequence may be either that the subordinate fails to live up to his billing as an exceptional office manager or that he finds this new work itself out of sync.

Everyday life is thus punctuated with occasions to evaluate the extent of routinization in things we do and test both the durability and flexibility of its routinized part(s).

2.4 Everyday life as a testing ground for knowledge

The observations above notwithstanding, we are not without resources to fall back on when confronted by things or events threatening to disrupt our everyday life. These are the savings, so to speak, of many kinds. They include the obvious such as monetary savings through the astute management of income and health through careful dietary habit and exercise. When endowed with these resources, we are in a better position of giving ourselves more time and a psychological cushion for adjustments in everyday life to take root. However, we also need to keep in mind that with some of the resources, we may be less inclined to take disruption seriously as a result.

Less obvious as the resources at our disposal is the stock of knowledge. Here we have in mind not only what we know (about things and events). It also includes the knowledge of how we come to know them in a given situation as what we know usually go through what Jerome Bruner calls the “cultural shaping of meaning-making” (Jerome Bruner, 1990, p. xii and passim) and a versatile language which we acquire through formal education and social life. The versatile language may be an odd term, but it implies its capacity of differentiating threatening and non-threatening disruptions, and as such it plays a significant role in our doing things in a given situation.

Stored in the stock of knowledge are the kind we may acquire through the necessity of living such as professional knowledge that we pick up through job-training to secure regular income, and those of more social in character through interactions with others. The distinction here between professional and social knowledge is not as obvious as we in everyday life rely on both almost indistinguishably. One salesperson, who loves to cook at home may be well informed of a thing or two about nutrition, helps himself sustain conversations with a buyer who may have nagging health

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4 Equally helpful here is William Clancey’s human knowledge, which is a product of a situated cognition, that is, the intimate working of looking, perceiving, understanding, and describing things while each helps shape other in a given situation (William J. Clancey, 1997.)
problems; a lone freelance reporter, having exposed himself to many walks of others, commands an unusually diverse language and may help him to “re-enact,” as Collingwood would have observed (Robin G. Collingwood, 1946, Part IV), in the unexpected things or events.

The richer the stock of knowledge is, the more versatile we can be in facing an unexpected event that our everyday life may expose us to. Here is an example which is a little closer to our daily life: with the richer stock of knowledge, an attack of a high fever to our infant child no longer derail us from daily routines as we know which medicine to administer, who to contact, what to do as an interim measure, and even where to look in case the fever represents more than an isolated incident.

The richness of the stock of knowledge enables us to respond in some sensible way to what may first appears to be a problem beyond our control. It expands the scope of our daily routines to embrace more things as “unproblematic” (Berger and Luckmann, p.24.) In short, it helps us lessen the burden of the whole exhausting process of thinking of what to do and what to choose.

A caution may be necessary: the blessing of the knowledge we accumulate through everyday life can be a curse. It justifies and even reinforces non-action when action is needed. In one of the fields of my research, a community at the foot of active volcano, Mt. Merapi, in Indonesia, a community activist related a story following its eruption in 2010: the villagers at the foot of the volcano refused to move even with the tremors signaling the coming of a major eruption until literally the last minute. The reason the villagers offered to the activist was the “knowledge” that the lava did not flow in the village’s direction in the previous eruptions. It is not clear, of course, if that knowledge alone was the deterrent; but at least, it slowed the villagers’ recognition of the urgency of the catastrophe.

In another of the field of my research, that in central Vietnam, the knowledge plays a little more complex role as the choice acted upon the knowledge has produced consequences for more than one possible interpretations.

The area is known for having the population, mostly farmers, exposed to the war-time use of dioxin-yielding herbicides, Agent Orange. An unusually large number of the families have the children with various forms of birth defects. Much to the great disappointment to the medical professionals, many of these families have refused to heed the warning against reproductive activities and end up having more than one handicapped children. Narratives and behaviors that these parents exhibit tell us a story where the knowledge dictates these farmers in more way than one.

No parents are prepared to have a child born with a birth defect in the first place and the effect of such an event easily crosses over the boundary of the parents’ everyday life. Following the dictate of commonsensical knowledge, they bring the child first to a local clinic, to district hospital, to provincial hospital and eventually to a major city hospital such as one in Ho Chi Minh City, more than 1000km
away, before settling the child down back home. Throughout this long and arduous detour, the parents would try as they may the routines of their everyday life. Disruptions caused by hospital visits are only reluctantly tolerated as necessary to protecting their “coherent world,” the reality par excellence, as a family. That is one story.

The same parents also follow the dictate of their knowledge that not all of their neighbors under the same living environment are slapped by the misfortune as theirs. That knowledge looms large especially in a predominantly agricultural community where having two or three children is the norm. The medical recommendation for not to engage in reproduction has only a limited traction on the parents. They are concerned equally with not giving a due chance to having a healthy child, the possibility which the medical findings have not removed. As the research in the area over the past 12 years show, many of these parents are with more than one child with birth defects. The parents stop reproduction more as the reaction to the limited financial capacity to sustain the well-being of their households (See for a case study of this decision-making foray, Vu Le Thao Chi, 2016.) That is another.

The parents’ frequent reference to so phan, the fate, may mislead us to see it as the farmers’ acceptance of the penalty for abandoning the teaching of proper – medical - knowledge and as the indisputable sign of their regret or remorse about doing so. However, here is another way of interpreting their use of “fate.” It represents their very limited vocabulary to articulate their view on life. It underlies their resolve to live with the unfortunate turn of events. That is yet another story.

3. Risk and Everyday Life

Having gone through several ways of capturing “everyday life,” we now turn to risk, which is equally elusive when it comes to the meanings it carries. Risk, as Deborah Lupton observes, cannot “be smelled, touched, tasted or observed with naked eye,” and it “exists in scientific knowledge rather than in everyday experience” (Lupton, 1999, p.66.) The backdrop of Lupton is Beck’s Risk Society (1992), where an immensely complex system of productions and transactions supports our everyday life while vastly complicating cause-effect linkages among everything we do in our eyes as ordinary citizens.

The question arises on how we capture such risk in our “highest tension of consciousness” without us ignoring it simply as “unproblematic” to our everyday life? That is, how does risk, as conceived below, work on our minds in such a way as to induce us into taking a meaningful action?
3.1 Risk as a probable truth

The first thing we need to do is to think about what “risk” appears to us. The term risk loses its distinctness amongst our casual references to threat, hazard, danger, or harm. Associated with these terms, risk accompanies with it usually negative implications as in “you run the risk of catching a cold unless you dry your hair after the bath,” or in “stop texting when you are driving, you are risking a traffic accident (or, police catching you).” What is lost in these usages is what makes risk distinctly different from these distant cousins: risk does not take place. It is a notion about a thing or incident which is likely or unlikely to take place. As such it opens itself to a wide range of interpretations so much so that even the experts’ opinions can be lost only as one of them.

Risk presents itself as a possibility, or probability in the risk specialists parlance. Experts or specialists in their specialized fields commit themselves to identifying the conditions by which to reduce or increase the probability turning into reality. The likes of cardiologists’ concerns with blood pressures, agrochemists’ concerns with soil conditions, or civil engineers’ concerns with geological structure, are all behind their efforts to make the “probability estimates” (Lupton, 1999, p.7) more accurate and the margin of uncertainty smaller. For these specialists, uncertainty in their specialized areas of research is, as Anthony Giddens puts it, like a “territory to be conquered or colonized” (Anthony Giddens, “Risk,” 1999.)

But here is an important reminder. That an estimate of the probability of an incident turning into reality is good does not mean that it tells everything about that incident. An estimate is a probable truth about it, a “truth” that it may or may not become a reality. As such the estimate is highly susceptible to the “pathology of perception” (Erich Fromm, 1964, quoted in A. R. Momin, 1975) of those who come to contact with it. We may see in that truth what we would like, or not like, to see depending on our overall experiential knowledge through fear-, relief- and distrust-generating experiences in the past.

Here is an example of an estimate which may cause various, and not uniform, reactions among people in their behavior: an estimate of X happening being 60% is an estimate of 40% of X not happening. There are two faces to this “probable truth.” Which of the two we may turn to is not part of the professionals’ and experts’ responsibility, which solely rests with the task of refining estimates – probability. If there is a fault with at least some of these professionals, it may be in their implicit assumption that the warnings should suffice in prompting people to take an appropriate action. Here we see an expected utility theorist belief that the action should be easily derived from its utility (its effect).

However, we are reminded by Kahneman and Tversky that our propensity toward action is
immensely sensitive. Our action is not so much a reaction to its perceived utility. We tend to react more to how the alternatives for action are “framed.” This is especially so for a decision-making process under the pressure of a great deal of uncertainties (Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 1979). Given this propensity, we are more inclined to interpret the “estimate,” the probable truth, to our liking.

Tens of thousands of people continue to reside in areas adjacent to active volcanoes in Indonesia or the Philippines in a very similar way as millions continue to smoke. The greatest majority of Tokyoites continue to reside in the city and the commuters from the adjacent prefectures never cease to commute. The warnings abound: the estimate of a destructive earthquake hitting Tokyo is 70% within 30 years. However, while a “destructive earthquake” may have traction on our consciousness, the “70% within 30 years” may not do so. We may let the remaining 30% and the closing rather than opening years of the 30 years speak louder. If so, in the cases cited above, it may not be too cynical to wonder if people continue to live everyday life the way they do because of, rather than despite, the warning.

One more important reminder: in a cognitive landscape filled with single or double-digit numbers of probability, the question of specifically when and to whom the risk turns into a reality is lost. Experts within their “trenches” of their expertise continue the work on reducing the uncertainty about these specifics by extending their efforts to cover the contextual specifics of when (time of day, climate conditions, geological features, and others) and to whom (physical make-ups, ages, sex, income, education and others). Still, these efforts are part of strengthening the probability estimates, and not of reducing the margin for the diverse interpretations by the receivers of the warnings.

Thus, when and if a risk turns into a reality, the experts may not blame particular individuals who happen to be at the wrong point in time and in place for their failure to heed the warnings. Instead, these individuals merely become another “case” that justifies their efforts to reinforces the probability estimates, thereby diminishing uncertainty that much more.

3.2 Risk as the Test for Everyday Life

We have come to another point of intersection between risk as conceived as above and everyday life. The equation -- risk equals danger x probability -- is succinct enough and even powerful in

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5 There are a plenty of warnings referring to the coming of a major earthquake affecting Tokyo. The warnings began soon after 2011, 3.11, as in The Telegraph, a British daily news reported on January 24, 2012, the 70 % chance of another major earthquake hitting Japan in four years, quoting a “research team of the University of Tokyo.” https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/9034473/Japan-has-70pc-chance-another-major-earthquake-will-hit-in-next-four-years.html
catching one's attention. This is so, however, only if it is taken alone, that is, if there is only one risk that counts in life.

Now, we do many things and do so in constant interactions with others in our everyday life. It is this complex of the things we do that demands our “highest tension of consciousness” as we find each of them as meaningful. Because they constitute a “coherent world” in our subjective purview, a prospect for any serious change in any one of the things we do inevitably poses us to pore over its various consequences on the others. The equation in one thing falls far short of triggering an action expected in the warning. It instead activates an immensely difficult calculation: how any action, prompted by this equation in one thing, should be justified when the same equation in the others maybe suggesting less than compatible courses of action?

The list of things we do in everyday life reflects directly or indirectly our usual concerns and can be nearly infinite. It covers health, human relationship, a secure path to a good school for a child, housing in a safe neighborhood, a steady employment environment, observation of a family tradition and the like. We usually do not take the equation in one of these things we do separately nor independently of it in the others. In other words, the things we do are the fronts that expose our everyday life to the cross-fires of various scientifically-backed “probable” truths; and choosing the right course of action in one would have to be made with its impact on the others in mind.

One net effect of the working of the equation is likely to be an inaction or at least reluctance to take an immediate action. Or else, failing to conform to the prompting of the equation conflicting with each other in many things we do, a chosen course of action is more a “cultural” product which is based upon a contextualized and individualized evaluation of its possible consequences (Lupton, 1999, chapter 3). The equation thus introduced to our everyday life is likely to be more a deterrent than a stimulant for an action; an “extreme transition,” a whole-sale reshuffling of everyday life, is indeed hard to come by even in the face of a life-threatening risk equation.

Given this difficulty we face in assessing the probable truth – especially a risk of low probability but grave consequences -- in our everyday life, it is one thing to conclude that action of most of us take is “taking a chance.” That is another way of saying that we cannot be responsible for the eventual consequence(s) of our own action. The likes of “shikata ga nai,” “it can’t be helped,” “God’s will,” and “fate” are among many of our utterances. These sound very much like what Giddens calls “pragmatic acceptance,” a way of liberating ourselves from the burden of anxiety emanating from the inability to go through a whole motion of calculating the chosen action’s impact on everything else we do.

Residents in another of my research sites, a small community at the foot of Mt. Fuji, one among
several volcanoes in Japan due to a major eruption, often quote the “90-some days” of minor quakes preceding to the 1707 eruption in its southwestern side as the time sufficient enough for evacuation. They then conclude that “still, if and when Fuji goes up in frames, we can’t help.”

Is this a case of “pragmatic acceptance”?

This confession maybe something else other than a mere concession that they cannot do much if the disaster is of a scale beyond the current protective measures can cope with. It is more a resolve that the disaster at an unforeseeable point within a predicted span of time cannot threaten to set off the whole process of an “extreme transition.” Much like “so phan” uttered by the Vietnamese farmers with the handicapped children, it signifies their approach to everyday life that it cannot be consumed by the preparations for something over which they may have little control. The difference separating these two groups of people is that something beyond their control lies either in the past (the Vietnamese farmers) or in the unspecified future (the residents of a Fuji community).

3.3 Living with Risks in Everyday Life

Are we, then, left alone with our own counsel only, at the mercy of our wayward interpretations of risk estimate as probable truths? To address this question, we consider how we usually react to the now familiar warning about the coming of a major earthquake: there is 70% possibility of a major earthquake hitting the Tokyo area in 30-some years. One may lean toward interpreting the 70% possibility to mean that there is 30% no major disaster.

The important point here is that this two-faceted probable truth triggers a calculation in us of what it means to respect either of the two. It is in this activated calculation where a clue lies for us to understand how we form our action and, therefore, how we can instill the preparedness in us for change. Underlying the calculation is the knowledge neither about the scientific basis of the estimated probability nor about the utility of action that the disaster experts expect us to take.

At the basis of the calculation is what behavioral economists, informed of cognitive psychological insights, call “endowment effect” (Kahneman, 2011, chapter 27.) Put it simply, we are more inclined not to part with what we have than to do anything for something we are yet to possess. From this perspective, even the routines of everyday life can be what we value to preserve as they have collectively contributed to acquiring things in our possession now. The change in our action in response to risk warnings would have to go through the process of evaluating how the “endowment effect” works.

Structural reinforcement of the house we live in maybe an obvious course of action (risk-preventive or -aversive) especially for those who live in Tokyo. However, we tend to view that choice
first and foremost from the perspective of what the construction means to everyday life – a prolonged inconvenience and/or a big dent in the savings or monthly disposable income (loss-averse⁶). Justification for non-action or procrastination can be made easily from our interpretation of the warning to mean 30% no disaster.

Thus, the risk warnings by the concerned experts may fall on our deaf ears. In the language of Kahneman-Tversky’s prospect theory, our first reaction to anything implying changes in our behavior is motivated by the cost it extracts from what we already possess. Unless endowed with extra-resources such as cash and abundant time beyond the requirement of a reasonably comfortable life, which make the prospect for change for better less costly, we are generally loss-averse.

This reluctance to taking action for its apparent benefits is observed elsewhere. Some of us take Vitamin supplements on a regular basis, which may be no small spending; or engage in “power walks,” which takes a chunk of our time. We would think that there is a strong health incentive behind these actions. But we would also suspect that the exposure to the flood of supplement ads in TV and in Internet, boosted by sufficient income, may have a lot to do in initiating us to take these actions. Irwin Rosenstock agrees with this somewhat cynical view. He, too, is doubtful if the health-related activities are sustained, or even triggered, alone by health-related motivations and vice versa (Irwin M. Rosenstock, 1960.) Rosenstock, later with others, conclude that there may be only a limited effectiveness in emphasizing the ultimate goal, life free of ailments, as a way of inducing us to take health-related action.

