

Disaster Preparedness Among Nepalese Residents in Saitama City: Insights from Questionnaire-based Survey

○Chandra Shekhar GOIT, Yuki SHIMOYAMA, Masato SAITOH

1. Introduction

Japan frequently experiences a variety of natural disasters, including earthquakes, typhoons, and floods, that challenge not only local residents but also its growing foreign population. According to the 2024 Annual Report by the Statistics Bureau of Japan^[1], the number of foreign residents in Japan surpassed 3 million in 2023, a figure double that of 2013. As the foreign population continues to grow, supported by visa programs designed to attract foreign workers^[2], providing adequate disaster preparedness and support to these communities becomes increasingly important.

While language barriers are often highlighted as a primary issue for foreigners during emergencies, other factors also play critical roles^[3]. During the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake, many foreign residents, uncertain of how to respond to tsunami sirens, fled in confusion or faced challenges accessing assistance and essential information. Some evacuees left shelters due to a lack of culturally appropriate food or difficulties in communication.

Disaster awareness and preparedness among foreign residents may vary depending on their country of origin. Those from regions with fewer natural disasters may lack experience or knowledge of emergency response procedures. Additionally, cultural norms and community dynamics shape preparedness behaviors. This diversity makes it difficult to categorize all foreign residents under a single label of “foreigners”. Such generalizations risk oversimplifying the complex and varied needs of different groups, potentially hindering effective disaster preparedness and response efforts.

To build a more resilient and inclusive society, it is essential to develop targeted strategies that address the unique challenges faced by various foreign resident communities. Recognizing and addressing these complexities is critical to ensure equitable disaster preparedness and support.

2. Methodology

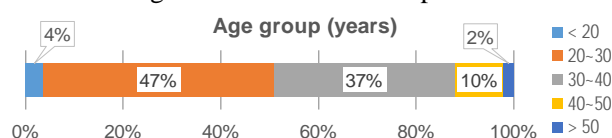
This study examines the disaster preparedness of the Nepalese community in Saitama City. In collaboration with Saitama City, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted between September and October 2024 to assess disaster awareness and preparedness among Nepalese residents aged 15 and above.

A total of 1,663 questionnaires, each comprising 32 questions, were distributed by post. The survey collected demographic information as well as data on individuals' awareness of disasters and related preparedness measures. Respondents could answer in Nepali, English, or Japanese, and submissions were accepted either online or via return mail. Of the distributed questionnaires, 191 responses were received (39 online and 152 by postal mail).

The findings from this survey aim to provide insights into the community's preparedness and identify key areas for improvement in disaster response planning.

3. Results

Fig. 1 presents some key demographic characteristics (age, sex, and respondent's duration of stay in Japan) demonstrating a well-distributed sample.



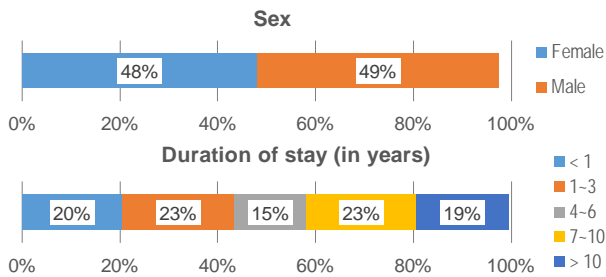


Fig. 1: Demographic characteristics

Fig. 2 presents some indicators that reveal the respondents' limited knowledge of disasters and low preparedness levels. Most participants reported lacking access to disaster preparedness information from governing authorities, as seen from Fig. 3. Additionally, the majority had never participated in disaster training or drills.

