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An attempt to facilitate support for vulnerable populations during disasters through partnership with support groups for disabled individuals

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Background: After the Great East Japan Earthquake, it was clear that support systems for disabled individuals were insufficient. Local communities therefore need to put in place safety measures to support vulnerable populations during disasters.

Purpose: To enhance community awareness that a strong everyday relationship with populations that would be vulnerable during disasters would improve support at such times, an attempt was carried out partnered with 18 groups for the disabled in Itabashi, Tokyo and conducted to develop local human resources to support these populations.

Methods: From June 2014 to March 2015, 1) a training course regarding coordination of urban disaster planning, elderly residences, and community cooperation was provided; 2) a survey regarding vulnerable populations during disasters was conducted; 3) a guidebook to facilitate safety of the vulnerable populations during disasters was created; and 4) the results were presented at a meeting.

Results: The training session involved 1083 participants, while the survey respondents comprised 1280 healthy individuals and 778 individuals who would be vulnerable during disasters. Of the healthy respondents, 93.1% indicated that they would ascertain the safety of vulnerable populations during disasters, while 98.4% of all respondents indicated that creation of a support system was necessary. The guidebook was distributed to the partnered groups and to public service counters in Itabashi.

Discussion and Conclusion: Community awareness of the need to support vulnerable populations during disasters was high. Clearly, there is a need for disaster prevention training and the promotion of cooperation between populations who would be vulnerable during disasters.