These health promoters’ observations of a successful patient-health provider relationship offer a glimpse of how a certain way of prodding may generate a desired action, encouraging a shift from loss-averse to risk-averse reaction. They insist on designing and offering “the goals that the patient feels personally capable of achieving within the time limit.” When a taken action is rewarded with the achievement of that goal, “the sense of self-efficacy is enhanced,” and the patient is ready to embark on “a new, more difficult goals” (Rosenstock, Victor Strecher and Marshall Becker, 1988.) Enforced efficacy of one’s action, rather than stressing the motivation behind the action, helps turn our loss-averse into risk-averse action.

Their observations suggest the need to look into our everyday life, not away from it. The efforts are needed to locate and identify the samples where the “goal that [we] feel capable of achieving with the time limit” is achieved and rewarded with the reinforced sense of our action. Such an effort forms an integral part of our shift from the predominantly loss-averse to a more risk-averse orientation.

⁶ For the terms, risk-averse and loss-averse, Kahneman and Tversky, 1979.
With the shift comes, also, the broadened range of things we do with diminishing reluctance.

3.4 Assimilating Risks in Everyday Life

No part of our everyday life is entirely immune to the threat of its disruption. Nonetheless we usually do not let that threat alter the way we live easily. We resist the threat by ignoring it or interpreting it in such a way that it matters less than it really may.

Part of our inclination to take the threat lightly is attributed to the way it is presented, as an estimated risk, that is, a danger multiplied by probability. Regardless of the sound scientific foundation for such presentation, the threat is only probable. That probability, plus our “pathology of perception” which mirror our experiential past, fall far short of convincing us to take action that may satisfy the alarmed expert in the areas where the threat is predicted.

Furthermore, probable or not, risk is usually addressed to a specific part of our everyday life independent of the others. We do not, however, take the weight of one risk in isolation. We locate it in a much larger landscape of many other things we do. A net effect of facing one risk is then a muted sense of urgency it is supposed to carry. Therefore, risk, regardless of its high or low probability, reminds us first of the cost of an “extreme transition,” a whole-sale re-examination of nearly everything we do in everyday life. Guarding ourselves against such risk is likely to lead us to interpret it to our liking.

All of these suggest that resistance to change has its roots deep in our everyday life. They suggest that we are inherently conservative, preoccupied with protecting the status quo. One way of breaking this resistance may be the pounding of the warnings with the hope of multiplied effects.

Another way of looking at this resistance, however, is that it is also a reflection of our refusal to see our life on borrowed time and to justify everyday life merely as a time and space for the preparation for the eventual disruption in an unforeseeable future. If that is the case, a sounder approach to risk in everyday life is to call attention to the details of our everyday life. Provided that the significance of the warnings remains intact, the attention should uncover the marks that everyday life is the cumulative result of reinforced belief in the efficacy of our action.

Some of the things we do routinely now have gone through the test of time, even though initially they may have started as a response to a risk warning. Examples that such routinized behaviors, at no mental cost of decision making for its positive result, should abound in everyday life. A familiar example may be the fastening of the seat belt. A quick reward, that is, no fear of a traffic ticket for the driver fastened to the seat, has reinforced the efficacy of the action in the mind of the driver. In due time, fastening the seat belt ceased to be a task requiring a conscious decision making and became a
routine.

Two points deserve special attention. First, the driver may not be aware that his and many others’ similar actions may contribute to reducing the traffic accident-induced death tolls drastically. Second, the need for reducing the deadly traffic accidents may not have even crossed the driver’s mind when he initially began fastening the seat belt, but a quick response to the non-action (or action) in the form of traffic ticket (or no ticket) certainly did. At the core of this and similar routines is the reinforced sense of efficacy, which eventually help transform a purposeful action into a routine. If risk warnings were to make a small dent in what we do and how we do things, the senders of the warnings would have to take into consideration how this sense of efficacy influence the warnings’ effectiveness.

4. In Lieu of Conclusion

A word of caution is in order before concluding the introductory essay on risk and everyday life. The focus of research is everyday life, and how we live it. As observed above, we may not be even aware of how each of the things we do may be connected to the others. Only when some of the things we do become unsustainable for one reason or another, we stop and stretch our imaginations to speculate their overall impact on our life. By the same token, it is rare to see somebody who is mindful of the interconnectedness of things he does all the time. We are even less ready to verbally articulate the things we do and how we do them.

In conducting research on, say ordinary citizens’ risk perception or risk behavior, the difficulty arises when we try to decipher from their narratives how they explain their perceptions and behaviors. Multiple-choice questions, in-depth interviews, and semi-structured questionnaires all have one thing in common: they are inducing, or even coercing, the respondents to answer along a predetermined story line. The responses may tell us more about how and what the respondents think as they digest the questions we offer than what they usually think.

An alternative method is needed so that the respondents are freed from the confines of the specific question-answer sessions. Such freedom of course comes at a cost. The researchers are likely to be exposed to an almost infinite flow of often fragmented narratives by the respondents.

Not to discount the value of statistics-based research which may help define a broad boundary of the respondents and their living environment, the researchers’ responsibility, then, is to uncover a pattern(s) in what appears to be inconsistent and fragmented narratives of the respondents. To do so, however, I have found it imperative to have repeated meetings over a relatively long period of time than to have a few lengthy meetings. The researchers need a patience to observe the respondents at
different points in time and against different situations. The narratives of people, when freed from the obligations to answer questions, do tell us a great deal more about what they usually think and do. What they usually think is the data from which we need to reconstruct how risk works on people’s minds in everyday life.

In preparing this special issue for the journal, the only guideline for writing that I initially offered the prospective contributors is the use of a few key terms: everyday life, risk, and narratives. The result is a collection of essays prepared by the authors whose background is diverse as they include a seismologist and an urban planner.

* * *

The four essays, though dealing with different risks of different scales and in different contexts, share one thing in common: the specific risk in each case, no matter how dominating and/or how structured it is in the living environment, is diversely interpreted and variously acted upon in the everyday life context.

In “Measuring the effectiveness of Disaster Reduction Education through ‘Community of Practice’” Dr. Oki takes up on the hints from “Community of Practice,” the cognitive development idea developed by an anthropologist-computer scientist duo of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, as a way of developing disaster awareness and preparedness in everyday life. The basis of this is her recognition of the wide gap between people’s verbalized awareness (stated in answers to a set of questionnaires) and their action during the 3.11 disaster time (Tohoku Earthquake, 2011). The gap is a wake-up call for her to the need of instilling the readiness to face disasters on everyday basis. Hence, her “action research” through “Community of Practice,” where efforts are made to turn children from passive learners of how to prepare for disasters to active participants and to involve the teachers and parents alike in that transition. The whole of learning about and preparing for disasters become a “social practice” in their everyday life.

One point of note in this essay is the author’s awareness that ordinary people, when asked of their opinion by the interviewers who appear only on rare occasions, may say things “in favor of what the society believes or demands than provide honest” responses. This awareness is behind her and her co-workers’ constant and repeated presence in Community of Practice. As a result, hers and the co-workers’ presence has been “internalized” in the local residents daily knowledge. Oki sees clearly that such presence narrows the distance between the disaster specialists and the local ordinary citizens.

Dr. Dinil Pushpalal, in his “Fears,” offers a convincing account of Namie, a small town within
the close proximity of Fukushima nuclear power plant to show how the Fukushima crisis is translated into a wide range of “invisible” but down-to-earth fears that can be extremely disruptive to the local people’s everyday life. What happened in Fukushima is not simply an environmental threat, but the beginning of an “extreme transition” for the people living in the nearby areas including a few remaining in Namie. While counter measures, taken by the government and the involved parties, are not anywhere near satisfactory and compensatory, the people have been living with mounting anxieties and stresses resulting from health concerns, deteriorating living conditions away from home, new job opportunities, family separation and conflict. Narratives of the local people as the telling evidence are also presented in the paper. Though it has been seven years since the crisis, Namie people are still going through the “extreme transition,” and that is the transition not to the new shore but to the old shore of “everyday life” they once knew back in Namie, against the full awareness that “returning is difficult.” This poses a challenging question for the government of how to protect human security priorities against the more conventional energy security or national security requirements.

With Dr. Watabe’s essay, “‘Everything is decided somewhere else’: Risk narratives as a navigation tool in societies experiencing uncertainty,” the focus shifts to life without apparent disruptions such as natural disasters. Risks are plenty, nonetheless. The author contributes an important and intriguing insight of how people live and navigate through uncertainties induced by many socioeconomic changes at two small villages in Northeast Thailand. These uncertainties, less visible than disaster risks but no less intimate to people’s daily concerns, scatter in their adaptions to changes in their livelihood and living style, in their feelings about changes in the physical settings, in their success as well as failures of not making the best use of opportunities presented by the changes, and in their responses to emerging issues like risks to health and to environments. These uncertainties are often times treated as “unintended” and unforeseen consequences of development and therefore remain unseen. Watabe proposes a narrative “as a collaborative framework,” jointly constructed by both interviewers and interviewees during “ad-hoc occasions,” to capture these uncertainties through the act of narrating of possible connections between “object of risks” and “objects at risks.” This narrative approach also helps the author reduce the distance caused by the 10-year interval in his visits to the areas because it enriches the description of people’s everyday life with contrasts between space, time, people, groups being highlighted, giving different meanings to the story told. “Such contrasts allowed people to talk in a coherent manner about their experiences, as well their aspirations to cope with the many uncertainties of a society transition.” Here, this editor finds this essay resonating with Clancey’s observation (Clancey, 1997, p.3) that narratives here are not “as bringing out what is already inside, but as a way of changing what is inside” and as concluded by the author, through narratives,
people “craft their tools to navigate the ocean of uncertainties.

Finally, Professor Jose Edgardo A. Gomez in his “Practical and Philosophical Perspectives on ‘Everyday Life’ as Applied to Urban Contexts: Some Evidence from the Philippines” examines the concept of “everyday life” in a similar fashion but in an entirely opposite context -- people’s everyday life of an urban environment of Metro Manila, the Philippines, where opportunities flourish hand in hand with “direct impositions of formal authority and hegemonic economic forces.” Gomez makes an interesting attempt in addressing the question why the people living in the urban area of Metro Manila do not rebel despite the harsh living conditions. He, relying on a classic, Ted Gurr’s Why Men Rebel (1970), argues that “conditions for serious relative deprivation have not been created” and people can still have ways to “lead their daily lives” and therefore there is no “major social upheaval” yet. Like the farmers in Northeast Thailand, the people in this urban setting also “craft tools to navigate the ocean of uncertainties” by choosing “sub-optimal state of existence.” As long as these provide more certainty versus perceived risk and/or relying on “helpful or symbolic human others,” for example, the presence of helpful neighbors and cheerful children can ease the burdens of life, their anxieties do not need to “reach intolerable levels.” Also, how these people live their everyday life is also “powerful means of contestation of power and social discourse in urban settings, and vehicles of aspiration for the masses.”

Altogether, these essays offer different ways of addressing how people address themselves to the requirement of everyday life. They are the testimony to the fact that there is life even when our “freedom from threats and freedom from want” remain far from reality.
References:
Measuring the Effectiveness of Disaster Reduction Education thorough the ‘Community of Practice Theory’

Satoko OKI

Abstract

This paper is a study on disaster education at an elementary school in Nagano Prefecture, Japan. It reports on two subjects. The first pertains to the limitations of conducting questionnaire surveys to measure the effectiveness of disaster reduction education. Analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data from questionnaire surveys and interviews, respectively, this paper raises issues within existing research that claims to have successfully measured disaster reduction education effectiveness. The second involves the validity of analyzing learning effects through what is known as the “community of practice” theory. The results of this research suggest the significance of conducting disaster reduction education based on the community of practice theory and vouch for the theory’s value in measuring the effectiveness of disaster reduction education.

1. Introduction

The 2011 Tohoku Earthquake claimed over 18,000 casualties. Of these, 659 were students and teachers of elementary, middle, and high schools and universities (Ministry of Education, 2012). Nearly 8,000 school and university facilities were severely damaged by the earthquake and tsunami. In response, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 outlined seven clear targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks: (i) understanding disaster risk, (ii) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage such risk, (iii) investing in disaster reduction for resilience, and (iv) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective responses, as well as “build back better” in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. It aims to achieve a substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods, and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities, and countries over the next 15 years (United Nations, 2015).

The significance of disaster education had already been discussed in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (United Nations, 2005). Although some successful cases were reported from the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, the current situation concerning disaster education in Japan is far from satisfactory. On top of fundamental subjects such as languages, mathematics, physical education, and music, the Japanese education system already consists of over 100 other subjects, such as career...
education, Olympics education, and education for international understanding, and so on. It is extremely difficult for schoolteachers to make time to study and prepare to teach all these subjects. In an OECD study on middle school teachers across 34 countries, Japan ranked first in terms of longest working hours by a considerable margin (OECD, 2013). As such, the results of a questionnaire survey previously conducted by the author revealed that despite most schoolteachers’ awareness of the insufficiency of current evacuation drills and disaster education, they continue to face challenges such as lack of time to prepare for disaster education classes and lack of access to effective teaching materials (Nagamatsu and Oki, 2015).

Another obstacle to schoolteachers’ participation in disaster education is their inability to verify its effectiveness. Effective teaching methods and content for disaster education remain unclear. One of the major reasons for this is the extreme difficulty in evaluating the efficacy of disaster education, which can only be truly achieved when an actual earthquake occurs. Moreover, even if an earthquake does occur and effects of the education program measured, it would be completely meaningless if such an earthquake ends up killing lives.

To measure the effectiveness of disaster education, for instance, Hata et al. (2015) developed a disaster consciousness scale for unannounced earthquake drills. They conducted a survey of 1,200 elementary and middle school students in Yamanashi Prefecture. The research developed indicators such as individuals’ proactivity toward disaster prevention as well as their fear of earthquakes. The study, which compared behaviors and intentions before and after the drills, reported that the effectiveness of the drills was successfully measured quantitatively by the indicators.

Another example is the research of Toyosawa et al. (2010), who measured the effectiveness of disaster education by examining its effects on elementary school children’s cognition and awareness, as well as their guardians’ behavior toward disaster preparedness actions. In the fear-appeal research context (Lazarus, 1966), students were surveyed prior to, right after, and three months after taking part in disaster education. They were investigated for their fear of earthquakes, perceived susceptibility to threats, perceived severity of threats, and perceived response efficacy. Results showed that right after disaster education, the students’ fear and awareness were heightened. Many of them spoke to their guardians about what they learned in the program, which then encouraged guardians’ to actually take disaster preparedness actions. However, in the three-month follow-up, the students’ awareness levels were found to have returned to pretraining levels.

Meanwhile, a significant amount of research has reexamined the framework the above reports are based on, that is, the one in which people believe that high risk perception leads to personal preparedness and risk-mitigation behaviors. A review research conducted by Solberg et al. (2010)
discussed that the relation between risk perception and disaster preparedness actions is weak, at the same time recognizing the existence of some studies reporting a positive correlation between the two. Furthermore, Wachinger et al. (2013) discussed the risk perception paradox, which argues that an individual’s high risk perception toward natural disasters does not necessarily promote disaster preparedness actions (also reported by Rochford & Blocker, 1991; Ozaki & Nakayachi, 2015).

On the other hand, there are studies that report disaster education as a bilateral, or even multilateral, long-term mutual-learning process among participants rather than a one-way, temporary transfer of knowledge and a consequential increase in the risk perception of a certain individual (Yamori, 2009). These were guided mainly by the community of practice (CoP) theory proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Sun et al., (2013); Na, Okada, and Fang (2009); and Shiwaku and Shaw (2008) are all examples of such studies. CoP theory argues that learning should be characterized as a mixture of three components: (1) internalization of knowledge or skill, (2) formation and maintenance of a CoP including those who teach and learn, and (3) identity rebuilding of those who have become involved in the CoP (more details in Chapter 4).