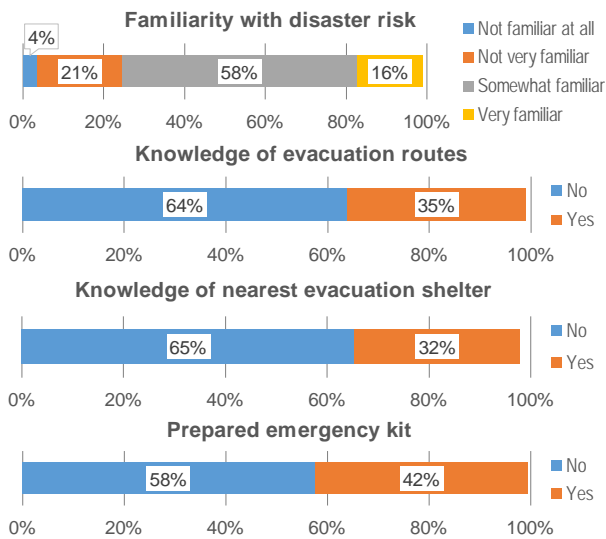


Fig. 2: Indicators on knowledge and awareness

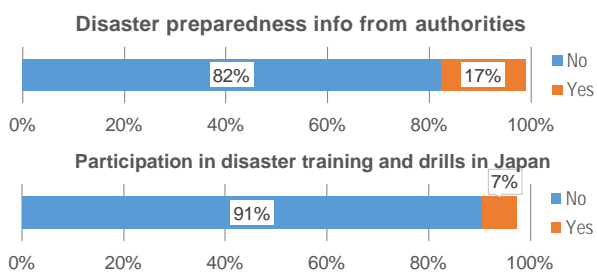


Fig. 3: Access to information

Fig. 4 illustrates that, as noted in the case of the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake, most respondents emphasized the importance of dietary restrictions when taking refuge in evacuation shelters.

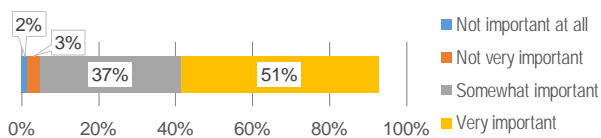


Fig. 4: Importance of dietary restrictions

When asked about challenges in disaster preparation, over 60% of respondents cited both language barriers and lack of information as main challenges (see Fig. 5).

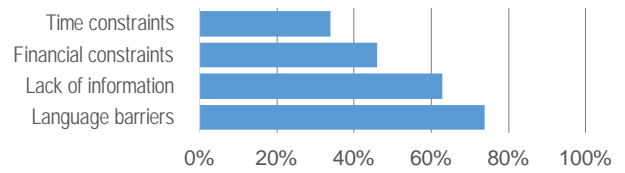


Fig. 5: Challenges related to disaster preparation

Due to rapid population increases in recent years, many Nepalese residents appear to have limited connections with the local community. However, the majority expressed eagerness to join local initiatives for disaster preparation, as depicted in Fig. 6.

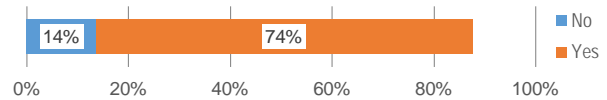


Fig. 6: Eagerness to join local communities

4. Conclusions

The study of disaster preparedness among Nepalese residents in Saitama City revealed several key findings: limited knowledge about disasters, insufficient access to preparedness information, inadequate details on evacuation shelters, and weak neighborhood ties. These insights highlight the need for targeted outreach, education, and community-building initiatives to enhance disaster readiness and integration within the local community, ultimately leading to a resilient and inclusive disaster response framework.

References

- [1] The Statistics Bureau of Japan
<https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/jinsui/2.html>
- [2] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ca/fna/ssw/us/>
- [3] Piao M, Kondo A, Qian H (2024) Factors related to immigrants' disaster preparedness: A scoping review, Health Emergency and Disaster Nursing, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24298/hedn.2023-0008>.

This study was conducted in collaboration with Saitama City and is a part of the Disaster Prevention Research Institute's Implementation Science Research for Regional Communities (Specific) project at Kyoto University (Project No. 2024RS-01).