

Disaster preparedness in maternal and child health – The Lessons learned from Mega Disasters in Japan

The Great East Japan Earthquake revealed two problems—one was the highly aged population and another was the lack of disaster management plans in local governments for mothers and children. Seventy infants below the age of 12 months died in the earthquake that day, and although exact numbers of pregnant women and the number of fetuses are unknown, approximately 4,500 were directly affected by the disaster in the devastated area. Disruptions in the supply of clean water for drinking and bathing, inadequate access to safe food, psychological stress from the nuclear power plant accident, interruption of health care, crowded conditions in shelters, and disruption of public health and clinical care infrastructure posed threats to these vulnerable populations. Methods: We revealed the training for providing minimum emergency care for pregnant and nursing women in time of disaster are significantly effective and we implemented the courses to the local governmental human development curricula. More than 1,200 obstetrician, midwives, government staff, NGO staff and firemen attended the trainings and it is clear that participants' behavior for disaster preparedness was dramatically changed from passive to proactive. We believe that our health policy research for building disaster preparedness system in the regions, governments, and the entire society to protect mothers and children in times of disaster will progress in the future by having shared the experience through this session. I am positive that with greater understanding and leading the preparation tools and skills for the next generation, we can strengthen our collaboration and partnerships with Asia/Pacific countries to provide the best possible outcomes for the mothers and children in the next disaster.