In our research, we sought to conduct disaster education that would fit into the relations between diverse stakeholders, as its importance is discussed in CoP theory. Our research, which involved students, parents and/or guardians, and schoolteachers of Mashima Elementary School, is an action research study that relies not only on the results of questionnaire surveys commonly believed to be effective in gaining quantitative and objective data. This research also examines and values qualitative data obtained by, for example, closely observing the participants’ daily behaviors and conducting interviews.

This paper will discuss two topics. First, by analyzing survey results both quantitatively and qualitatively, this paper shall report and discuss differences between the two methods of analysis. This will then lead to the limitations of conducting conventional questionnaire surveys when measuring the effectiveness of disaster education. Second, this paper will examine the validity of using CoP theory to analyze learning effects.

2. Action research

2.1 Overview of the study field

The study field of this research was Mashima Elementary School in Nagano Prefecture. The research began in July 2015 and continued until March 2017. Mashima Elementary School is near the intersection of the Sai River and Chikuma River (Figure 1). The area, being prime agricultural
land, is designated as an urban control area. Although the school is located in the capital of Nagano Prefecture, only a few residential areas surround the school. With 120 students and 89 households, and one class per grade (as of April 2016), the school’s student body is known to be smaller than that of other elementary schools in the region.

The Nagano Basin, where Mashima Elementary School is situated, was formed as a result of past activities along the Western Boundary Fault Zone. In 1847, the Nagano (Zenkoji) earthquake occurred along the active fault and caused 8,000 to 10,000 deaths, destroyed approximately 20,000 houses, and triggered landslides and sector collapses in over 42,000 locations around this area. These landslides then led to the formation of several dams on surrounding rivers, which eventually broke and flooded the region. In an old drawing of this disaster, Mashima is depicted as one of the regions that suffered the greatest damage. As such, it can be said that Mashima, being a region located right above the faults, suffered not only from the earthquakes but also from the resulting flood from the landslides (Cabinet Office, 2007).

![Location of Mashima Elementary School](image)

Figure 1. Location of Mashima Elementary School. Black arrow in the upper figure shows where the Nagano City is, and the lower figure is the magnified view. The elementary school is in the intersection of the Sai River and Chikuma River in the Nagano Basin, which was formed through activities along the Western Boundary Fault Zone.

### 2.2 Research background

Research at Mashima Elementary School began when the first author received an e-mail from the school’s health teacher. Disaster education was new to the school prior to this research. The e-mail
stated, “Every year at our school, we do have evacuation drills based on scenarios of fire, earthquake, and crime. However, none of these drills seem to be taken seriously as something that could affect our lives in the future. It seems the drills have turned into nothing but an ordinary school event and has lost its original purpose of preparing to protect our lives.” This implies that the school’s annual drills had become a mere façade.

The e-mail continued, “I would like to implement evacuation drills and disaster education that would truly save each and every person’s life. I want students to learn how to care about themselves and others. It makes me sad to see many students not doing anything when, for instance, a younger student gets injured in the hallway. Some of them are very ignorant and do not even try to seek help even if their peers are in need of it.” Clearly, the health teacher was deeply concerned by the students’ attitude toward another person’s life.

The original request in the e-mail was for the author to teach a disaster education lesson to students and to deliver a lecture to guardians and teachers on September 26, 2015. The first author said they would accept the request only if the school implements a disaster education program designed for the entire academic year. The schoolteachers’ enthusiastic agreement to this condition led to the commencement of a long-term collaborative research at Mashima Elementary School.

### 2.3 Action research

With the above topics in mind, this study was done through an “action research” approach aimed at (1) students’ ability to protect their own lives, and (2) the advancement of disaster preparedness actions taken within households through the empowerment of students and guardians. These objectives were shared by the authors and the schoolteachers of Mashima Elementary School.

Action research is often referred as a collaborative research amongst researchers and research participants. Both of them must share their ideals of what they want to accomplish through the collaborative and practical research. This was further discussed and applied to the field of disaster prevention and earthquakes by Yamori (2010). Action research can be examined in contrast with research methods in the natural sciences, which are based on the premise of an implicit separation between researchers and research subjects. This is because with action research, which involves human beings and society as research subjects, it is impossible to guarantee a 100% separation of relations between the two.

As such, in collaborating with the participants of our action research, we as researchers did not seek complete detachment from them and found significance in not being objective all the time. Even when observing or evaluating the students, guardians, teachers, and other members of the community
throughout the research period, we always made sure “to be involved in the research being aware of the recursive influences observing and evaluating participants can bring upon the original research,” as Yamori (2010) suggested. Thus, when investigating the participants, we decided to rely not only on questionnaire surveys that allow for quantitative analysis but also on qualitative data. We collected data by recording the participants’ daily behavior and conducting interviews. Furthermore, as Muto et al. (2004) recommended, we limited the amount of recording data (such as taking videos or making observation notes) within the participants’ sight, as that may lead to an undesirable and implicit expert/nonexpert, researcher/research subject relationship.

3. Overview of activities

Table 1 below provides an overview of the activities of our action research program throughout academic years 2015 and 2016. Some activities are described in detail as follows. Note that in Japan, the academic year begins in April and ends in March.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year 2015</th>
<th>Description of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>First questionnaire survey conducted on guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July ~</td>
<td>Creation of a BOSAI newsletter for students (issued monthly ever since)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 24</td>
<td>Interview with teachers prior to the beginning of the disaster education program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September ~</td>
<td>Creation of a BOSAI newsletter for guardians (issued monthly ever since)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 26</td>
<td>Teaching a disaster education lesson, lecture for guardians, and a training program for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October ~ November</td>
<td>BOSAI month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October ~</td>
<td>Creation of a BOSAI newsletter for people in the community (issued monthly ever since)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November ~</td>
<td>Development of a mini lesson based on the BOSAI newsletter for students (held monthly ever since)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9</td>
<td>Observation of the final day of the BOSAI month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation with the director of Mashima ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 14</td>
<td>Participation in events held by the school and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation with the president and vice president of the PTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 9</td>
<td>Workshop for people in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Second questionnaire survey conducted on guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22</td>
<td>First interview conducted on guardians and teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1. List of activities in this research. Note that in Japan, the academic year begins in April and ends in March.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year 2016</th>
<th>Description of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April ~</td>
<td>Creation of a BOSAI newsletter for students and guardians (issued monthly ever since)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April ~</td>
<td>Development of a mini lesson based on the BOSAI newsletter for students (held monthly ever since)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July ~</td>
<td>Third questionnaire survey conducted on guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September ~</td>
<td>Creation of a BOSAI newsletter for guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 6</td>
<td>Held an earthquake simulating vehicle experiencing class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>Teaching a disaster education lesson, lecture for guardians, and a training program for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October ~ November</td>
<td>BOSAI month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Development of a mini lesson based on the BOSAI newsletter for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>Designing and carrying out a workshop at a school event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November ~ December</td>
<td>Second interview conducted on guardians and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Fourth questionnaire survey conducted on guardians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.1 Questionnaire survey

We conducted a survey on the school’s parents and guardians twice within each academic year: July 2015 and February 2016, and July and December 2016. The questionnaires (see Appendix) were distributed to and collected from each household by the school. Also, to conduct future follow-up research, we asked the participants to write their names on the questionnaires.

Here is an overview of the questionnaire items:

- Question 1: The respondent’s personal information
- Questions 2–5: The respondent’s perception of earthquake risks
- Question 6: The respondent’s perception of their child’s ability to protect themselves in an earthquake
- Question 7: The current situation of disaster preparedness within the respondent’s household
- Question 8: Reasons why taking disaster preparedness actions may be difficult (open-ended response)

Disaster preparedness actions in questions 7 and 8 consist of the following 7 items: (1) emergency stockpile (water and food), (2) preparation of an emergency bag, (3) securing heavy furniture, (4) relocating furniture to avoid danger, (5) deciding how to contact family members in case of an
emergency, (6) anti-seismic reinforcement of homes, and (7) subscription to earthquake insurance. Questions 2–7 are multiple choice while question 8 is open-ended.

The choices for question 2 are “1 - Very scared,” “2 - Scared,” “3 - Neither,” “4 - Somewhat scared,” and “5 - Not scared at all.”

The choices for question 4 are as follows: “1 - Within 5 years,” “2 - Within 6–10 years,”
“3 - Within 11–30 years,” “4 - Within 31–50 years,” “5 - Within 50–70 years,” and “6 - More than 71 years from now.”

The choices for questions 3 and 5–7 are “1 - Yes, very much,” “2 - Somewhat,” “3 - Not sure,”
“4 - Not really,” and “5 - No, not at all.” For question 7, there is an additional choice of “6 – Resolved” (meaning that the respondent has already taken the corresponding preventive measure).

The questionnaire surveys’ results and analyses will be discussed in Chapter 5.

3.2 The monthly BOSAI newsletter

One of the research objectives was to encourage participants to undertake disaster preparedness actions at home, which is extremely difficult to achieve in a short-term disaster education program. Furthermore, even if a disaster education program were to be implemented continuously throughout the year, it would be nearly impossible to allot time for it in the school curriculum. Therefore, to address this issue, we created and issued monthly newsletters called the monthly BOSAI newsletter. BOSAI means “disaster prevention” in Japanese. The newsletter contained quizzes and information related to disasters and disaster prevention, such as trivia about active faults and emergency food recipes. Students would bring these home and share with their guardians what they learned from it. This newsletter aimed to extend school education to households and to empower guardians to practice disaster preparedness at home.
3.3 Disaster education program for stakeholders

The authors taught a disaster education lecture for students, a lecture and workshop for guardians, and a training program for schoolteachers during parents’ day. In academic year 2015, the authors held lectures for students every two grades. Activities for guardians and teachers were facilitated by the first author.

The disaster education lecture was a 45-min program whose purpose was to enable students to protect their own lives not only by learning about disaster prevention but also by actually taking preparedness actions. Each of the lectures was designed according to the students’ developmental stages. The author had already taught these lectures many times in schools across the country (Oki, 2016).

In the lecture for guardians, the authors discussed earthquake risks in Nagano City, and gave an overview of the lecture that was delivered for students. Given that we had also encouraged guardians to become an active participant of this action research, we had conversations with them, saying such things as, “Today, your children learned how to protect themselves. We’ve told them to let their guardians know, so please try to talk to them, and see if they’ve learned the right move.” To guide the guardians in determining whether their children were protecting themselves correctly, we distributed a handout with a description of the three safety poses that the students learned in class.

In the teachers’ training program, the first author gave an explanation of each of the BOSAI lectures’ contents and purposes. The authors then introduced case studies of different schools’ disaster education programs and ended the training session by answering questions raised by the faculty.
3.4 Interview with guardians and schoolteachers

In March 2016 (the end of academic year 2015) and throughout November and December (latter half of academic year 2016), a hearing investigation was conducted with guardians and schoolteachers. The procedure was a 30-min semistructured interview per person. Based on the results of the first and second questionnaire surveys, we selected 30 households and asked if they could partake in the interview. Of the 30, we were able interview 16. The results of this investigation will be discussed in Chapter 4.

As for the schoolteachers, we interviewed those who were available on the day of the investigation. Interview questions focused on (1) how the teachers themselves changed after participating in disaster education, (2) how the students changed, (3) comments on the 2015 disaster education program, and (4) comments and thoughts on future disaster education programs.

3.5 Other research activities

In this research, the authors designed the disaster education program so that participants could continuously take part in it for the long term, even for only 10 min per month. To achieve this, in addition to the abovementioned procedures, the authors actively participated in local festivals, issued BOSAI newsletters for guardians and community members, and taught lectures where students can experience riding the earthquake simulator vehicle.

4. The “Community of Practice” theory

4.1 Issues relating to the methods of measuring the effectiveness of disaster education

Disaster education exists to reduce or prevent the damage caused by future disasters. Therefore, how should one evaluate the effectiveness of such education? Bluntly speaking, following a disaster, one could investigate individuals who had previously received disaster education and see if they survived or not. However, the timing of disasters is unpredictable, and they clearly do not occur in favor of measuring the effectiveness of disaster education. Moreover, it is absolute nonsense to examine the effectiveness of disaster education based on whether or not there were casualties.

Currently, four main methods that measure disaster education effectiveness has been put into practice. The most orthodox method is a written test based on knowledge. It checks whether or not the individual who took part in disaster education gained the right knowledge. For instance, one may take a certification exam to become a Bousaishi (a disaster prevention expert). It is indeed important for one to have knowledge to make the right decisions in the event of an earthquake. However, let us
imagine a scenario of a tsunami or flood, in which one must evacuate. Predicting risks (thinking *I might need to evacuate soon*) and actually taking action (thinking *Now’s the time to evacuate!*) are completely different from providing the right answer on a written test (writing “It is important to evacuate quickly”). When actually protecting your life in a disaster, it is far more important to do the first two rather than do well on a written test. For instance, Oki and Nakayachi (2012) noted that in a March 2010 investigation, 97% of residents across Japan said that they were aware that earthquakes and tsunamis are related to each other. Nevertheless, a year later, 18,000 people lost their lives from the tsunami caused by the Tohoku earthquake. Each person responsible for disaster education must be aware that merely knowing that evacuating is a proactive action does not necessarily lead to making the call to evacuate and take action accordingly.

The second method of evaluating disaster education effectiveness is the practical skills test. Examples of this include testing skills attained from short drills, evacuation drills, and first-aid courses. This method is beneficial in that it can assess the individual’s ability to take the right action in the event of a disaster. In actual disasters, however, situations vary significantly. It is almost impossible to test an individual in the exact same situation as an actual disaster that is yet to occur. Thus, the practical skills test is unrealistic and insufficient in evaluating disaster education effectiveness.

Other methods include using quantitative data collected from questionnaire surveys. These attempt to evaluate disaster education by comparing responses to questions such as “Are you afraid of earthquakes?” and “Do you think there will be an earthquake soon?” prior to and after disaster education (Toyosawa et al., 2010). Close attention must be paid to responses being biased because the respondents are most definitely aware that the education they received aimed to increase their awareness of disaster prevention. It is a well-known fact that respondents tend to respond in favor of what the society believes or demands rather than provide honest answers according to their individual opinions. Furthermore, this method only allows for investigation of the increase in the respondents’ awareness of disaster prevention. It is incapable of probing further, such as measuring their behavioral changes in taking practical disaster preparedness actions. As discussed in the Introduction, an individual’s high risk perception or awareness of natural disasters do not necessarily lead to disaster preparedness actions. Thus, disaster education effectiveness cannot be measured by looking at the increase in an individual’s awareness level with regard to disasters.

Another measure of disaster education effectiveness that attempts to solve this issue involves investigating behavioral changes (whether or not one took preparedness actions) through a questionnaire survey. More valuable and essential data can be obtained from this method compared to that of Toyosawa et al. (2010) discussed above. However, several issues with this method must be
raised. For instance, for economic and physical reasons, students are most likely not directly involved in actions such as securing furniture or buying food for stockpiling. Thus, when students are the subject of a disaster education program, it is inappropriate to conduct questionnaire surveys to investigate situations involving disaster preparedness actions. Further details of the issues related to this method will be discussed in Chapter 5.

From the above methods, it is evident that an effective way to evaluate students in a disaster education program has yet to be developed. Furthermore, methods that measure the effectiveness of disaster education have not been established. This situation is presumably a tremendous obstacle for schoolteachers who are responsible for teaching disaster education. Not only are they unable to grade and evaluate their students, but they also do not have a way to evaluate their own skills in teaching disaster education. The only way that they may do so is in the actual event of a disaster, and in a worst-case scenario, they may end up being responsible for their students’ lives. Thus, even though a schoolteacher feels the need to teach disaster education, in reality, it is extremely difficult for them to confidently and continuously take part in it.

In a proposal to overcome these difficulties, Yamori (2006) has suggested that disaster education should be perceived more as an educational or learning process. Yamori argues that Lave and Wenger’s (1991) community of practice (CoP) theory serves as a useful framework to achieve long-term and collaborative learning in disaster education.

4.2 The community of practice (CoP) theory

This section will provide an overview of the community of practice (CoP) theory by Lave and Wenger (1991) and examine its relations with disaster education, mainly by discussing Yamori’s (2006) case of conducting action research using the CoP framework.

