

# Receiving Help: Learning from Sri Lankan Victims of the Asian Tsunami



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# Introduction

- > Survivors of natural disasters (NDs) are in need of support during their recovery process  
*e.g., NGO's, corporate sector, family and/or friends*
- > Effective use of help depends heavily upon recipients' readiness to accept support.
- > Assumption made by supporters:
  - Survivors of ND's would sense much less stigma related to needing support from others
  - Therefore, survivors would react positively towards help



# Introduction<sub>(cont.)</sub>

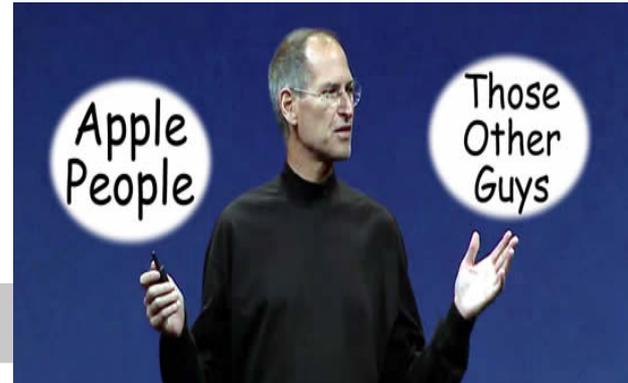
- > “Self-esteem” is considered to be a main factor determining how a person reacts to help
- > When donations are perceived as potentially damaging to self-esteem recipients tend to react negatively:
  - poor evaluations of donors and aid
  - low rates of acceptance of aid



- > **Theories that can be drawn up on:**
  - Equity theories
  - Reactance theory
  - Attribution theories
  - **Identity Theories (Focus of the current study)**

# Social Identity Theory (SIT)

- > “Identity” is defined as a person’s understanding that he or she belongs to a particular social group (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg et al., 2004).
- > A social group is a collection of individuals who commonly view themselves as members of that group (*e.g., religious, ethnic, or occupational groups*)
- > Through a comparative process, one may identify their:
  - In-groups
  - Out-groups



# Purpose of the Study

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To explore the role of “social identity” and the notions of “in-group” and “out-group” in relation to willingness to accept help after a natural disaster

# Methodology

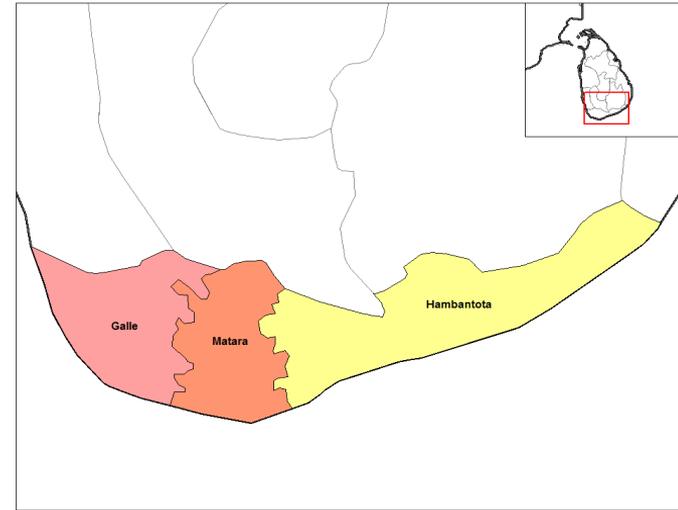
## ➤ Research Approach

- Exploratory nature
- Qualitative method

## ➤ Study Context – Sri Lanka

- 8 years after the Asian tsunami
- Highly prone to disasters
- Various support initiatives in the recovery process were available

## ➤ Geographical Location



# The Impact of the Tsunami in Sri Lanka (2004)

Type of Damage	Total Number
Fatalities	35,322
Injured persons	21,441
Internally displaced persons	516,150
Houses damage or destroyed	98,000
Livelihood affected	150,000
Water and sanitation systems affected	60,000 wells contaminated
Land affected	9510 ha

