

Children's Perception of Threat within Their Spaces of Activities

Case study: Merapi Volcano Area, Indonesia

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1. Introduction

In many cases, children are considered as one of the most vulnerable age groups in disasters. However, policies related to disaster management often ignore children's voices. Since most policy makers are adults, they generally tend to assume that they know what children need and think. Children are often not treated as stakeholders in disaster policy design and implementation.

This study addressed the need for approaching and listening to children in order to understand their world and perception. We present a scientific approach to investigate their needs in the context of risk communication. The study framework consists of: (1) investigating children's daily activities and location, and (2) identify how they perceive the threat within their spaces of activities. As importantly, another aspect of our study is to design tools, methods and know-how to test how to better communicate with children about disaster risks.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out near the most active volcano in Indonesia, Mount Merapi, based on a field survey carried out by authors in August 2008. The main sources of data and information were collected through the workshop, i.e. the mapping of daily activities and interview, conducted in three closest schools to Merapi (approximately 6.5 km from the peak), namely Tarakanita Tritis, Pangukrejo, and Srunen schools.

Participants of the workshop who were students of grade 5 and 6 (n = 94), were asked to draw the map of their daily activities and mark dangerous places or objects in the event case of Merapi eruption. Subsequently, the facilitators interviewed them regarding to their drawings and asked them to interpret the drawings. The techniques from grounded theory were employed to describe the data, by microscopic examination of data, and data coding. Based on the above data and information we analyzed children's perception of threats based on geographical condition of their living environments.

3. Results

With the information from the participants' map of daily activities and interview, the locations reached by children around the area were identified. With our instruction in the drawing activities, most participants did not have any difficulties to express their minds. Interestingly a few children added information about dangerous places which they think are threatening even if Merapi does not erupt. Thus, two kinds of information about threat perceptions were provided by children, one is related to volcanic hazard, and another not related to volcanic hazard. From the volcanic hazard related perception some significant patterns have been found for those children with similar activity locations and who live around the area which has the same past eruption history. The perceived threat with no relations to volcanic hazard offers new insights for policy makers for disaster management.