Lave and Wenger (1991) strongly rejected the conventional view of learning processes, which focus on the learner’s internalization of knowledge or skill. They say that such a perspective is indeed an important aspect of learning but that its significance is negligible. They express the importance of integrating two other components when defining learning. Yamori (2006) emphasized the value of these components particularly when considering disaster education from a much broader and deeper perspective.

One such component is the formation and maintenance of a community of practice (CoP), which includes those who teach and learn. Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that focusing on a one-way, temporary transfer of knowledge or skill is insufficient. Rather, forming and sustaining a CoP can be more feasible in the long run, as those who both teach and learn “ provisionally” participate in the CoP.
The existence of the community allows participants to partake in bilateral, or at times multilateral, long-term mutual learning. Neither the amount of knowledge or skill of the participant nor his or her commitment is significant, so anybody can be a part of the CoP. A diverse interaction among people of diverse backgrounds must also be identified in a CoP.

The third component is the “identity (re)building” of those involved in the CoP. Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning not only improves a person’s intelligence or skills but also reshapes his/her whole identity. Frequent role changes in a CoP is an example of identity reshaping. Each person in the CoP has an identity, which ceaselessly changes through interacting with others in the CoP. For instance, those in a learning role the day before could transform into those in a teaching role the following day.

Therefore, within the CoP framework, learning is neither a short-term internalization of knowledge or skill nor a temporary, linear transfer of knowledge or skill among members. Rather, learning must be perceived as a social practice, and one must carefully observe how the CoP is formed, sustained, and expanded. In addition, changes in the relationships between those involved and the (re)building of their identities must be monitored simultaneously.

This framework can undoubtedly be applied to the context of disaster education. Yamori (2006) argues that disaster education is not a process of simply gaining knowledge or skill. It is also part of a social practice in which people participate in disaster prevention. The creation of a CoP can lead to collaborative and co-generative learning among various stakeholders such as researchers, students, local government officials, local residents, and schoolteachers. These stakeholders contribute to the CoP through their various points of view and roles to collaboratively take part in and advance disaster prevention. Yamori stated that identity (re)building can also be applied, as students who participate in disaster education as learners become teachers and active participants when they talk about it at home with their guardians. Then, guardians, along with others in the community, become practitioners as well. Experts and researchers also switch roles, becoming learners when learning about the region and local hazards. It is crucial that all participants be responsible for contributing to the CoP in a manner unique to themselves.

Furthermore, Yamori (2006) discussed that applying CoP theory to disaster education can potentially solve the issue of relationships among many people being and remaining binary. For example, in disaster education, many people tend to be categorized as one or the other: expert/nonexpert, one who helps others/one who is being helped, or educator/learner. The 1995 Kobe earthquake revealed that public help did not function as expected in an actual event of a disaster. Despite this fact, the idea of two roles—helping others and being helped—is fixed in many people’s minds. The concept of identity (re)building based on CoP theory may be a clue to solving this issue.
Another example in which the CoP theory can be applied is the issue involving victims who share their experiences as storytellers. The concern here is that their stories and lessons cannot be told firsthand across generations when disasters occur only once in a while and across different generations. However, we can address this issue by treating disaster prevention as a social practice that prepares us for natural hazards that occur on occasion. By focusing not on the internalization of knowledge or skills (gained by the storytellers) in the short term but on the reorganization of the CoP in the long term, people would be able to dismiss the perception of the stories as something that is effective for only one generation (Yamori, 2006).

Thus, building a community-based learning system is more significant than simply promoting knowledge internalization within each individual. Conducting and perceiving disaster education based on CoP theory and creating a sustainable CoP and promoting identity (re)building as well as role (re)shaping are crucial in solving the aforementioned problems and in continuously advancing disaster prevention within society. The section below will discuss the changes that were observed in students and guardians of Mashima Elementary School, based on CoP theory.

5. Results of the research

5.1 Changes in the schoolchildren

Throughout this research, the students went beyond internalizing their knowledge and skills. Their awareness and interest toward disasters increased, which also led to changes in their identity and role. For instance, when a student was injured in class and was sent to the hospital with the health teacher, the student said (as reported by the health teacher in December 2015), “If there’s an earthquake right now, we’ll be okay. But over there, there seems to be a lot of picture frames. Those are dangerous.” This shows how the student has become an active participant rather than a passive learner throughout the program. There were also guardians who commented as follows: “I saw my child relocate heavy items that were on top of the shelf to somewhere lower, so that it would be less dangerous” (from the second questionnaire survey to guardians conducted in February 2016) and “My youngest child also reads the BOSAI newsletter. Oftentimes, when he comes home, he would proudly demonstrate what he learned at daycare and does things like evacuating under the desk. Then, my eldest child would teach him how to do it correctly. I see them learning from each other very often” (from the first guardian interview conducted in March 2016). These are evidence of the students’ identity being reshaped through the disaster education program. We can see that as the students shift roles from learners to teachers, the CoP simultaneously expands into households.
5.2 Changes in the guardians

There were changes observed in the guardians as well. One parent responded, “Now I can imagine what it will be like if there was an earthquake whenever I’m shopping or at work. Sometimes I relocate objects to avoid danger in advance” (from the second questionnaire survey conducted in February 2016). This parent not only internalized their knowledge and skills but also displayed full commitment to the CoP. Furthermore, we can see that a parent’s role transformed from learner to teacher, as a student diary entry in September 2015 noted: “I was studying, and then my mom tested me on the spot if I knew how to protect myself in an earthquake. That was fun!” Another example suggests CoP expansion into households: “We ate dinner as a family imagining that we were having dinner in a blackout. We used the water bottle lanterns that our child made at school” (from the first guardian interview conducted in March 2016). Another parent, who is a piano teacher, decided to hand out LED flashlights, whistles, and other emergency items to her students as prizes for their Christmas concert. She went beyond taking disaster preparedness actions at home and became a fully involved CoP participant. Moreover, because her students included those outside Mashima Elementary School, her actions expanded the CoP.

From the examples above, it is evident that the disaster education conducted in this research was effective when evaluated within the CoP framework. The next section of this paper will discuss how these effects appeared in the results of the questionnaire surveys.

6. Limitations of pre–post comparisons of questionnaire survey results

One of the purposes of this research was to promote disaster preparedness actions within households. Thus, analyzing the responses concerning preparedness actions is extremely important. Since the beginning of this research in July 2015, we have conducted disaster education lessons for schoolchildren and lectures and workshops for guardians, as well as delivered BOSAI newsletters (Table 1 above). The effects of these activities were real as explained in Chapter 5.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents in each survey who confirmed having taken preventive measures. The black bars represent those who had taken the corresponding disaster preparedness actions even before our collaborative activities (July 2015), and they make up only 10% of the total participants. During and after the collaborative activities in the first academic year, we expected a dramatic improvement, but the results from the second questionnaire surveys in February 2016 fell short as shown in dotted bars—less than 10%.
Figure 3. Share of the Respondents Taking Disaster Preventive Measures Before and After the Disaster Education

Households that took disaster preparedness actions before and after the first half-year of the research activities. The black and dotted bars in each cell represent the percentage of those who took the corresponding disaster preparedness action before the session in July 2015 and after February 2016, respectively.

Despite this finding, the behavioral changes discussed in Chapter 4 were observed (excluding the case of the piano teacher) even before the second survey. This raises the following question: given that several behavioral changes were observed, why did the increase rate in the survey results remain low?

To determine the reasons for the big gap between the results of the quantitative and qualitative surveys, we interviewed the 16 guardians. The interviews took 30 min each and were held on March 22, 2016.

We found one of the answers to this question in the following parent’s comments:

“Yes, I do have a stockpile, but I thought that that wasn't enough at all. I’ve prepared a significant amount of water and food, but I still think that’s not enough in case the lifeline is completely cut.”

“I bought one case of water at the Home Depot. I haven’t been able to prepare the entire stockpile, though. And the other day, I tasted the canned bread (kanpan) that I had bought. We were thinking about what emergency foods were, and after eating it, I realized that they’re not any different from daily snacks.”
These suggest that the enhanced disaster prevention interest and awareness on the part of the interviewee caused the respondent to evaluate herself more closely. She had already taken disaster preparedness actions and grew increasingly stricter with herself, which made her think that what she was already doing was not enough. This self-perception is what was reflected in the survey responses. This is the very limitation of comparing the quantitative results of questionnaire surveys.

This finding also suggests an extremely significant academic aspect. Usually, when conducting questionnaire surveys multiple times throughout a research project, the same questions are asked. The results are then compared to discover any changes in the respondents before and after the survey, based on a premise that every respondent’s self-evaluation criteria remains the same. This method and way of thinking is not an issue in the natural sciences, which include, for example, measuring ground displacement caused by earthquakes or researching minerals in rocks. This is because the researcher’s intentions and purposes do not affect the items being measured (land and rocks) in any way. In the human sciences, however, long-term studies and multiple questionnaire surveys may affect respondents’ self-evaluations. The changes in the relationship between them and the researchers throughout the research may also alter their responses.

Awareness of these factors is crucial when conducting research on human behavior. Comparing two numbers obtained as pre- and postsurvey results and jumping to conclusions is not sufficient. Thus, it is essential to revisit and reexamine the findings reported in many academic papers measuring disaster education effectiveness.

Other than the two questionnaire surveys described above, we have conducted two more, for a total of four, in July 2015, February 2016, July 2016, and December 2016. Figure 4 below shows the percentages of the respondents taking disaster preventive measure.
Figure 4. Share of the Respondents Taking Disaster Preventive Measures Throughout the Research Period

Households that took disaster preparedness actions throughout the research period. The black, dotted, gray, and striped bars in each cell represent the percentage of people who practiced disaster preparedness in July 2015, February 2016, July 2016, and December 2016, respectively.

It is evident here that the likelihood of a household taking disaster preparedness actions increased throughout the research period. The increase between the second and third and the third and fourth surveys are especially noteworthy. This strongly suggests the necessity and effectiveness of practicing disaster preparedness education for the long term.
7. Conclusion

We taught disaster education to schoolchildren in Mashima Elementary School in Nagano City so that (1) students can protect their own lives and that (2) disaster preparedness actions within households can be promoted by empowering students and guardians. The aim of this research was shared by the authors, the schoolchildren, the schoolteachers, and the guardians. This study was done as an “action research”; thus, we did not aim for complete detachment from participants and sought meaning in not being objective all the time.

In the research period from July 2015 to February 2017, we conducted disaster education lessons to schoolchildren, lectures and training programs for teachers and guardians, and workshops for community members, as well as issued monthly BOSAI newsletters and carried out questionnaire surveys and interviews.

To evaluate the effectiveness of disaster education, we adopted the community of practice theory. In the CoP framework, learning is not a short-term knowledge or skill internalization or a one-way, temporary knowledge or skill transfer, among others. Rather, it must be perceived as a social practice, and ways in which the CoP is formed, sustained, and expanded must be carefully studied. In addition, the changes in the relationships among those involved and the (re)building of their identities must be observed simultaneously.

From a CoP perspective, we could observe many changes in the behaviors of schoolchildren and guardians. Students could apply their newly obtained knowledge and change their identity from learners to actors or educators. Guardians could begin taking disaster preparedness actions and playing roles as influencers. Evidently, the disaster education conducted in this research was effective when it was assessed qualitatively within the CoP framework.

We then attempted to quantitatively confirm the effectiveness of our program through the questionnaire surveys, comparing the one before and the one after the first half–academic year of activities. The initial percentage of those who had taken disaster preparedness actions was only 10% in July 2015, increasing no more than 10% or so in February 2016 despite the abovementioned behavioral changes. Subsequent interviews with guardians revealed that the interviewee’s interest and awareness in disaster prevention encouraged them to assess themselves more strictly.

In addition, being aware of these factors is crucial when conducting human behavior research. Comparing two numbers that were obtained as results before and after a survey and jumping to conclusions is not recommended. Thus, it would be prudent to revisit and reexamine the findings in many academic papers that claim to measure disaster education effectiveness.
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Appendix

A Survey on Disaster Prevention Mashima Elementary School (July)

Q1. *Grade _____ Class _____ ID _______ Child's name: __________________
   *The respondent is a (Male - Female)

Q2. How do you feel about a large-scale earthquake occurring in the region you live in?

Q3. Do you think the region you live in will be greatly damaged in the event of a disaster?

Q4. When do you think the region you live in will be struck by the large-scale earthquake?
    1. Within 5 years    2. Within 6-10 years    3. Within 11-30 years    4. Within 31-50 years
    5. Within 51-70 years    6. More than 7 years from now

Q5. In the event of an earthquake, how much damage do you think you will experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Select one answer)</th>
<th>Yes, very much</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Not really</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Will be seriously injured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Will not be able to live in current home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6. How do you think your child will react in the event of an earthquake when going to and from school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Select one answer)</th>
<th>Yes, very much</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Not really</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Can calmly protect self</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Can make the right judgments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Can identify the safest ways of evacuating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7. Do you think the following countermeasures are effective? (Select one answer). If you have already taken the countermeasure, select 6 instead of 1-5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Select one answer)</th>
<th>Yes, very much</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Not really</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
<th>Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Emergency stockpile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Emergency bag</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Securing furniture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Relocating furniture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Emergency contact method</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Anti-seismic reinforcement of homes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Subscription to earthquake insurance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8. What are possible reasons as to why you have not taken action yet, despite answering 1 or 2? (eg. It costs too much, I do not have time to do that, etc.)

This is the end of the survey. We appreciate your responses. Thank you.
The Fears

Dinil Pushpalal

Abstract

This article forwards “invisible fears” of nuclear disaster victims, who suffered from the explosion of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, happened as a result of Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on 11 March 2011. The primary focus has been given to Namie within close proximity to the power plant. Information acquired from local and national newspapers, documentary programs, online databases, published reports, narratives, and statistics has been referred for supporting the arguments. The discussions have been expanded by frequently referring normative expressions given in a landmark document of human security paradigm, 1994 Human Development Report. The author argues that nuclear threat is a personal or communal threat rather than an environmental threat, hence affected individuals should be treated as victims of physical violence due to invisible threats.

1. Introduction

Human Security paradigm promotes three preventive actions; freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live in dignity, against seven threats, which human beings generally face their day to day life. Fear is a subjective notion which depends on the mind or on an individual’s perception for its existence. Within the seven threats of human security discourse, personal threats necessitate freedom from fear more than other threats. Human Development Report (United Nations, 1994, p. 30) has explained personal threats as an act; from the state (physical torture), from other states (war), from other groups of people (ethnic tension), from individuals or gangs (crime, street violence), to women (rape, domestic violence), to children (child abuse), and to self (suicide, drug use). Canada’s foreign policy for human security is fully rooted in the “freedom from fear” conception. Canada’s commitment to this version of human security focuses on protecting people from acts of violence and helping build a greater sense of security in the personal sphere, while, Japanese Government led the Broad Definition Approach of empowering people’s ability to act on their own behalf—and on behalf of others. By just taking a cursory glance through the words “human security,” one notices that it means “freedom from fear” rather than other two preventive actions. A recent survey conducted by the Human Development Report Office proves this fact. They have asked women of all ages and occupational backgrounds around the world, “What does human security mean to you?” Many women responded that they were concerned with physical and psychological violence (United Nations, 2016). One of the emotional

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narratives by a woman from Cameroon captures a feeling of vulnerability and uncertainty, which many informants confirm in various ways.

“Human security is being able to sleep peacefully, not being afraid of getting home late at night because of violators, not driving with closed windows for fear that someone will grab my bag, going to the supermarket without being afraid of having my belongings stolen from the car, going to the Yaounde market without hiding my money in my bra, and walking freely along Kennedy Avenue” (United Nations, 2016).

Narratives like these give some sense of the variety of ways in which people’s lives were affected by fears and how this relates to establish core thoughts of human security discourse.

Examples given in 1994 Human Development Report presume that personal threats are physical, depicting them as torture, war, crime, rape, suicide etc. In other words, they are predominantly visible fears. This article attempts to understand invisible fears which are rooted from nuclear disasters. Nuclear disasters are categorized as an environmental threat in 1994 Human Development Report. It mentioned that many environmental threats are chronic and long-lasting. Others take on a more sudden and violent character. Bhopal and Chernobyl are the more obvious sudden environmental catastrophes (United Nations, 1994, p. 29), considering a nuclear disaster as an environmental threat. This article argues nuclear disasters as a cause of invisible fears, leading to personal and communal threats in affected areas rather than an environmental threat. The focus is primarily on Namie town within close proximity to Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (FDNPP) from which victims, stakeholders and local politicians were interviewed. Information acquired from local and national newspapers, documentary programs, online databases, published reports, narratives, and statistics has been referred for supporting the arguments. The discussions have been expanded by frequently referring normative expressions given in landmark document of human security paradigm, the 1994 Human Development Report.

