

# Optimal Life Recovery Assistance for Those Who Are Residing in Government-Leased Private Rental Interim Housing in Widely Dispersed Areas

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## ABSTRACT

Largest number of those who lost their houses due to the 2011 Tohoku-Oki earthquake/tsunami disaster are now residing in Government-Leased Private Rental Interim Housing (GLPRIH). Unlike prefabricated temporary housing occupants, GLPRIH dwellers reside in widely dispersed areas. Japanese disaster research has been mainly focusing on life recovery assistance for prefabricated temporary housing inhabitants who live in a close proximity and not much is known about “diaspora” survivors. This paper outlines a set of projects aimed at identifying 1) life recovery process characteristics among GLPRIH inhabitants, 2) interrelations between community rebuilding and individual life recovery processes of GLPRIH dwellers, 3) effective ways to connect/re-connect those displaced GLPRIH residents, and 4) effective ways to manage individual life recovery by providing disaster case management services.

## Introduction

In order to respond to huge temporary housing demands caused by Tohoku-Oki earthquake and tsunami, Japanese national government introduced a new policy that provided free temporary housing units by the government’s renting privately owned apartments and houses for the impacted survivors. Government-Leased Private Rental Interim Housing (GLPRIH) has since become a mainstream policy: 57,825 units of apartments/houses were rented while 47,839 units temporary housing were newly constructed. As of May, 2013, those who were dwelling in GLPRIH, newly constructed (prefabricated), and public housing units were 50%, 41% and 9 %, respectively. Unlike prefabricated temporary housing occupants, GLPRIH dwellers reside in widely dispersed areas inside and outside of the city/township of their original residence. This made much harder for them to form mutual support networks, and to obtain necessary public information and assistance. Japanese disaster research has been mainly focusing on life recovery assistance for prefabricated temporary housing inhabitants who live in a close proximity and not much is known about “diaspora” survivors. This paper outlines a set of projects aimed at identifying 1) life recovery process characteristics among GLPRIH inhabitants by conducting ethnographic interviews as well as TQM-style focus group assessment workshops, 2) interrelations between community rebuilding and individual life recovery processes of GLPRIH dwellers, 3) effective ways to connect/re-connect those displaced GLPRIH residents with community of origin, orientation and/or in current proximity through community social work

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initiatives, and 4) effective ways to manage individual life recovery by providing disaster case management services. City of Natori, Miyagi prefecture was chosen as the project site. Natori is one of Sendai Bay area coastal cities situated south of Sendai and suffered from serious tsunami damages including 911 dead, 41 missing, 2,801 houses totally destroyed and 910 houses half damaged. This paper illustrates an overview of the Natori GLPRIH study project that began in October, 2012 (see Figure 1).

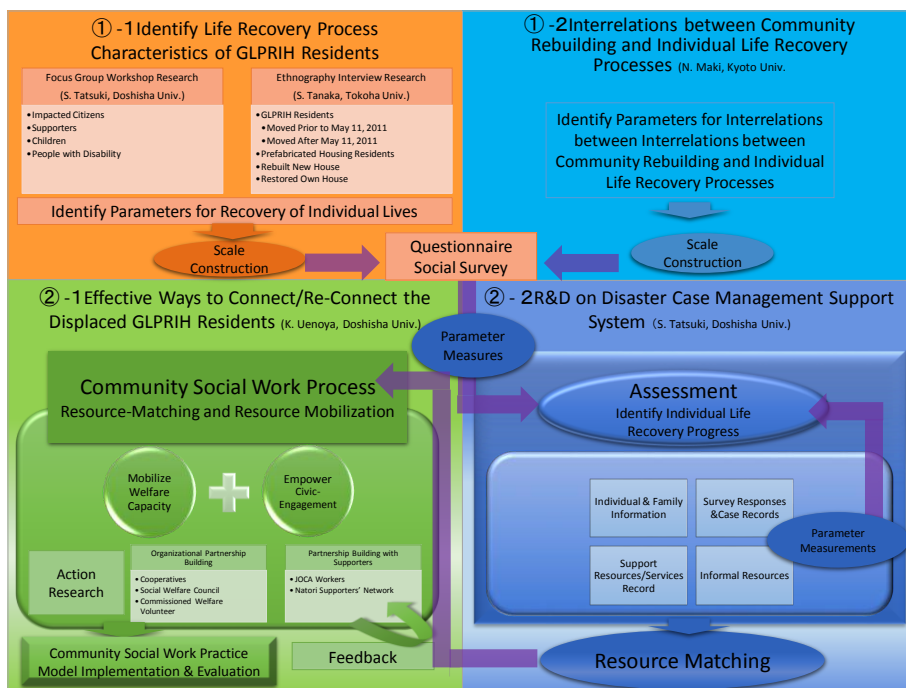


Figure 1. Natori GLPRIH Study Project Work Flow.

