Impact Objectives

- Investigate healthcare risks in complex humanitarian emergencies

- Develop a Community Oriented Approach for Comprehensive Healthcare in Emergency Situations (COACHES) to detect the healthcare needs among disaster-affected populations

Real-time data help disaster response

*Disaster relief expert **Professor Mari Kinoshita** outlines her work as part of a team determining the specific healthcare needs of communities affected by natural disasters*

You have been working in disaster relief for many years. How did you become inspired to research this field?

Before I began working at the University of Kochi in 2019, I developed extensive experience working in the area of international public health with government organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations and an UN agency (UNHCR). Throughout this part of my career, I spent a significant amount of time and energy working on disaster relief and emergency relief activities. When I moved into my current position, it was the beginning of an attempt to pass on a legacy of my work to the next generation by codifying the lessons I have learned from my time in the field.

Generally, what type of research are you carrying out at the University of Kochi?

I am involved in a mixture of different research, including cross-sectional field studies that are mostly targeting people in the community. Usually, I start with qualitative research followed by a questionnaire survey. Action research is ongoing to develop a system to detect the healthcare needs among disaster-affected populations, while my cross-sectional research activities are designed to detect healthcare risks in complex humanitarian emergencies.

From your perspective, what is the ultimate impact of your studies?

Ultimately, relief work during disasters will become more effective and efficient as a result of our work. This benefits all parties for obvious reasons, but the disaster-affected population as a whole will be the major beneficiaries.

Can you talk about some of the challenges you had to address through this research?

Finding a local partner agency for applying collaborative research funds has been the biggest challenge - we missed several funding opportunities due to being unable to find local business partners. Some companies have shown interest in the projects, but very few of them participated in the bidding. In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for communication services is increasing and the IT business is booming. However, the local private company involved lacks the human resources necessary for this project.

What type of reactions have you had to your research from the community?

We had two different types of reactions from the communities and the local governments. Enthusiastic and supportive reactions full of suggestions are from individual government officers and residents in the coastal area where large-scale disaster damage is warned by the government. Mild and conservative reactions tend to be from the residents in the inland communities, where the risk of disaster is not high or localised. A similar reaction is observed in an official comment from the local government agencies, regardless of the location.

Finally, what are your plans for the next stages of this research?

The main priority is expanding the collaborations we are engaged with. More specifically, we want to work with private sectors for technical solutions, local governments for field testing and community involvement, and research partners in different academic fields to facilitate a multidisciplinary approach. In a few years, we will develop a practical model and proceed with field testing in real disaster situations. At this point we hope to make a real difference to the lives of people and communities affected by disasters. ▶