2. Namie’s misfortune

In 1898, Namie reached a historical milestone with the establishment of a Nippon Railway station. In 1955, the population of Namie totaled 28,800; despite this, the town wanted to find a solution for its depopulation and financial difficulties. When Fukushima Prefecture invited nuclear power plants to be established in their territory in 1960, Namie was included as a candidate. However, the FDNPP
was constructed in the nearby towns of Futaba and Okuma. FDNPP also contributed to the diffusion of the society and economy in Namie by slowing population decline. Many FDNPP employees lived in Namie and, thus, contributed positively to its economy. The population of the town of Namie stood at 20,888 in December 2010; about 2,500 of them worked at FDNPP. Approximately 30 per cent of all FDNPP employees lived in Namie.

Figure 1. Radiation levels seven months after the disaster around FDNPP. The white line of the map shows the border of Namie. Derived from the Nuclear Regulation Authority, World Nuclear Association (World Nuclear News, 2013).

The tsunami killed 184 people and completely destroyed 613 houses in Namie. Furthermore, the nuclear disaster together with the tsunami displaced the entire population of the town. On 12 March, inhabitants voluntarily evacuated using their own automobiles or buses provided by the town. Most of those who evacuated the area headed north-west along Route 114 since it was the only available escape route, and took refuge at the Tsushima Kasseika Center, a place 30km far away from the FDNPP. To make matters worse, winds pushed the radioactive clouds in the same direction as the fleeing inhabitants. The Tsushima Kasseika Center is also located within the boundary of the most heavily radiated area in Figure 1. According to the radiation levels shown in Figure 1, the inhabitants may have experienced more than 19 μSv/hour, five times more radiation than a chest x-ray.

After understanding that they had taken refuge in one of the most contaminated places, the
dwellers started to move another 30 km landward side on 15th March morning and temporarily sheltered in Nihonmatsu city. The Town Hall and its functions too moved from place to place and Mayor with his staff sheltered in several places one after another, eating, sleeping and working together for evacuation and searching for missing. Mr. Tamotsu Baba, the Mayor of Namie, recounted:

“...we learnt about the accident at 5:44 AM on 12 March from a television programme, in which the Prime Minister’s office ordered inhabitants within 10 km to be evacuated. I personally made a decision on evacuation. I want to stress that there were not any directives for evacuation from our government. The town of Namie had an agreement with the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), to be informed of any trouble if it happened. However, it never functioned” (Baba, 2012).

3. Evacuees

By May, 2013 temporary shelters located beyond the 20 km evacuation zone hosted 14,000 evacuees while 7000 evacuees lived in other prefectures. The town office of Namie was moved to the city of Nihonmatsu in Fukushima Prefecture. Under guidelines established by the central government, TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima plant, has been paying 100,000 yen a month to each resident who was forced to evacuate. The payments will continue as long as residents are evacuees. This figure was calculated by referring to the approximate 120,000 yen monthly benefit that is paid through automobile liability insurance to those who are hospitalized as a result of traffic accidents (Kotsubo, 2013). However, the Namie municipal government argued that the figure is too low since it does not take into account the terrible damage caused by the nuclear accident which forced residents to evacuate. Nor does it take into account the fact that the disaster broke up communities which had been built up over many years. The Namie municipal government has asked that monthly compensation for psychological duress be increased to 350,000 yen.

Evacuees in temporary shelters are predominantly elderly since many young families have escaped with their young children to cities further away owing to anxiety related to invisible toxicants and also due to the lack of employment opportunities. Frustration, deteriorating health, and a growing feeling of unfair treatment are being reported by residents who evacuated from the township. Residents claim that their health and the health of their families has deteriorated after evacuating and they feel more irritable compared to before the disaster. Stress is causing disputes among many evacuees; some have reported a lack of sleep and increased smoking or drinking since being evacuated. Depression
and family collapse are also increasing. Conflicts between family members, between individuals from
different generations, and between those who want to return and those who cannot leave have been
reported. The majority of evacuated residents currently live apart from their extended family, which
is another cause of increased frustration. More than half of the residents moved away from other family
members (including elderly parents) with whom they lived before the disaster.

Another survey found that one third of the evacuees made the decision to never return to their
hometown (Kodera, 2012). A questionnaire was sent to all 18,448 residents of senior high school age
or above, among those, 11,001 responded (about 60 per cent of the total). Among those who responded,
64 per cent said they hoped to eventually return to Namie. Those respondents who decided not to
return gave the following justification for their responses:

"There is no hope of radiation levels decreasing."
"The nuclear accident will not be brought under control."
"It will be difficult to rebuild social infrastructure."

Among those respondents who want to return to Namie, 70 per cent stated that certain conditions
would have to be met before they returned. A decrease in radiation levels, the rebuilding of the
infrastructure for daily living and having a certain percentage of other residents also returning, were
all key stipulations for returning.

The questionnaires also contained sections where respondents could expand upon their answers.
Those sections showed the conflicting emotions among evacuees. One woman in her 30s who
evacuated to Nagano Prefecture responded that she would not return to Namie. Nevertheless, she
wrote:

"While I want to return, I feel that in reality it is difficult. I cannot allow my recently born
child to touch the soil of Namie. But, once I thrive with child-rearing, I want to return and
live in Namie because that is the only hometown I have."

Even those who said they wanted to one day return expressed various emotions. One woman in
her 20s wrote,

"I want to one day live again in Namie that I love. That is my only reason for having hope
right now."
One elderly woman wrote:

"I want to die in my home in Namie where the spirits of my ancestors are. I am no longer afraid of radiation" (Kodera, 2012).

4. Restricted areas and their neighborhoods

As a countermeasure to the accident at FDNPP, a 'Restricted Area' to which entry is prohibited has been designated around the nuclear plant within a 20 km radius. However, there are many other locations with high radiation levels beyond the 20 km radius since radioactive particles have been carried by the wind from the damaged power plant. By 7 May 2013, those locations have extended to 11 villages, towns and cities including Minamisoma, Naraha, Tomioka, Kawauchi, Okuma, Futaba, Namie, Katsurao, Iitate, Tamura and Kawamata. Those regions have been divided into four different categories according to the radioactive dosage (see Figure 2 and Table 1). Residents may return at will to visit and work without the use of protective equipment to areas marked in green. The only restriction is that they may not stay overnight. The radiation dosage in these areas is less than 20 mSv/year, which is the government's benchmark for permanent return.

Figure 2. Restricted areas and areas to which evacuation orders have been issued, as of 7 May, 2013 (METI, 2013).
Table 1. Evacuation Zones (by 7 May 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Radiation level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Areas to which evacuation orders are ready to be lifted</td>
<td>Less than 20 mSv/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas in which the residents are not permitted to live</td>
<td>Over 20 mSv/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas where it is expected that the residents will have difficulties returning to for a long time</td>
<td>More than 50 mSv/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate evacuation area</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Authors’ compilation)

While the evacuees from designated evacuation areas have been compensated by the government and TEPCO-regulated packages, inhabitants in nearby municipalities have basically been abandoned. However, the negative impact of the nuclear accident has spread throughout the entirety of Fukushima Prefecture, especially to cities such as Minamisoma, which is located adjacent to the 20 km restricted zone. Furthermore, a “black substance” resembling fungus which has spread along the roads of Minamisoma has increased anxiety among inhabitants. This “black substance” might have been carried by the wind from the damaged power plant. Mr. Koichi Oyama, an assemblyman of Minamisoma, insisted that:

“I am very much uneasy as a father. Looking at the high school girls who do not wear masks, looking at the elementary school children running barefoot, I worry from the bottom of my heart. If you can’t swim in the sea, if you can’t fish in a river, if you can’t gather mushrooms in the hills, what does that youth mean? Even though, there are many devices to measure radiation, who knows which radiation level is safe and which is not? If we cannot achieve freedom from fear here, we should be evacuated from Minamisoma. Is that not the right of a citizen?” (Oyama, 2012).

The catastrophe at FDNPP not only affected people directly in Fukushima Prefecture but also harmed the local economy. Sales of products from the prefecture have suffered, and tourist spots have also lost business because of rumors or misinformation about radioactive contamination. The sea off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture used to be a rich fishing ground where warm and cold ocean currents converge. However, after the nuclear crisis in March 2011, fishing in the southern sea area ground to a halt. In an article by The Japan Times, a victim of this fishing crisis mentioned that:

“...if such fishes are unloaded at ports outside Fukushima Prefecture, nobody thinks twice about buying them. But if they are unloaded at ports in the prefecture and then shipped to
other places for sale, they attract suspicion because they are from Fukushima Prefecture” (The Japan Times, 2012).

In May 2012, Fukushima fishermen caught 18 tons of bonito off the coast of Hachijo Island near Tokyo and brought them to their home port, where radiation monitoring confirmed that they were safe. But when the fish were shipped to Tokyo’s Tsukiji wholesale market, the market did not even put them up for auction (The Japan Times, 2012).

The vulnerabilities of the victims of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident accompanied with the Great East Japan Earthquake are listed in Table 2. Those affected by the nuclear accident have been divided into two categories, in which “forced evacuation” represents those inhabitants who previously lived in restricted zones and “voluntary evacuation” indicates inhabitants who voluntarily left non-restricted areas because of anxiety. Each exposure has been qualitatively assessed using three indicators, “yes,” “no,” and “perhaps,” according to the author’s experiences.

Table 2. Vulnerabilities of the victims of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident accompanied with the Great East Japan Earthquake.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure</th>
<th>Earthqu.</th>
<th>Tsunami</th>
<th>Nuclear Accident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation for living expenses</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation for damaged houses</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of return back to previous home</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of revitalization of local business</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of revitalization of agriculture</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market value for Products</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social discrimination</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health risk</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Author’s compilation)

5. Efforts to return

By April 1, 2017 evacuation orders were lifted for part of Namie town, however, large part of the town remains as areas designated as “Returning is Difficult,” where the annual cumulative radiation dose estimated from the air dose rate may not fall below 20 mSv even six years after the nuclear
accident (Reconstruction Agency 2017). However, some elderly people exert all possible efforts to return. The head of Tsushima ward Mr. Yoshito Konno measures radiation level once a month in his previous Akougi village, with the hopes of return back again to the former hometown. He has found that the radiation levels are more than 3.8μSv/h in the gardens of all 80 households in his village, which is the indicator for lifting evacuation order. He put into words:

“Government has given priority for decontamination of areas with lower radiation dosage, but neglected decontamination of areas designated as “Returning is Difficult.” Will my hometown stay like this forever? It is pity, it is lonely, it is difficult to express in words. My hometown will become a place where I can never return if the dose does not go down” (Hibakuno Mori, 2018).

Mr. Yasuo Yamazaki engaged in forestry in Tsushima forest before the nuclear accident. A 100-year old Tsushima pine tree can cost two million yen. Now his pine and cypress trees are difficult to sell, because trees are highly contaminated. He and his fellows try to understand possibility of restoring forestry in his area, having advices from an expert of Fukushima University. Mr. Yamazaki put into words:

“It is the ’Tsushima tree’ after all. I want to use it in Namie. I was born and raised here. Namie Town cannot be abandoned so easily. Probably, everyone who is evacuated is thinking so. They want to return but they cannot return. (According to the expert radiation level of pine and cypress is high and they are difficult to ship at this moment. It will take 100 years for falling radioactivity of trees to one tenth of current level. To resume forestry now, it is necessary to peel off the soil and replant trees). In the story that I heard now, I have to spend quite a long time if I replant it. I feel that Tsushima pine will not be born again, our era has passed” (Hibakuno Mori, 2018).

Mr. Satoshi Mori (Emeritus Professor, University of Tokyo), a researcher who continues the field investigations immediately after the accident to date, has collected the wild plants in the areas designated as “Returning is Difficult” and found high cesium dose in flowers and fruits (i.e. goldenrod flowers: 97,300 Bq/kg, cosmos: 73,300 Bq/kg, cypress fruits: 18,082 Bq/kg), which is far higher than permissible level for crops (100Bq/kg). Pointing his surroundings in “Returning is Difficult” area, he insisted that
“If there is cesium the plant absorbs it. This is very beautiful nature, but we must see something we cannot see. We have to look at the landscape with such eyes” (Hibakuno Mori, 2018).

Above narratives, statistical investigations, and contamination measurements collectively demonstrate devastation happened, and anxiety, uncertainty, distrust and social fragmentation the inhabitants have experienced. Social fragmentation among the elderly and young, husband and wife, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is significant.

6. **Nuclear security, state security and human security**

The concept of human security is part of an ongoing debate over the meaning of security that has its origins in the aftermath of the collapse of the international structure following the break-up of the Soviet Union and an end to the Cold War. The debate focused on the shifting emphasis of discourse surrounding security from military and political issues to concerns that reflected the economic and social well-being of people and communities. Primacy shifted from states to focus on people and from state security to human security.

Seventeen years before FDNPP explosion, 1994 Human Development Report asserts its wishfulness of transition from nuclear security to human security. It emphasizes that although nuclear explosions devastated Nagasaki and Hiroshima, humankind has survived its first critical test of preventing worldwide nuclear devastation. But five decades later, we need another profound transition in thinking from nuclear security to human security (United Nations, 1994, p. 22).

Opinions on nuclear energy are significantly divided among its winners and losers or outsiders and insiders or state security front and human security front. Nuclear energy guarantees stable supply, large amount of energy and energy diversity. It minimizes greenhouse gases and oxides emissions. Representing state security front, the United States Energy Secretary Rick Perry posits that “Nuclear deterrence has been, and remains, the cornerstone of our nation’s security posture and among the highest priority missions at the Department of Energy” (NNSA 2018a). As long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective nuclear deterrent to keep America safe (NNSA 2018b). In the same front, energy poverty encourages leaders to take pro-nuclear actions. Speaking on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the devastating Fukushima disaster, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said that “Our resource-poor country cannot do without nuclear power to secure the stability of energy supply while considering what makes economic sense and the issue of
Above speeches demonstrate that strong trust about nuclear energy does not fit with their specific government policies that prioritize human security. There is a common attitude that governments depend on nuclear security as their guardian of state, even though their core priority of governing has been set on human security. Judging by his experience of socialist times Chernobyl explosion, Scherbak noticed no difference from Fukushima (Scherbak, 2012). Comparing Chernobyl with Fukushima he posits that:

“FDNPP disaster means that mankind has not adequately learned to react to emergency situations yet; it was unable to use the experiences accumulated through Chernobyl. Visiting Fukushima and listening to various people, I sadly realized that the vast experience of Chernobyl, which was accumulated through the bitter price of lives and health, was not utilized. This is not a matter of the pride and self-discipline of the Japanese people, who have demonstrated the finest examples of courage and stoicism during the earthquake and tsunami. This is a matter for Ukrainians, who have such large data sets with regard to the survival of people in the contaminated areas, agricultural fields and the influence of low radiation on the human body. We failed to provide our knowledge to the world; we failed to make it scholarly capital. I am thinking that now there are two radioactive towns in the world – socialistic Pripyat with its typical Lenin statues and ideological slogans of communist times, and democratic Namie with advertisements of Michelin tires and McDonalds. They are so different but are united by human grief” (Scherbak, 2012, translated by Alexei Kononenko).

On the other hand, security ultimately is a matter in which the leading concern should be around human life. Amartya Sen argued that:

“If we are speaking of security, it has to be human security. Since this also means security from external threats and violence, what we call national security is one of the components of human security. In the name of national security, resources are often not allocated to things on which human security depends, such as education, health care, and a social safety net. Sometimes, national security in the political context seems like a barrier rather than a component to fostering human security. There’s no reason why there should be a conflict between the two” (Sampath, 2015).
7. Freedom from invisible fears

While the earthquake and tsunami did not affect Fukushima differently than any other earthquake or tsunami would affect another city, the prevailing problems in Fukushima are considerably different. While reconstruction in other prefectures progresses, Fukushima is still struggling with the nuclear trauma. Figure 3 illustrates that difference of issues across the borders. Fukushima Prefecture has been compared with its northern neighbor Miyagi Prefecture. Miyagi Prefecture is closer to the epicenter of 11 March 2011 earthquake than Fukushima Prefecture and its coastal area suffered the severest damages by tsunami than any other place.

