Fire Disaster and Its Implications on Survivors and Social Work Practice: The Case of Rumah Lepang Sayat, Engkilili

DAPHNE TALA BINTI JUSIN* & DOLLY PAUL CARLO

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia
*Corresponding author: daphnetala@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the implications of a longhouse fire on its survivors. It also presents the assistance that survivors received during post-disaster and the implications on the social work practice. It draws on qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with survivors selected through purposive sampling. The data of the study were analysed based thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the survivors faced both short-term and long-term implications after the fire disaster. The assistance received was mainly focused on responding to the short-term implications and was less focused on long-term implications. In the scheme of things, these implications bear on the social work practices as well as on the conditions of the fire disaster survivors.

Keywords: Fire Disaster, Long House, Social Work Practice, Survivor

INTRODUCTION

Fire disaster is one of the most common disasters which may be natural or man-made. Natural causes may come from hot climate, volcano eruptions or man-made causes like fire disasters may arise from technological error or accidents. In Sarawak, longhouse fire is becoming a concern (Nais, 2018) and has resulted in over RM 10 million losses (Pei, 2019). Sarawak has recorded a total of 14 longhouse fires in just first eight months of 2019 and leaving 1300 villagers homeless (Pei, 2019). The longhouse fires have affected the villagers and local communities in different ways. This study aims to look at the implications of fire disaster on the local communities and to analyze the implications on social work practice revolving around post-disaster recovery and in a social development context. The location chosen for this study was Rumah Lepang Sayat Engkilili where a recent longhouse fire occurred when this research began. The findings highlighted in both long and short-term implications faced by the longhouse fire survivors are significant as longhouse fires are very common disasters in Sarawak. Moreover, these findings can be used as premises for a bottom-up approach to help those affected communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impacts of disaster on survivors

There was not much past research done on longhouse fire disasters. While discussing the impacts of disaster topics such as psychological issues, impacts on economics and social impacts should be highlighted too. One of the most popular topics is on the psychological distress faced by survivors. According to Davidson and McFarlane (2006), disaster is a collective social suffering that challenges individual's capacity of adaptation that can lead to a range of mental health problems including post-traumatic psychopathologies such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This statement becomes evident as North *et al*. (1999) revealed that more than half of the research subjects were dissatisfied with their work performances and observed negative changes in their personal relationships, in addition to having symptoms of PTSD. The research subjects in North *et al*. (1999) research were based on the proximity of the subjects to the disaster. When compared to the setting of this research, such outcomes could be expected when research participants are based on the proximity of the occurrence of longhouse fire.