

# Disaster Handling Needs to Take into Account Cultural Context


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Many disasters have struck Indonesia recently. We have witnessed the occurrence of various kinds of disasters that resulted in deaths and material losses. The impact can be observed in various domains of life. Therefore, disaster management is not enough to just rely on one particular discipline. Care is required in a systematic, comprehensive, and efficient way to prevent and cope with a variety of adverse effects that may arise from natural disasters.

This is the background to the convening of multidisciplinary workshops entitled *Disaster-Reduction, Resilience, Well-Being, and Culture* that is hosted by the Center for Public Mental Health (CPMH), Faculty of Psychology of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and Coventry University with the support from the British Council. The workshop from 15 to 19 February was followed by multi-disciplinary researchers from various universities and research centers, related agencies, as well as other parties involved in disaster management.

"Indonesia experiences very diverse disaster, ranging from earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, as well as disasters caused by climate change. In fact, there is a so-called label for Indonesia as a 'disaster supermarket'. In this workshop we will look at these issues and discuss how to prepare for and respond to various kinds of disasters," said one of the speakers from Coventry University, Dr. Gavin Sullivan, Friday (12/2) at a press conference at the Faculty of Psychology.



He expressed the importance of cultural context as one of the things that need to be considered in disaster management, especially for Indonesia where each region has distinct culture. This condition requires a disaster management strategy adaptable to the culture in each region, not only in the handling of disasters that have occurred, but also in communicating the risk of disaster.

"I noticed from the media, in the eruption of Mt. Merapi in 2010, there were such beliefs about the mountain giving certain signs for disaster. In this case, the strategy of risk communication has an important role in changing society and making them understand the risks they face if they do not immediately leave the disaster area," explained by the researcher who has also conducted research on the earthquake in Bantul district.

Similar thing was delivered by the Head of CPMH, Dr. Diana Setiyawati, M.H.Sc.Psy. Disaster management strategy that does not pay attention to the cultural context, she said, makes the effort to be less effective. "For example, when there is an earthquake evacuation route in the village, there are some people who do not want to follow the direction because it is considered incompatible with their culture. Therefore, disaster experts need to collaborate with psychologists or other experts in the field to understand better on how to approach the public," she said.

This workshop is expected to improve the monitoring of potential and the threat of natural disasters in Indonesia and encourage resilience of communities in disaster-prone areas through collaboration between the various parties. "The workshop aims to build a network between a variety of multidisciplinary experts to share their perspectives, and to encourage the establishment of long-term collaboration between researchers in Indonesia and in the UK in the form of joint research projects," added by Gavin.

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