Figure 3. The difference of issues across the borders.
Note: Prepared by the author using a Google Earth map.

There are certainties and uncertainties about effects of radiation on the human body. A certain is that acute exposure to a high dosage of external radiation results in death in humans since it has been proved by the epidemiological survey of atomic-bomb victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An uncertain is that the health effects of low-level radiation exposure at less than 0.1 Gy. Cancer is one of the delayed effects of radiation, which appears after a long-term latency period without any symptoms, making it unclear whether or not cancer is a result of radiation exposure (Fukumoto, 2014). Radioactive iodine 131 (I-131) has been attributed to an increase in the incidence of thyroid cancer after the Chernobyl disaster. However, there is an argument that the physical half-life of I-131, which is eight days, was too short to accurately estimate the dose just a short time after the accident (Fukumoto, 2014).

Regardless of the health effects on the human body are certain or not, it is understood that
inhabitants of Fukushima Prefecture predominantly live in fear and are vulnerable to all seven threats defined in the 1994 Human Development Report. Hence, the fears of inhabitants could be divided across the borders of Fukushima and other prefectures as “invisible fears” and “visible fears”, respectively. While the “visible fears” can be reduced through physical solutions, the “invisible fears” of Fukushima should immediately be treated through transcendental actions. As we understand through the narratives, nuclear pollution discriminates people across the borders more than other environmental pollutions. It depresses an affected individual to ask a question “why only me?” Human insecurity among the affected inhabitants causes horizontal inequality and vulnerability of persons at the individual level, then they escalate to community level as social disintegration and fragmentation.

8. Concluding remarks

Human security is people-centered. It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices and how much access they have to market and social opportunities. Moreover and most importantly, human security serves to prevent or address various threats to life, ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of individuals. The value of human security should be applied to real situations and help make tangible steps towards the amelioration of various threats and insecurities affecting vulnerable people. Therefore, this study attempted to ascertain the threats or insecurities that nuclear disaster victims are facing. What the author proposes is that the nuclear disaster not only destroyed and changed physical habitats and livelihoods, but it also interrupted economic, social, and moral settings in ways that caused multiple human rights crises. The author argues that nuclear threat is a personal or communal threat rather than an environmental threat, hence affected individuals should be treated as victims of physical violence due to invisible threats.


This study has been actively supported by many victims of the FDNPP disaster, who provided invaluable information about their experiences. I would like to convey my utmost gratitude to those onymous and anonymous individuals. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP 16H05648.
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‘Everything is decided somewhere else’:
Risk narratives as a navigation tool in societies experiencing uncertainty

Atsushi Watabe

Abstract
In recent decades, economic development in Southeast Asian countries has made tremendous impacts on rural societies. People have tried to take advantage of the new opportunities brought about by such economic development, as well as the assets and capacities presented, to develop and diversify their livelihood options.

Against this backdrop, this paper analyses the narratives of people living in the villages of Northeast Thailand. Participants have shared their experiences employing their unique narrative frameworks, highlighting inequality of the opportunities to take advantage of the changes. Their narratives also cover some of the risks associated with economic development, such as the environmental damage due to new crops and factories. When talking about these risks, people make their positions clear – whether they can avoid the damages or not. Thus, these expressions of risk are the navigation tools guiding them in these societies in transition.

1. Introduction

Since the late 20th century, the recognition and behaviours of lay people living with risk have become one of the key foci in risk studies (Leiss 1996, Plough and Krimsky 1987, Morrow 2009, Amendola 2001, and Zinn 2004.) However, it is not easy to study people’s risk perceptions. Researchers are tempted to ask survey participants what their main concerns are, assuming that the participants will relate their perceptions of risk which they had developed in advance. In reality, these participants cannot give clear answers to such unfocused questions (Hollway and Jefferson 1997). People’s lives are usually exposed to many uncertainties and threats related to their personal conditions such as health (Burchardt 2010.) or employment (Schäfer, 2010; Apitzsch 2010,) as well as to the outside world such as political instability (Safonova and Sántha 2010; Reiter 2010), crime (Hollway and Jefferson 1997,) ‘not in my backyard’ (Nimby) issues (Henwood, Karen et al. 2010), and so on. A risk does not usually occupy a person’s mind. People face risks only at some occasions such as when they are pressed to take urgent decisions. Thus, it is not easy for survey participants to pin down which risks concern them when a researcher asks such a question without clarifying the context.

1 Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
Narrative approaches, including biographies, are applied to have meaningful conversations about risks. A narrative is a co-construction of knowledge by the speaker and the listener (Tamboukou, Andrews, and Squire 2013, and Squire 2013). Hence, one can also assume that the meaning of risk is co-created during the ad-hoc occasions of interviews. By taking the time to co-create storylines, the researcher can work with the participants to discover how they attach meaning to something threatening their day-to-day living.

Based on the above, this paper looks at how people identify something as a risk during the course of a conversation, instead of assuming that they are describing perceptions of ‘the risk’ which they had in advance. The following sections are based on interviews conducted in two villages in Northeast Thailand. People have experienced rapid transitions in their socioeconomic conditions in recent decades, resulting in both opportunities and threats. This analysis reveals that when the participants talked about their experiences of socioeconomic transitions, they drew maps that included many elements such as locations, characters, and events. They monitored the researcher’s reactions and took steps to delineate the outlines of the maps on which they depicted possible benefits and damages, as well as their response to uncertainties.

2. Transitions taking place in rural villages of Khon Kaen Province, Thailand

Khon Kaen is one of the largest cities in Northeast Thailand, located at the intersection of two major highways, namely the ‘Friendship Way’ connecting Bangkok to the border with the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), and the east-west highway from Chiang Mai to the border with Cambodia. It has therefore served as a ‘growth pole’ in Thailand’s regional development strategies since the 1970s (Glassman and Sneddon 2003, and Sang-Arun 2013). From the 1990s onwards, many factories began operating along the highways and contributed to the rapid development of the regional economy.

Due to the industrialisation of the region, the rural population have changed their livelihoods substantially: Off-farm employment opportunities became abundant, and households obtained the major part of their income from the salaries of family members working in the factories or cities. Many development projects have been launched in the villages and improved the infrastructures as well as services such as finance and health care.

Against this backdrop, the capacity to attract development projects and participate in off-farm employment markets has a decisive influence on social status in present-day rural Thai societies, as previous studies have reported (Walker 2012; Kelly 2009). Parents are driven to earn money to support
their children to study as far as possible and gain the best possible jobs. Young villagers graduate from high school and take employment in the industrial or service sectors. Villagers continue farming, but their ways are different from what was practised decades earlier. Some people grow cash crops under contract with the major agribusinesses, and some produce organic vegetables and fruit for the middle-class urban population. Others, mainly elderly people, continue farming without generating profits while their younger family members earn wages to support their livelihoods (Watabe 2017).

I visited three villages in Khon Kaen province between 2000 and 2006 to conduct interviews with the villagers about their livelihoods. I had opportunities to revisit these villages in 2016 and 2017, and found that the villages had taken remarkably different pathways during the decade between my visits. Due to their different conditions, such as the distance from the industrial zones, regional development had made different impacts on the villages. Naturally, the ways in which the villagers’ livelihoods have shifted are also different.

This paper introduces two of the three villages.

2.1 N Village

N Village is located 20 km south of the centre of Khon Kaen city. Villagers grow rice, vegetables, and fruit for own consumption and selling. Additionally, many villagers work in Bangkok or foreign countries to support their families. However, since the financial crisis of 1997 many of these migrant workers have returned and stayed in the village. They were eventually employed by the factories that have been relocated near the village since the 1990s. Due to its advantageous location near the highways, the village prospered from industrialisation, through the job opportunities at factories as well as other business opportunities, such as selling food to factory workers and running dormitories to accommodate temporary workers.

While the majority of the villagers under 40 years old work in the factories or cities, those above this age continue to farm. However, this is not the main part of their livelihood. By the mid-2000s they had substantially reduced the production of cash crops and mostly grew rice and a few kinds of vegetables for own consumption. They stated that they were ‘just doing’ farming. Some of them have already sold their farmland to the factories. However, as they noticed that factory workers would not be able continue this kind of work after their mid-forties, they started considering the retirement lives of their children. Although farming does not constitute a major part of their income generation, it is now considered a part of their insurance.
2.2 P Village

P Village is located 120 km west of Khon Kaen city. The area was developed as part of the government’s resettlement programme in the 1980s. In the early days of resettlement, it was difficult to clear the forest and grow crops. Thus almost all families had to work on the sugar farms or shrimp farms in Central Thailand. In the early 2000s the prefectural government encouraged the villagers to grow soy, but this attempt ended in failure and left many villagers in debt. Then, a new variety of sugarcane was introduced in the late 2000s. Within several years, two thirds of the farmlands had shifted to sugar, which remarkably improved the local economy. Today approximately ten large holders run sugar plantations where they employ many workers, both from within and outside the village. Other smallholders also grow and sell sugarcane under the contract to the factory. This shift to sugar farming has enabled the villagers to live on their land without seasonal migration for the first time in the village history. However, as they use most of their farmlands to grow sugarcane, they need to buy most of their food with cash, although job opportunities other than on the sugar farms are still limited, owing to the long distance to the industrial zones.

3. The frame of narratives on the rural changes

In 2016 and 2017, I made short visits to the three villages, including the above two, and talked to 61 villagers in total. In 2016, I introduced myself and told the villagers that I was visiting for the first time in 10 years. This introduction prompted my interviewees to touch on what had changed during that period. In 2017, some of them met up with me again and related their stories on the changes they had observed.

Participants in N Village described the changes concerning the factories, such as the increased number of job opportunities for the youth and the development of infrastructures.

Interviewee: Many factories are in operation now. ‘CP’2 produces instant foods, ‘Titan’ for foods. The street was two-track back then, but now it has four tracks. A lot of cars come to the CP factory, making us feel dangerous. The civilisation of the village has changed.

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2 CP stands for Charoen Phokphan, one of the largest conglomerates in Southeast Asia. Its strength lies in food and agricultural business.
Researcher: In what manner?

Respondent: Roads in the village became better. You see the arcades over there. Waste collection service now comes to each house. Schools have now transportation services that bring many children every morning. Everything became convenient. Water channel improved as well. Now the village has a park and exercise facilities. TAO (the sub-district administration office) developed them.

(Shortened)

Researcher: Has the factory changed the villagers’ lives?

Interviewee: It changed, changed greatly. We can live a comfortable life if we spend money. In the past, we had to do everything ourselves. For instance, we distilled rainwater to produce drinking water. But now we can use the water line.

Researcher: What about those having less money? Do they find it difficult to live?

Interviewee: If one does not have enough money, one should work harder. Besides, TAO will help them. Aged villagers can receive a pension.

Researcher: Understood. Has agriculture changed also?

Interviewee: Some still go to the farm. They can continue unless there is flood or drought. It was OK last year. This year we haven’t had rain yet.

Researcher: Have you had more flood or drought recently?

Interviewee: Not really. In the past, we could do nothing in drought years. We were forced to find work outside. Now we can ask the government to support us by, for example, allowing us to use the irrigation water. This is also the reason I think the civilisation has improved.

(N Village, 29 April 2016)

In P Village the spread of sugar farming often became the introductory part of the narratives, followed by the opportunities for the youth, the increase in income and expenditure, and the unequal opportunities to become wealthy.

Interviewee: I think quite many things changed. People used to grow soy, corn, and cassava. Now they mostly grow sugarcane. Many villagers now work at the financiers’ farms.

Researcher: What made them decide to change the crops?

Interviewee: Once we plant, we can harvest sugarcane for four continuous years. It is stronger than the other crops.
Researcher: Does it influence the villagers’ way of living?

Interviewee: Quite a lot. We used to help each other more often. Now they always compete with each other for finding jobs or finding employees.

(P Village, 30 April 2016)

The above excerpts illustrate that the narratives of the two villages share a similar framework. They start from the changes in the livelihood options and then connect to the affluence or opportunities distributed to people. Finally, they introduce changes in other respects, such as communicating, studying, etc.

The similarity in the frameworks is also seen in the manner people contrast the characters in their stories. Narrative research has revealed that the participants develop unique contrasts of elements that enable and confine their living, such as spaces (Ridanpää 2017 and Schäfer 2010), cultural and linguistic groups (Bond et al. 2012 and Ridanpää 2017), particular experiences and the normal state (Mota et al. 2018 and Zinn 2010), and health conditions (Green, Thompson, and Griffiths 2002 and Burchardt 2010). Participants from the villages in transition contrasted those who took advantage of the opportunities with those who were left behind. For instance, factories usually employ workers under 40 or 45 years old. Thus, villagers above 45 stated that they had nothing to do with the increased opportunities.

Interviewee: Factories improved the economy. Young people go there to work. The elderly like us have nothing to do with it. I hope our children and grandchildren have more jobs.

(N Village, 7 May 2017)

Interviewee: Everyone works in the factories. Nobody goes to farmlands or catches fish or frogs to eat. Only elderly people stay here and take care of kids. Now this village is the village for the aged.

Researcher: Where are the young villagers?

Interviewee: In factories. They don’t work on farms. They ask their parents to take care of their children. Very few stay in the village.

(Shortened)

Researcher: Isn’t it hard for the families who don’t have members working in the factories?

Interviewee: They live on the paddy and some dryland. If they have small land like one or
two rai (0.16 ha to 0.32 ha), it will be hard. They need a lot of effort to live on.

(N Village, 2 May 2016)

When these aged villagers stated that they had ‘nothing to do with’ factories, they differentiated the changes in the village, in the family, and in the opportunities for ‘the aged like us’. They described the different roles: young villagers work in the factories while the aged people stay home to take care of the children and farmlands. With such statements, they contrasted those who benefit from the factories with those who do not, and located characters on the relevant sides.

The participants from P Village were more direct about unevenly distributed opportunities. They explained that the shift in crops benefited the landowners, while the workers’ status stayed the same as before. With the increased wages they could earn enough income without engaging in seasonal migration. However, this fact seems subtle compared to the significant improvement of the landowners’ economy.

Interviewee: I guess most of the families now buy rice. Only a few grow themselves.

Researcher: Does the TAO support those who can’t live on?

Interviewee: Not specifically. Villagers need to earn cash to let their children go to colleges and vocational schools. They need to work at factories to this end.

Researcher: Is it still better than to live on the small land they have?

Interviewee: I think so. Families became bigger, but the size of the land is the same. They have no option.

(Shortened)

Interviewee: Those who work on the sugar farms are those who aren’t employed in factories. They do not have the educational background required by the factories, such as a lower secondary school diploma. They can’t work in factories. In my case, I can’t leave this house all day as I have a sick mother. Those people also need to earn an income by all means by the time they reach certain ages, like 50.

(Deputy head of P Village, 1 May 2016)

Even in a remote village, children do not want to be farmers. They go to the upper-secondary school, dreaming of becoming police officers, nurses, or accountants. However, in reality most of them become paid workers on farms or in factories. Against this background they consider working on a sugar farm something done by those who have no other options, despite the substantial increase in
incomes this work has brought.

The participants arranged the characters of their narratives according to their respective positions, such as those taking advantage of the new opportunities and those who could not make use of the new opportunities. Their narratives needed this kind of casting, arguably because their social status, as well as the possibility to maintain and improve on their current circumstances, depended heavily on their access to the new economic activities in their rural societies. They had to give account of their thoughts and behaviours in terms of the contrast between those who were advantaged by the socioeconomic transitions and those who were not.3

Thus, the generic frameworks of the narratives about rural changes have been presented. The participants described the increased job opportunities, the need for cash expenditure, the absence of young people in the village, etc. At the same time, they compared those who capitalised on the new opportunities presented by factories and sugar farms and those who did not, those who can live more convenient lives with cash and those who experience hardships. Such a framework guides the speaker and the listener to attach meaning to what they have done in the past, as well as to what they are doing in the present. For instance, their past efforts to work hard in a foreign country are associated with the current status of their children, who have graduated from high school and have decent jobs.