## Identifying Parameters for Individual Life Recovery and Implementation of Effective Life Recovery Support Measures

### Individual Characteristics: Ethnography Interview Early Findings

Two separate teams employed different qualitative approaches, ethnography interviews and focus group workshops, in order to identify life recovery process characteristics of GLPRIH residents. From October, 2012 to March 2014, the Ethnography team interviewed 22 informants including 16 GLPRIH residents/ex-residents, 4 prefabricated temporary housing residents, 1 survivor who has been residing in his own restored house, 1 private rental unit owner. Each ethnography interview took place on one occasion at each informant's residence with, most of the cases, his/her spouse or other adult family members being present. They were asked to share their experiences after the event in an unstructured interview which usually took 2 to 2 and a half hours.

Most of interviewed GLPRIH residents showed high propensity to be independent from the government support. They began rental housing search soon after the disaster, found interim units by their own efforts and they were willing to pay their own rent. This was done way before Natori city office announced the introduction of GLPRIH policy on May 10, 2011. Families with elderly and/or people with disability who found emergency shelters being too hard to use

(non-universal) also opted for alternatives to mass-provided/produced general shelters and prefabricated temporary housing units. The stable job and household income allowed them to initiate voluntary interim housing hunts.

Furthermore, a large proportion of the interviewed GLPRIH residents have bought and built their own homes within 2 years. They have planned the individual housing recovery plans independent from their old community of Yuriage land readjustment/recovery planning process. Those who were quick to find a new land and rebuilt the new home were typically 1) not carrying any house loan mortgages of the previous and now non-existent houses, 2) received earthquake insurance money for rebuilding, 3) felt compelled to make quick decisions to buy because the available land seemed to run out soon, and 4) were facing a mortgage loan qualification age limit if they were in their late forties to early fifties.

Those who rebuilt their homes in new land felt a lack of daily communication with their new neighbors but were willing to spend long time in order to develop human relationships. However, at the same time, once they rebuilt their own houses, they felt that they were no longer considered being the impacted survivors. The lack of support was especially felt in the areas of psychological care for their children. The more details on the ethnography research results will be covered in the current workshop by Tanaka and Shigekawa (2014) [1].

### **Group Characteristics: Focus Group Workshop Research Early Findings**

31 participants from four different groups of the earthquake/tsunami impacted Natori citizens were invited to a three hour long focus group workshop on January 27, 2013. Those included 7 from GLPRIH, 13 from prefabricated temporary housing complexes, 5 from restored own homes, and 6 from newly built own homes. They provided altogether 143 opinion cards with regard to what would facilitate their individual life recovery processes. Those 143 opinions were then grouped into 15 categories by the participants during the workshop session.

The association between the 4 types of housing (GLPRIH, prefabricated housing, restored own house, and newly rebuilt house) and 17 life recovery promotion categories were analyzed by correspondence analysis (see Figure 1). GLPRIH and newly rebuilt groups showed very similar characteristics with regard to their views on what would help for them to feel that their individual lives are back to normalcy: Those two groups shared their valuations for positive self-governing attitude, infrastructural redevelopment, future pension and medical services when they become older, physical and psychological stress care, family understanding/support, social ties, and current medical/social services/education services. These results seem to triangulate and validate the findings from individual ethnography interview results. Compared with GLPRIH and newly rebuilt groups, those who were residing in prefabricated housing units were characterized by needs for such categories as living expenses and business start-up capital and land. Finally, those who repaired their own homes on the original land were characterized by such needs for safety and security, livelihood restoration fund and more government supports. The more details on the focus group workshop research results will be presented in the current workshop by Matsukawa, Tsujioka, and Tatsuki (2014) [2].

### **Community Recovery Processes**

In addition to the above basic research on individual life recovery processes, the third team has

been focusing on the interrelations between individual recovery and community rebuilding processes. The aim of the team is to identify those parameters that might determine the nature of their interrelations. This team has been monitoring consensus building processes in Yuriage community and their impacts on individual house rebuilding decision making processes. Based on these observations, the team is also aiming at developing preventative strategies before the community rebuilding process have become complicated. It also aims to explore ways to induce cooperation among different and conflicting stakeholders.

### **Development of Disaster Case Management Database System**

The first three teams of the current projects are all concerned with identifying parameters that might determine individual life recovery processes. The next two teams are more concerned with implementing solutions to make impacts on individual lives by measuring and directly or indirectly manipulating these parameters. Upon the identification of important parameters for individual recovery, the fourth team is going to develop and apply operational measures in order to scale these parameters on individual basis. These measurements will provide a basis for the assessment of individual recovery needs and corresponding services and resources. The fourth team has been developing a prototype database system that would support the assessment and resource matching processes. As of October, 2014, all Natori impacted citizens administrative information will be stored to the prototype system and the system will be running for field tests.

### **Community Social Work Model Building**

Community social work process becomes crucial where there is no formal resources available that would satisfy particular individual needs and therefore resource mobilization efforts are needed. The fifth team has chosen two project communities and have been conducting action research on empowering the impacted citizens and helping them collaborate with local formal and informal helper network. The team is aiming at developing, implementing and evaluation a working community social work model for GLPRIH residents.

### **Conclusions**

GLPRIH has becomes one of the major policy measures but the relevant policies and programs have not yet been well established. This paper provided an overview of Natori study project which deals with parameter identification of individual life recovery processes of GLPRIH and with R/D of effective implementation measures. Internal and external validity of the current project needs to be tested, however, by further studies.

### **Acknowledgments**

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