*Source: Abe, Takeuchi and Shaw (2011)*

# Methodology (cont.)

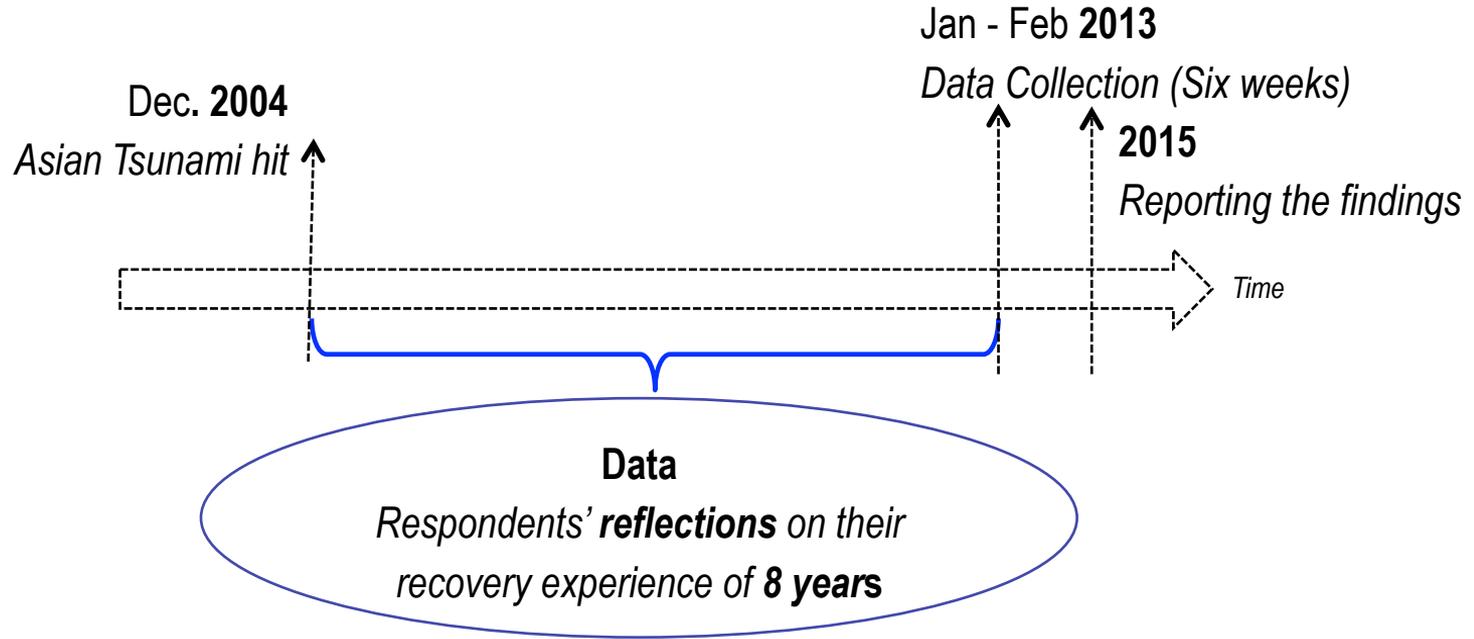
## ➤ Data Collection

- Snowball sampling technique
- 42 semi-structured in-depth interviews (16 – 75 years of age)
- Interviews 1-2 hours
- Conducted within their homes
- On survivors experience and reflections of “receiving support”
- Supplemented by field notes taken by the researcher

## ➤ Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis - guided by a six step process (Brun & Clarke 2013)
- Data coding and organising

# Time Frame Involved in the Study



# Findings

- > Survivors experienced a diminished sense of their self-identity partly due to their feelings towards those they received support from.
- > Survivors seemed adept at identifying both “in-groups” and “out-groups” when receiving support.

*“I would not ask for support from anyone”*

*“I am so grateful that all companies [from whom we bought supplies for our business] came to help us. They supported us even in restarting our business”*

*Female, 58 years, an entrepreneur*

# Findings (cont.)

*“I felt ashamed when I was in queues for food because I am from a respectable family in this village. Sometimes, I chose to avoid such situations”*

*“My friends [from the office] gave me relatively big amounts of money... like Rs. 5000.00. I knew that they gave me money because they cared for me. ‘Friends’ means... those who worked with me. They were officers at my level. Even the Lottery Board [where I worked] sent me some money....those officers came to hand over money from the Lottery Board, even drivers came over. One new driver, having observed all other officers giving me money, put Rs.100.00 into my pocket and said “sir, you keep this”. I felt really bad when that happened.”*

*Male, 52 years, senior executive of a semi-government organisation*

# Findings (cont.)

*“Being a teacher, I felt ashamed having to queue to collect donations. It was shameful for my children too. But, I had to do so at times without thinking of my feelings”*

*“I was so happy about my background [pre-disaster socio-economic status], I helped my friends and they helped me. The Principal of my school took the initiative and he helped us resettle. Around 200 students came. They cleaned the house, they cooked for us. I still wear some of the clothes my friends gave me”*

*Female, 58 years, school teacher*

# Discussion & Conclusion

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- > We adopted a social-identity theory to explore survivors' receptivity towards helps

## Key Finding:

- > Survivors respond positively towards helps received from “in-groups” rather than “out-groups”.
- This might be due to the collectivistic nature of the country's culture too

## Implications for support agencies:

- > Consider the impact on survivors' social identity when designing mechanisms for providing aid
- > Understand how survivors conceptualise their 'in-groups'
  - > These groups might be used as “agents” of support distribution

# Future Studies

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Further research could explore:

- > Whether acceptance of aid is associated with “in-groups” in other contexts
- > Whether using ‘in-group’ distribution channels will enhance the uptake of support



Thank You!