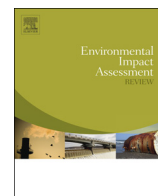




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Examining professional emergency managers in Korea

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ABSTRACT

Although the number of emergency managers has risen in South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea) over the years, their role is not yet as defined and noteworthy compared to other professions because of its unidisciplinary approach. This article investigates how Korea has to improve emergency managers' disciplinary approach to ultimately contribute to the goal of effective transnational disaster management. This study uses qualitative content analysis of government policies, college curricula, nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs') emergency-manager certification, and mass media coverage to compare emergency managers' unidisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. The key tenet is that Korea must change its emergency managers' unidisciplinary approach into a multidisciplinary approach because the former is less effective when dealing with complicated disaster management systems. To achieve this change, the stakeholders must carry out their assigned responsibilities under risk-oriented management. As for the study's international implications, developing nations may consider the enhancement of related educational curricula, collaborative learning, continuous evaluation, disaster awareness, and disaster prevention for the emergency managers' multidisciplinary approach.

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1. Introduction

The frequency and impact of large-scale disasters in Korea are not decreasing, and the characteristics of such disasters are becoming more complicated than ever before. In addition, disasters have become more heterogeneous. The current structure of Korean disaster management is unable to fully address the impacts of disasters, due to political, economic, social, and cultural reasons. To resolve this, a more collaborative, integrated, and comprehensive form of emergency management is required.

Several sub-areas in Korea including firefighting, civil engineering, and other businesses officially proclaim that they have produced emergency managers through their own individual programs, focusing on their specific discipline. Also, government institutions at the central government level (being similar to the U.S. federal level) have started to recruit emergency managers as public employees. However, governments have maintained that the capability or knowledge of Korean emergency managers is still limited when it comes to dealing with diverse disasters, both natural disasters and manmade emergencies (Kim, 2014). To be professional Korean emergency managers, they have to be oriented towards multiple disciplines. Such professionals possess specialized training, skill, or education, whereas non-professionals do not. Restrictively speaking, professional emergency managers

concentrate on their own areas of responsibility, but they clearly need multiple disciplines apart from their own specialization.

The premise of this study is that a unidisciplinary approach does not lead to effective disaster planning, whereas a multidisciplinary approach does (DOE, 2006). By depending upon a single aspect or one-sided viewpoint, the unidisciplinary model addresses reactive disaster management, which does not consider planning (Culwick and Patel, 2013; Hartkopf, 2003). On the other hand, a multidisciplinary approach strongly supports disaster planning. Note also that similar terms have been used in place of *multidisciplinary*, such as *interdisciplinary*, *intradisciplinary*, *crossdisciplinary*, and *transdisciplinary*. Among them, *interdisciplinary* has been used frequently or interchangeably with *multidisciplinary*. What they all have in common is the need for more than one discipline and the interconnection of one discipline to another.

Many developed nations have strongly relied upon the multidisciplinary approach for disaster management. When recruiting emergency managers, the United States prefers to employ those who have a multidisciplinary background (Waugh and Sadiq, 2011). Japan has also implemented the multidisciplinary approach to deal with earthquakes and tsunamis, floods accompanying typhoons, and other complex natural disasters (Nazarov, 2011). The Emergency Planning College in the United Kingdom has traditionally offered multidisciplinary programs, while educating their emergency managers (EPC, 2016).

Korean emergency managers have unique characteristics. The job itself lacks professionalism and popularity in Korea. For advanced nations, their emergency managers are regularly recruited, paid, and thus contribute significantly to efficient disaster management. Modern disaster management in Korea started 10 years ago, which is 'new' or less

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experienced when compared with developed nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and others. This means that Korea has much room for improvement in this field and can learn from examples and practices by developed nations such as the whole community approach in the United States, the establishment of integrated emergency management system in United Kingdom, the role of small-scale voluntary organizations in Japan, among others. A specific area to consider is adopting a multidisciplinary approach for/by emergency managers to widen their exposure in the field.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how Korea might improve the disciplinary approach of its emergency managers towards the ultimate goal of effective transnational disaster management through mitigating human loss, economic damages, and psychological impacts. We maintain that Korea has to change its emergency managers' unidisciplinary status to multidisciplinary status, and given Korea's own experience, the international community must address the need to change related educational curricula, collaborative learning, and sustainable evaluation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Studies on Korean disaster management

There have been two kinds of studies on Korean disaster management in the past: those within Korea, and those outside of it. The majority of Korean researchers or Korean language researchers have examined how to organize the national disaster management institution (Cho and Ahn, 2011). Considering that the history of modern disaster management in Korea started in 2004 with the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), related researchers paid attention to predicting the next head of NEMA. With the rise of Ministry of Public Safety and Security (MPSS) at the end of 2014, they continued to study which professions would require the human resources of MPSS. In fact, the NEMA was transformed into the MPSS after experiencing the sinking of ferry Sewol in mid-2014.