4. Risks and the (lack of) capacities to address them

Socioeconomic transitions bring opportunities as well as threats. Thus, the villagers’ narratives also embedded some unique contrasts regarding risks. Risk is a narrative linkage in which the object of the risk (a nuclear power station, for instance) is connected to the object at risk (health, for instance) and the probability of its consequences (damage to health) (Mairal 2008). The topic of risk allows the speakers to highlight the different positions faced by themselves and their neighbours.

Participants in P Village often pointed to the damage to villagers’ health caused by the sugar farms. The farms use a massive amount of chemical fertilisers and pesticides from April to May every year. Additionally, they burn the stems of the sugarcane in the harvest season for labour effectiveness. The villagers have concerns about soil contamination and health damage caused by these methods. In fact, a person in a nearby village fell sick after the chemical spraying and died suddenly within a day.

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3 In addition to the contrasts between those who benefit from the new economic opportunities and those do not, some unique roles are assigned to neighbours. Participants in N Village mentioned their neighbours who sold their farmlands to factories, pointing out that this would threaten the families’ future livelihoods. People in P Village often talked about their debt that had increased over the past decade. They were not concerned about the current interest or the amounts owed. However, they were afraid of passing down the debt to their children. These topics were also useful for them to describe the opportunities and threats that were unevenly distributed among the villagers.
Stem-burning is a prohibited method due to potential soil and air pollution. The villagers have different ways of talking about the topics of chemicals and stem-burning. On the one hand, it is a pressing concern for the farmworkers.

*Interviewee:* We have the problem here and there. It caused a death in the sub-district. After coming back from spraying, a man became sick and died. We have damages. I feel numb in my leg. I am sure this is because of the chemicals.

*Researcher:* Do you ask the landowner to reduce chemicals?

*Interviewee:* Nobody does such a thing. We complain only among ourselves.

*Researcher:* Why? Because you can’t show displeasure with the landowners?

*Interviewee:* Correct. We can’t. We are also afraid of the groundwater that we drink.

*Researcher:* Does the headman or the TAO do anything?

*Interviewee:* I haven’t heard. We have a health check. But no measure has been taken.

(P Village, 6 May 2017)

*Interviewee:* A person died because of the spraying of pesticide a few years ago, right over there in the village. Everyone worries.

*Researcher:* Don’t you appeal to reduce the amount?

*Interviewee:* No.

*Researcher:* Why not?

*Interviewee:* I have no idea. Everything is decided somewhere else. More people died in the neighbouring villages. I have no idea if it is possible to go back to the past method even if we want to. We have nothing else to do. So, they do the same (spraying chemicals) even now.

*Researcher:* Do you work at the sugar farm?

*Interviewee:* I go there in the harvesting season. I don’t join spraying.

(P Village, 6 May 2017)

In these conversations, the speakers and the listener share the same understanding that workers are incapable of negotiating with their employers to address the issues. To protect themselves, they need to keep a distance from the sugar farms during the spraying season.

On the other hand, other participants told me that they could use chemicals safely. According to them, they can protect themselves in various ways, such as by wearing protective gear, spraying from
a tractor instead of on foot, and finally, employing someone else instead of doing it themselves. They indicated that only those who do not follow the instructions might encounter problems.

*Interviewee:* Chemicals might affect health. We haven’t seen the effect clearly, as it comes slowly. We have instructions to have masks and gloves on. If we take decent care, we won’t become sick. Some don’t follow them. I don’t know if they are in a hurry or they don’t know. These people become sick or die. Doctors do not form a clear diagnosis, but I suppose there is a linkage. I myself am careful.

(P Village, 6 May 2017)

To the question as to whether there was a way to cope with this other than the individual ‘care’ of the workers, the village head responded that they had no choice.

*Researcher:* I heard some refrain from spraying themselves in fear of health effect. *Interviewee:* You are right. I suppose some have allergies to chemicals. Now we often spray on the small tractors. Others carry the tanks themselves. In any case, we won’t have enough harvest without (chemicals). Not worthy of doing (sugar farms). I have tried without chemicals once. I went to the farm and took bugs away one by one with my hands, but I couldn’t finish. The farm is so large.

*Researcher:* Does the village have any plan to deal with this? Don’t you collaborate with the government or health centre? *Interviewee:* We discuss in the meetings. We talked to the district office, but no division helped us. We have no choice. The burning of stems was banned two years ago by the government, but all farms continue. Researchers come here and advise us to stop using chemicals. But from the viewpoint of the farmers, it is unpractical.

(Head of P Village, 6 May 2017)

By contrast, the head teacher of P Village primary school said the villagers should do something.

*Interviewee:* I want the villagers to have more knowledge. If they grow sugarcane, they should learn to do so without damaging the soil and the environment. I hope Khon Kaen University and the TAO could cooperate. We may be able to make a profit by packing the vegetables and bringing them to town. In short, I want them to have marketing knowledge.
Come back in 10 years. If they keep using chemicals as they do now, they will not have a successful harvest in 10 years or 15 years from now. They should do better marketing, grow fruit in addition to vegetables, and introduce better methods to avoid degrading the land.

(Head teacher of primary school, P Village, 1 May 2016)

Previous narrative research on risks has revealed that the participants elaborate on how they and their colleagues suffer from risks, and mitigate risks differently, according to their different attributes and conditions. While participants in P Village expressed their concern about health and the environment, and their opinions that those who do not take appropriate measures to protect themselves will suffer, they also clarified how they were involved in the changes that sugar farming had brought about. The workers described their worry and incapacity to negotiate with the landowners, portraying themselves as not in a position to address the issue. Their concerns come from somewhere that they cannot access. Some spoke of protective measures or the necessity of alternative methods. They identified themselves in a position of committing to the changes in the village.

The villagers in N Village generally welcomed the increase in the number of factories, but sometimes felt uneasy about them. In 2016, the plan to build a factory making asphalt pavement material caused worries. The factory was originally planned for a different district, but the plan was suddenly changed. The villagers requested the company to clarify its measures to prevent pollution. They gathered signatures and sent the headman and the TAO a request to have the municipal government revise the plan. However, the request was not heeded and the construction licence was issued.

No actual case of health or environmental problems has been reported yet. However, the municipal government’s way of going over their heads uncovered the fact that the villagers are not in a position to decide whether they welcome the new opportunities or not. This experience became a popular topic for the villagers’ narratives, enabling them to highlight their sense of incapacity in a society in transition. However, some participants expressed the view that the village needs to come up with alternatives, so that people can become independent of the factories.

Interviewee: What has changed? Like the economy, do you mean? Factories have huge impacts. Last year they decided to build a new one to produce asphalt here. We objected

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4 See, for instance, Moloney, Hunt, and Joe-Laidler 2015, on the narratives of young drug sellers in San Francisco.
to this plan and filed a petition, but they finally started construction. It was not us, but someone in T District did.

*Researcher:* Did they build in spite of the villagers’ voice?

*Interviewee:* Correct. The government and the city had already approved.

*Researcher:* What was the reason for your objection?

*Interviewee:* Pollution. It was so close and in a high place. We were afraid of the pollution of the groundwater. We buy water but still use groundwater as well.

*Researcher:* Does anyone from this village work at the asphalt factory?

*Interviewee:* No. The factory offered that they could repair the pavement in the village for free. But we rejected this. What is the purpose of this interview? Do you do this only in Thailand?

*Researcher:* I am studying the responses of the local people to the changes in society and the economy. Not only in Thailand. I do this in other countries as well.

*Interviewee:* Then, I am the representative of this village, aren’t I?

(Shortened)

*Interviewee:* The villagers do not want the factories to come. Factories can’t get along with us. They came here and told us what kind of benefits they could offer, but the villagers did not accept. However, the factories still came.

*Researcher:* Does the head or the TAO mobilise the villagers to protest?

*Interviewee:* They offer bribes to those big guys. People in the city and the prefecture were already corrupt.

*Researcher:* Then, what do you think is necessary to improve the village?

*Interviewee:* The village needs more development. We need more support from the government, for example, to electrify the farms. We do not need more factories.

*Researcher:* Do you mean the villagers can live on farming?

*Interviewee:* I believe so. Though the majority of the villagers work in the factories, some still live on farming. They have enough to live and need little money for water, electricity, and so on.

(TAO member in N Village, 7 May 2017)

Having checked my intention, the participant proclaimed himself as the representative of the village. I then asked what was required to improve the situation, understanding that he was speaking on behalf of those left behind. He then related his opinions on the potential of making a livelihood
from farming. With these remarks, he indicated that the current pattern of development was not the best way for the villagers.

Previous research has found that those who face threats or have survived dangerous events often share common narrative plots. In the two villages many people related common narratives of how they had become aware of the threats, voiced their concerns, and were not paid heed by the authorities. However, some of the participants, such as the head teacher of P Village primary school and the TAO member of N Village, built on the common frameworks and created additional storylines in which they identified themselves as being in a position to propose alternative paths for those left behind.

5. Conclusion

Narrative is a collaborative work in which the speaker and the listener jointly construct a framework and assign positions to characters and events at the right moments. The speaker and the listener carefully develop their pathway by checking whether they share the same vocabulary, topics, and backgrounds. As the narrative progresses, they develop a framework highlighting the contrasts between spaces, times, people or groups, giving different meanings to the storylines. Different understandings of, and approaches to, risk and the development of risk were elements of the framework that emerged during the ad-hoc occasions of the narratives of this study. The participants stated that something was a risk and contrasted those who took advantage of, and those who were left behind by, the transitions, and those who had the power to overcome risks and those who did not.

Such contrasts allowed the participants to talk in a coherent manner about their experiences, as well as their aspirations to cope with many uncertainties of a society in transition. Many participants depicted themselves as people affected by economic development without the ability to control the situation. Some emphasised that only those who did not use the right methods were affected, adding that it was not possible to get rid of the source of the risk. However, some crafted alternative frameworks, in which they expressed their intention to take back control for the sake of those who were not advantaged by the current patterns of development. Seen in that light, when they talked about the connections between the objects of risk and the objects at risk, they crafted their tools to navigate the ocean of uncertainties.

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5 See, for instance, Andresen 2017, on the narratives about the large fire in Norway.
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Practical and Philosophical Perspectives on `Everyday Life’ as Applied to Urban Contexts: Some Evidence from the Philippines

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Abstract
“Everyday life” of citizens around the world is increasingly taking place in the context of cities as dynamic, unpredictable sites where there are diverse opportunities for developing human capacities, but also the presence of harmful or unjust social conditions and risks, especially in developing countries. This research and critical commentary tries to show that field conditions tend to resonate with ideas from the literature that show how relative deprivation should be more a concern than absolute metrics set by authorities for a better life, and that citizens do not necessarily choose selfish interest or profit-maximization everyday, but may settle for sub-optimal choices with greater certainty versus risk, or other perceived non-material benefits. In a related vein, philosophical commentary reminds us that “everyday life” is a potent phenomenon that manifests acts of contestation in urban contexts against established structures, which may be perceived to be unjust, inefficient, or non-responsive, especially towards Human Security concerns. The essay closes by suggesting that there is importance in removing adversarial factors and obstacles to development of human capacities, which in turn will allow citizens’ everyday life to expand and progress on its own accord, with no need for patronizing intervention from formal power holders.

“A revolution takes place when and only when people can no longer lead their daily lives...”

-- Henri Lefebvre (1971)

1. Introduction: Purpose and Scope of the Research

“Everyday Life” has taken an urban cast and hue. Since a majority of the world’s population has come to live in cities since 2007, give or take a few years (United Nations 2014), it has likewise become inevitable that each daily concern of the ordinary citizen—indeed the entire drama of human life, will more often play itself out in a setting inhabited by throngs of other citizens, themselves often caught in similar struggles, surrounded by streets and buildings that crowd out nature, by materialistic commerce as well as the blaze and blare of mass media. This has been reflected in the literature in so far as the urban question has become one of the dominant metanarratives through which the current planetary situation is interpreted, both in academic circles and in the public sphere, especially since

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the Marxist sociologist Manuel Castells declared back in the 1970s his astonishment at how urban problems had become an essential element of government policy, and not just an ideological appurtenance to discussions of citizens’ concerns and overall societal development (Brenner 2013, 85). This essay concerns itself with the Human Security aspects of that urban development, by first describing a couple of representative manifestations of contemporary “everyday life”, using Metro Manila as a case study, but drawing too from the author’s own experiences in other cities, as well as from scholarly accounts of other Southeast Asian urban settings. It then proceeds to reflect upon the more important question, how does life become worth living in this daily arena of challenges that many cities present? The core argument asserts that the quotidian experience, like all other manifestations of individual and group behavior, needs to be examined, and if necessary, shaped formally or informally by responsible actors in order to prevent the occurrence of shocks, to eschew the accumulation of inefficiencies and injustices that later erupt in different crises on individual or collective existence, and to support instead the flowering of everyday life that is empowering and afforded of dignity that present levels of sociopolitical consciousness, economic production, and technological advancement permit.

2. Analysis of Concepts from the Literature and Examples from the Fieldwork

In the first place, what is “everyday life”? At a superficial level, it would involve the ordinary experiences and routines that are taken for granted to such an extent that these have almost become invisible (Rajendran 2013, 122). And yet one person’s routine may differ greatly from another’s even within the same neighborhood, more so between people who live in cities on different continents. Nevertheless, the shared story of all human civilization is that of people filling the space and time of their waking hours first doing what is necessary to survive in a biological sense, and later doing what is necessary to thrive—often doing both only by adapting to a given social and cultural context, where others influence how one goes about interacting and improving one’s self. The mark of generally wealthy, developed countries, is that most of their citizens have been emancipated from the tedium of foraging, from the risk of depradation by unruly others, and from crises related to poverty, ill health, and social injustice—so that citizens may devote themselves to leisure and self-enrichment, especially through higher education and political involvement. Beyond the basics of food, shelter and clothing provided by a small nuclear family or state agencies, everyday life for upwardly-mobile young Asians has thus come to mean not only enjoying the company of friends and colleagues in good eating and sporting places, but also means having the capacity to travel for business and pleasure, and to be
engaged in social media and other forms of online-participation, whether as a spectator or as a trendsetter and entrepreneur. In other words, everyday life has become something more expansive and diverse, but also more inclusive, with patterns and problems shared across countries and cultures, especially as enabled by global technological connectivity.

On the other hand, in developing countries, systems and safeguards are not yet in place to assure the resident of state protections and societal approval, so that he or she must often go through the day with greater vigilance against daily risks, and conserve personal resources to invest in capacity-building, as well as cushion against future shocks. It is within, and despite such unpredictable settings that the fierce will to grow and improve oneself manifests, especially if life goals become somehow influenced by information and ideals set in the sociocultural context. It is human striving for security and later, self-realization that has become remarkable in the urban jungles of the world, for in many cases, even those who have least capacity (i.e. because of lack of education and capital) have found ways to grow, especially if they are young and restless on the city streets. It is in these same contexts that immense new routes of migration as well as older migration paths have resulted in the influx of peoples who are sometimes, poor, rural, stateless, or simply wandering, and are all in search of a better life, which they must share with the original inhabitants of a given area. In time, they create their own comfort zones, despite difficult and dangerous circumstances that may prevail. For example, in this author’s interviews on the streets of Metropolitan Manila, particularly in the poorer fringe neighborhoods of the otherwise wealthy Makati City, the daily routine of scavengers counterposes a daily undercurrent to the risks of living on the streets. As many a respondent would narrate (R.D., L.S., L.Z., et al. 2017):

“I get up before dawn, and just walk around…stretch…later I have breakfast if I can find it…”
or,

“I get up before sunrise, and roam the streets…there is usually someone I know who will hand me breakfast, or at least a cup of coffee…”
or

“I wake up, make coffee from the water I heat by burning scrap paper and wood…then I sort the trash to find something to sell…”

Such accounts seem routine, almost “normal”, and tend to mask the severity of poverty of scavengers who will spend the rest of the day sorting and selling junk. Indeed, it is almost a semblance of settled life, except for the fact that such persons wake up on the sidewalks at odd hours,
and roam the streets as if these were their living rooms. One then begins to realize, as a researcher, that somewhere along the way, such coping behavior has shaded over to a daily routine from which some small measure of comfort can be derived, but which is still dysfunctional from the point of view of the majority of citizens who are better-off.