Outside Korea, some English language researchers have looked into how disaster management principles would be applied to the case of Korea (Park, 2015). In doing so, they made efforts to examine subjects that Korean language researchers had not considered. For example, while disasters have both physical and social impacts, many Korean researchers focused only on the physical impacts in the following cases: typhoon Maemi in 2003, the sinking of ferry Sewol in 2014, the outbreak of Middle-East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2015, among others. Conversely, researchers outside Korea often delve into the social impact including the psychological impact of disasters, the status of special needs population, and the application of equity to emergency professionals.

2.2. Necessity of multidisciplinary approach

Many researchers have examined the significance of a multidisciplinary aspect on disaster management in the international community (Fazey et al., 2014; Leonard et al., 2014; Quick, 1998; Rose, 2007). In particular, many educators, nurses, and medical doctors have focused on topics within their areas. At the same time, they have identified, promoted, and implemented multidisciplinary status for professional emergency managers, while elaborating on environmental change, holistic problem solving, dynamic change, and case studies, among many others.

Although some researchers have attempted to create boundaries between their preferred subject and other specialized subjects in the field of disaster management, many researchers have shared basic knowledge or common disciplines (Macinnis and Folkes, 2010; Zhang et al., 2015). In this context, correlation exists among multidisciplinary subjects and other specialized ones. Multidisciplinary approach does not stunt but fuels the advancement of disaster management. Further,

with a multidisciplinary approach, there is comprehensive planning as part of proactive management.

When analyzing that a specific disaster may lead to multiple disasters, disaster management is not oriented for a unidisciplinary but a multidisciplinary model. To illustrate, when a typhoon hits a local area, it usually causes flooding. Overflowing water contains a number of chemicals, which need the management of hazardous materials. Subsequently, flooding may cause fires due to electric leakage. Complex situations such as these scenarios will not be addressed by a linear or single approach. Understanding and quick action, looking into alternatives, and applying a multidisciplinary approach have a greater chance of succeeding and in helping to mobilize as many people and organizations as possible to work together to resolve problems. Given that disaster management involves a number of interrelated factors and parties, a multidisciplinary perspective is needed to identify and evaluate complicated issues (Ali and Nitivattananon, 2012).

2.3. Theoretical aspects on multidisciplinary approach

Unidisciplinary disaster plans typically outline actions for emergency managers from a single discipline or common background. Those emergency managers share similar language, training, and emergency function. In addition, they are oriented to handle only one specific aspect of disaster management. In contrast, multidisciplinary disaster plans cover those for emergency managers from diverse fields or different backgrounds. To this point, emergency managers from different disciplines or multidisciplinary disaster plan(s) are expected to handle the multi-faceted aspects of disaster management better than unidisciplinary emergency managers.

Many challenges come with disaster awareness, decision flexibility, adapting to volatile environments, among others, and for this reason, relying on a single discipline is not likely to adequately explain certain complicated aspects of hazards or risks in disaster management nor will it provide comprehensive solutions (Doren et al., 2012; Jensenius, 2012). Conversely, a multidisciplinary approach may fully address many fragmented issues and concerns towards the goal of effective disaster management, in particular, by comprehensively combining or integrating various knowledge and information.

2.4. Value of this study

As decision-makers, professional emergency managers in developed nations may get diverse support from their multidisciplinary background (Sterlacchini et al., 2007). Whether as part-time or full-time, shared position or not, as they go about making sound decisions, they also utilize their knowledge on preventive measures during dangerous events. As a result, professional emergency managers play a role in maximizing potential benefits despite limited resources, as long as they fully utilize a multidisciplinary approach.

On the other hand, professional emergency managers in Korea have not played a specific role in managing diverse disasters. Rather, they have taken part in many roles in disaster management such as planners, leaders, administrators, trainers, protectors, communicators, and problem solvers, among others. Accordingly, the whole community has expected them to carry out many activities such as hazard identification, efficient emergency response, systematic emergency recovery, ethical conduct, and others (FEMA, 2013-1).

In Korea, an increasing number of researchers have studied how efficiently the nation has to operate its disaster management. In doing so, some researchers have indirectly mentioned the category of emergency managers while proposing their theories (Incheon City Council, 2013). However, when reflecting that the concept of professional emergency managers is a relatively new one to Korea, almost no rigorous study has been attempted to delve into the issue (Yoon, 2015; Yoo et al., 2015). To the author's best knowledge, this study is the first to systematically investigate Korean professional emergency managers.

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