One might take for instance the case of R.T., a typical blue-collar laborer who works as a chauffeur for a factory-boss in Metro Manila—a profile that would fit almost any of 20 respondents of this author’s dissertation research on resettlement sites, conducted from 2015 through 2018. Like other minimum-wage earners, he lives in a wooden hut or a 30-square meter government-provided bungalow some 20 kilometers outside of the metropolitan center, and must wake before dawn to catch the jeepneys that make their way from the rugged, unpaved roads of the periphery to the nearest metro-rail or bus terminal. From there, he might take the metro-rail (which in 2017 has been breaking down nearly every month) or a cheap, non-airconditioned bus into the heart of the metropolis, where he must clock-in at the factory gates by 8:00 a.m., and work for the next eight hours. The one-way commute alone takes one-&-a-half hours, and costs him ¼ of his daily wage, so that he sometimes goes without breakfast, waiting only to get free coffee on the factory floor. He endures this daily drudgery and lack of sleep because he must save his wages for the sustenance of a family of five, himself included. Almost every working week entails a small struggle at to choose between basic necessities like food, and perhaps the comfort of a cigarette or a beer after a stressful day, versus the need to save up for an expectant family, children’s education, medicines, and other contingencies. It also means learning to navigate daily a metropolis that is not always well-policed, where criminal elements may pounce on hapless commuters during odd hours and in remote areas at the edge of Metro Manila, as does happen too in mega-cities like Jakarta and Bangkok.

Such workers, if they are lucky, find a place to sleep throughout the week in the factory, or in informal settlements within the city, and return to their peri-urban homes only on the weekend. They actually endure their toil, with little apparent anger or strong resentment, as long as they have the means to improve their lives by increments—although this does not mean that they do not complain: indeed they said much to this author about government’s shortcomings. However, as Ted Gurr points out in his exposition on *Why Men Rebel* (2009, 24), the perception of value expectations and value capacities of such social actors is not yet irretrievably disparate, hence relative deprivation is not experienced as severe—at least not (yet) enough to lead to any mass protest and uprising. It is often when relative deprivation becomes unbearable, and the risks associated with living mount to such a degree that daily life become unbearable that citizens surely revolt against the societal and administrative framework. This latter need not always take the form of far-reaching revolution. In
some cases, group revolt can take place in certain symbolic and functional locations, as in the case of the increasing number of anti-capitalist “Occupy” movements that have sprouted in major cities around the world starting with Occupy Wallstreet (2011) in Zucotti Park. Closely-related, anti-government and anti-globalization erupted in Tahrir Square, Cairo (2010 through 2011) and the Puerta del Sol, Madrid (Indignados movement, 2011), which underscore the essence of today’s cities as contested spaces where the everyday life of citizens chafes under the grinding weight of advanced forms transcontinental capitalism and unjust or unresponsive governance. To occupy or to counter-occupy, in other words, is to insist on building the necessary conditions for social justice and new autonomous forms of collective life (Vasudevan 2014, 317-318). By extension, it means building up conditions of Human Security that are attainable by each able-bodied, mature citizen. It also means reducing insecurity such that daily anxiety caused by the risks in commuting, job-seeking, or other gain-seeking activity need not reach intolerable levels. If there is no major social upheaval in other country contexts, following Gurr’s theory, it is because the conditions for serious relative deprivation have not been created. In some instances, sincere if spotty efforts have been made to improve public welfare, as in the case of the Philippines, where the slow betterment of the public educational system and increased employment opportunities since the 1986 Revolution seem to have made the masses less restive and more open to the idea of gradual progress through assisted self-help rather than violent agitation stirred by demagogues who have made false promises in the past.

Or take the case of S.I. (2018), somewhat better off as a supervisor in the Human Resources department of a local bus company: she too endures the daily roundtrip commute from a nearby province into Metro Manila. As her children are already grown and gainfully employed, she only has to support herself and her husband, a former contractor/foreman, who is no longer working. Her neighbors are friendly and helpful, and she is generally well-liked at work, and yet she is willing to go on living her life as it is, not aspiring to any much greater ambition than to dote over her grandchild and see her remaining son and daughter stable in their careers and married off well. Happiness, or at least contentment, it seems in this case, does not require great wealth, as enjoyed by the politicians in the capital, but rather a good-enough fit between one’s circumstances, and one’s ability to manage well, with both the negative shocks and the positive windfalls arriving in balanced measure, or not at all, as long as one can live in peace and health. Indeed, it might be said upon further reflection, that vast ambition to enjoy luxuries is decidedly not a characteristic of the mass base of any society—it is rather the intelligentsia, those already steeped in commerce, and the political upper classes that are driven by such desires, and whose conception of everyday life is too rarefied and afflicted by the hankering after status symbols and alternative lifestyles, while in the ordinary neighborhoods,
modestly-educated citizens build up the foundations of society piece-meal, voting through struggle, with their hands and feet, as it were, as they rage against what Thoreau (1854) so aptly called the mass of men who live lives of quiet desperation.

The foregoing examples touch on a peculiar central aspect about human choice that this author would like to highlight, in so far as it influences the determination of Human Security: people can and do opt for sub-optimal choices from the materialistic point-of-view, even if they live their daily lives in cities that are often more enticing mercantile contexts than rural areas. This curious feature of human behavior belies the assumption that all persons are self-interested, benefit-maximizing, and rational creatures—and was empirically demonstrated as early as 1979 by Kahnemann and Tversky, in their exposition of Prospect Theory, which showed that risk aversion in a positive domain is mirrored by risk-seeking in a negative domain, especially in economic terms. This means that certainty seems to increase aversion to losses as well as desirability of gains, so that most people are more likely to choose what they perceived to be certainty (or security, safety, or some other psychological-cognitive equivalent choice) under a given context despite the presence of less-certain but obviously more superior options. In this author’s fieldwork, this mental dynamic played out in the choices of urban poor respondents, but was mediated by life-cycle stage and the presence of dependents: younger respondents with very young family members tended to reject government offers of remote public housing in favor of remaining in inner-city shanties accessible to jobs, charities and schools, while elder respondents with older children opted to be relocated in favor of the certainty of a retirement home, albeit one located far from the city centers. In both cases, the choices involved overlap or duplication of certain benefits, but the differences were the preferences of the respondents, which they chose based on their perceived needs and wants, not least of which was some form of risk-free or risk-minimal existence that would fit the daily routine that they had shaped, or were shaping for themselves.

3. Discussion: Everyday Life and Human Insecurities in an Urban Context

All these elements, patient striving against difficult odds (simmering, but rarely boiling over into insurgency), coping that graduates into self-capacitating up to a “good-enough” state, and choosing surer prospects rather than better prospects, are the habits and processes that determine the security of the individual in his daily context. These are, simultaneously constitutive of the situations and material contexts of Human Security: the day-to-day health, comfort, and assurance of the individual that states should be just as concerned with as the abstractions of national security and international trade. Everyday life, then is not the residual—neither the leftover between life’s glorious peaks, nor
the calm intermission between life’s crises, it is rather the main act, and it is colored and intensified by the magnifying lens and Web-enhanced connectivity of the Asian mega-city, where no less than 10s of millions of individual lives come together, intertwining by the hundreds at least in a person’s single life-time, so that the movements and impulses of the groups of citizens become just as compelling as the directives of those who assume leadership, and hold power temporarily over the seething masses. In such a dynamic setting, insecurities are multiplied and entangled many times over, and require a different set of skills and acute sociopolitical perception by leaders in order to resolve into a state of relative stability and productivity that capacitates and ennobles the human being. Mass-based technologies for big data handling, crowd-sourcing and queueing somehow have to be coupled with personalized attention and care, and policies that protect and prioritize the less-capacitated and impoverished rather than only those who have the means to afford privileged services.

When confronted with heretofore-unencountered complexity, especially conditions that entail risk, human beings can either try to battle against the unknown with whatever resources they can muster until they subdue or comprehend it enough to carve out a relatively stable niche, or they can lose their identity (as well as hope) and be swallowed by it, possibly coming to the point where they consider life no longer worth living. The challenges are diverse in developing cities: rigid social and religious stratification, lack of education as a barrier to work, migrants struggling with a strange language and lack of state protections, polluted neighborhoods, abusive local authorities, etc. What makes life worth living therefore, especially in an urbanizing world, is precisely the ability to apprehend the shifting reality of everyday life, and to exercise one’s will over such a moving target, if only by increments, so that one transforms from being a victim to a co-maker, if not the master builder of one’s existence. In this sense, the poor junk-scavenger who recycles an old bike and learns to ride it profitably for his trade is just as psychologically secure and happy as he lives from day to day as the wealthy tycoon who purchases and learns to fly his own private jet to seal deals across continents, because both have achieved a step in mastery of their urban environments at their respective levels of existence. In addition, it must be added, the presence of helpful or symbolic human “others” is also important. In this author’s fieldwork, the reliable availability of helpful neighbors, or the cheerful presence of children and grandchildren (being symbols of one’s self extended) were both explicitly declared to be factors that eased the burdens of life—whether urban or rural.
4. Philosophical Perspectives on Everyday Life and the Contested City

Beyond the mundane level however, “everyday life”, from a philosophical point of view can have many more layers of meaning, and has long become the chosen battleground for post-modern discourse that counters the privileged position of hegemonic narratives, especially those played out in urban space. For this we are indebted to Michel Foucault, who expounded on how everyday life can be counterpoised against the encompassing singularity of nation-state histories punctuated by heroic figures, as against the jumbled micro-histories of the lives of faceless citizens, or what he elaborated as genealogies—struggles and exercises of power that gave rise to present practices, rather than an unbroken, coherent history. On a somewhat different note, everyday life for Henri Lefebvre (like Foucault, he had Leftist leanings) was contradictory: it was actually central to the reproduction of social relations of production because of its perceived stability, yet contained the potential for change, resistance and contestation, and was further was given geographic contexts in the writings of Antonio Gramsci and David Harvey (Kipfer 2002, 117-118). If one were to try to entwine, or somehow relate the concerns of Human Security to such philosophizing, one might suppose that the daily search for safety and self-improvement that lie within an underprivileged citizen’s capacities is precisely constitutive of resistance against the more exploitative aspects of political and economic hegemony, but which in time, once it has reached a comfort zone (i.e. risk-level) deemed satisfactory to the struggling actor, might be coopted yet again into a politically and economically-assimilative complex, unless there is a conscious attempt or a critical mass of change agents who can overturn the whole system. Risk, in a counter-hegemonic, post-modern construction, is that real or imagined danger posed by the overburdening structure; it is likewise the discomfort and ill-fit imposed by non-inclusive processes that affect daily life.

But for those concerned with the daily crises on the ground, how does all this conceptual criticism and recasting help the situation in any practical sense? Does the state Human Security benefit whether one sees space, time, and history as coherent or disjointed? The value, it would seem, is that those who analyze human struggles in the urban context have provided useful insight into the nature of “everyday life”, and how it actually operates in the face of risk and oppression. The insight of one more thinker, Michel de Certeau (1984) are particularly worth quoting in its entirety:

Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many “ways of operating”: victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence
of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.

The acts and utterances themselves that constitute “everyday life”, especially for the non-privileged classes, whether they be the impoverished mass base or a neglected minority, are not under the control of any larger, totalitarian system—they cannot, or can never be so extremely regimented, without extinguishing humanity itself. Human Security is negotiated and won most effectively in this commons: where hegemony and formality break down within the churning mass of individuals asserting their own creativity and right to the city and its resources, to the best of their abilities, and often with the odds stacked against them. Whether consciously or not, it is people in their daily acts who seek out a better quality of life, that deceivingly mundane state of having wholesome food and clean air and water, enjoyment of unfettered open space and natural bodies, security from crime, and protection from radiation and other toxic substances, along with the chance to associate freely with others, or the social dimension of sustainable development (El Din 2013, 87).

If “everyday life” is such a potent but amorphous force, advancing imperceptibly and inexorably, then the pragmatic-minded scholar may ask, can its best qualities be cultivated, or can it be guided or influenced per se, so that it address the most important insecurities of daily life without getting tied up in all the nitty-gritty of individual habits and caprices? To answer these questions probably requires another, extended analysis. However, one way to answer this is to remain vigilant against those social conditions that cause insecurity, personal and group incapacity, and structural injustices—precisely the conditions that trigger revolutions. Where, through selfish intent or neglect, the leaders of society and government at any level cause deprivation and severe social inequality, it may be said that everyday life in that cultural context becomes correspondingly less livable by certain degrees. This is every citizen’s lookout, but the greater responsibility falls upon the shoulders of those who govern with legitimacy. By starting first with preventing or removing the harms to progressive daily existence, one might allow for the numerous daily acts of persons to expand and forge ahead, driven by its own internal logics. For it would, in retrospect, be presumptuous to insist on shaping and directing this “everydayness” it at every step. It is the adult citizens themselves who, if adequately educated and empowered, are often capable of pursuing their own aspirations for personal development and participation-in-society, which leads to interpersonal, interdependent growth.

One final instructive example may be derived from the writings of Benedict Kerkvliet who studied extensively the peasant movements and government responses in both the Philippines and
Vietnam, and produced at least two related books: *Everyday Politics in the Philippines: Class and Status Relations in a Central Luzon Village* (1990) and *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (2005). He has argued that while the Philippines is nominally more democratic, it was historically emancipated by the elite of Filipino society, and has developed government structures that are slow to respond to the mass clamor of the impoverished, whereas Vietnam’s government, while essentially still governed by a top-down socialist structure, has responded in various ways to the demands of the broad mass base—in fact, it has had to reform and redistribute wealth based on what was already taking place widely on the ground: grassroots capitalism and requests for agrarian reform, noting that both countries tolerate some levels of corruption, but only up to a point when mass discontent boils over (Kerkvliet 2005, 1, 3-4). Although much of Kerkvliet’s work relied on rural observations, what he concluded rings true even in urban settings: the ordinary citizens, who are sometimes impoverished in a Southeast Asian context, together can compel governments to improve conditions of long-running insecurity and inequality, either through direct engagement, or precisely through the powerful indirectness of daily life’s acts to go their own way. Such a social reality often provokes a question that is difficult for elected officials to ask themselves: if capacitated can and will do as they please, what then is the relevance and need for government, at least in its traditional form?

5. **By Way of Conclusion**

To summarize the main ideas of this essay: “everyday life” is increasingly taking place in the context of cities as dynamic, unpredictable sites where there are often more diverse opportunities for developing human capacities, but also the presence of more adverse or unjust social conditions and risks, especially in developing countries. Ironically, actual field conditions tend to support concepts from the literature that show how relative deprivation is more a concern than absolute measures (e.g. standard-setting by the authorities) of comfort and decency, such that impoverished citizens do not necessarily choose what is optimal or maximal from an economic standpoint, but may choose sub-optimal states of existence, as long as these provide more certainty versus perceived risk, or other non-material (e.g. sociological, cultural, or psychological) relief and capacity-building. More abstract thinkers who have critiqued everyday life in the city have, in addition, argued that the deeds and decisions of everyday life are powerful means of contestation of power and social discourse in urban settings, and vehicles of aspiration for the masses. In practical terms, all these encourage a more respectful and detailed approach towards daily life as a means and context of human development,
particularly by removing risks and other obstacles to individual capacities and decision-making, and by allowing everyday life to flourish pursuant to the hopes of human agents on the ground.

Further research that elucidates the intersection of “Everyday Life”, Human Security, and urban studies can, and should probably investigate the precise conditions under which risks and insecurities occur and their causes, as well as that special range of intervention that is pro-capacitation without being too interventionist. Another possible fruitful venue for research is developing an understanding of how a society responds, or fails to respond, to different types of violence (Moser 2004, 10), which is commonly the result of cumulative and structural insecurities and injustices. This study has made its own modest contribution by showing that from both the practical and philosophical standpoints, everyday life as a concept does resonate usefully with the expanding discourse on urbanization and how the latter has resulted in places that are contested by different groups of citizens versus the impositions of formal authority and the hegemonic economic forces of globalization.
References: