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How do those affected by a disaster organize to meet their needs for justice? Campaign strategies and partial victories following the Grenfell Tower fire

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that disasters often involve a sense of injustice among affected communities. But the empowerment process through which 'disaster communities' organise strategically to confront such injustices have not been investigated by social psychology. This study addresses this gap by examining how community members impacted by the Grenfell Tower fire self-organized to demand justice in response to government neglect. Thematic analysis of interviews with fifteen campaigners helped us to understand the strategies of those involved in support campaigns following the fire. Campaigners aimed to: overcome injustice against the government inactions in the aftermath of the fire; empower their community against government neglect; create a sense of community for people who experienced injustice. Community members created a petition calling on the government to build trust in the public inquiry; they achieved their goals with the participation of people from wider communities. We found that reaching out to allies from different communities and building shared social identity among supporters were two main ways to achieve campaign goals. The study suggests ways that empowerment and hence organizing for justice can be achieved after a disaster if campaigners adopt strategies for empowering collective action.

Keywords: Campaigning, empowerment, social identity, shared identity, Grenfell Tower fire, disasters, injustice, justice.

Introduction

Disasters are hazardous incidents leading to human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts. Interacting with social conditions, they disrupt the functioning of a community (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2016). Whether or not the hazards occur as a natural process or are human made, the results can be experienced on different levels in different sections of society (Lewis, 2005; Smith, 2006). Therefore, disasters can be considered as political events which lead to political responses from those communities directly and indirectly affected by them (Cleaver, 1987; Smith, 2006). Sometimes, those affected by a disaster develop campaigns which tackle the social conditions that led to the catastrophe, in addition to their immediate needs and injustices after the disaster (Heldman, 2010).

The recovery process does not only involve replacement of resources or rehabilitation of those affected; it is a complex social process that involves rebuilding and restoring the community (Cabinet Office, 2013, p. 83). Besides meeting community needs for shelter, medical assistance, and financial support (Oliver-Smith, 1991), disasters might also bring people together to demand justice (Cleaver, 1988; Hajek, 2013) and more resources from authorities, typically because these services are lacking. Since the effects of disasters are often related to social inequalities in a society as a whole (Smith, 2006), sometimes, wider communities also share a sense of injustice with survivors and bereaved families and support them in 'political' responses such as protests and campaigns (Aldrich, 2013).

Previous research evidenced that sharing an identity motivates people to support others affected by an emergency (Drury, 2018). The 'individual reactions' of survivors and their supporters can become 'shared reactions' (Kaniasty & Norris,

1999). Therefore, the shared reactions of people who experience an emergency may lead them to act as one, and support each other with different needs (Drury et al., 2009a, 2009b). What has not been examined yet, however, is how empowerment process can be achieved when people who are directly affected by a disaster solidarize with allies from wider communities. justice can be achieved when people who are directly affected by a disaster solidarize with allies from wider communities during the empowerment process. Therefore, in this study we considered empowerment as a process in which campaigners take an active role to reach out to allies from wider communities to fight for justice.

How do those affected by disasters meet their needs for justice?

After the initial response to a disaster, those affected may see themselves as a single group fighting against inadequate responses from the government (Luft, 2009). In the cases where disasters lead to such campaigns, the people affected sometimes aim to broaden the 'disaster community' to include wider support networks, hoping to hold authorities account for inaction (Clever, 1988; Solnit, 2009). The extent to which they create such allies can affect whether they are successful in meeting their needs for justice.

One example is the Hillsborough Football disaster of April 15, 1989, which occurred after police directed people into already overcrowded pens. Ninety-six people lost their lives and hundreds of people were injured and traumatized. The first coroner's inquests in 1991 decided that the deaths were accidental (Scruton et al., 1995). The Hillsborough Justice Campaign was formed by the bereaved families to demand justice and was supported by people from around the country even 30 years after the disaster. Following the campaign, a new inquest ruled that supporters were

unlawfully killed because of the negligence of the police and ambulance services, vindicating the campaigners (Cronin, 2017).

In another example, Solnit (2009) describes how 'ordinary men and women' created an alternative 'government' in the absence of an official response following the 1985 Mexico City Earthquake. Many lives were lost, and survivors held the authorities accountable because of poor construction and building regulation fraud prior to the earthquake (Cleaver, 1987). Community members affected by the earthquake and supporters from other cities campaigned against the government and their inadequate building regulations. As a result, those affected by the earthquake came together, created organizations and worked with existing groups to defend the homes, jobs and rights of the survivors through creating a stronger civil society after the earthquake (Solnit, 2009).

According to previous research, people can take political action to overcome injustices and inequalities in the aftermath of an emergency (Aldrich, 2013; Fominaya, 2011; Sarfati, 2019). Moreover, even though these actions for justice can be taken by the people who experience the disaster first-hand, people from wider communities also can also contribute (e.g., Scraton, et al., 1995; Solnit, 2009). However, how reaching out to an extended audience as a strategy to empower campaign actions has not been examined by previous studies. In order to examine the group processes in the actions of campaigners who seek justice in the aftermath of a disaster, we turn now to social psychological research on disaster communities.

The Social Psychology of Disaster Communities

Previous social psychology research explained how trauma can be experienced collectively (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999) and on how certain groups in communities are affected at different levels in the aftermath of a disaster (Zagefka et

al., 2011). For example, post-traumatic stress, depression, and other types of mental health issues are most often observed in disadvantaged groups (e.g., women and people from lower-socioeconomic level) because these groups are socially excluded and have fewer social and economic resources (Muldoon et al., 2017). Moreover, it was also suggested in the previous literature that distress and a subsequent sense of loss can also mobilize support networks that help people who experience a disaster improve their wellbeing (Kaniasty, 2020).

Recent research on community behaviour suggests that pre-existing community identification was the basis of responses to the COVID-19; in line with the 'social cure' approach, a three-wave panel study found that identification with the community before the pandemic predicted giving and receiving of pandemic-related social support during 'lockdown', enabling people to cope (Stevenson et al., 2021). In addition, it was found in another study on community support during COVID-19 pandemic that community support and volunteering can predict better mental health among community members (Tierney & Mahtani, 2020). Therefore, it is important to emphasize the vital role of community identity and community support to encourage effective behavioural responses to an emergency (e.g., the pandemic).

Social psychology research on disasters suggests that shared social identity is a key mechanism whereby community members act as one to overcome the effects of a disaster (Drury, 2018). Social identity is defined as individuals' self-concept based on their social group membership with the related value connotations and emotional meaning (Turner et al., 1987). Community spirit, solidarity, and emergent togetherness are commonly seen as powerful mechanisms of collective resilience when there is an emergency (Drury et al., 2009b). In addition to resilience among the individuals who experience the emergency, it has also been evidenced that, by

sharing a community identity, people who were not physically affected by an emergency can also support those who experience the disaster first-hand. For example, Ntontis and colleagues (2018) found that community members who were not physically affected by the floods in York, UK (in 2015) supported the affected population when they shared a community identity with those affected based on the experience of common fate.

Community support in the context of an emergency can be similar in some ways to collective action processes (e.g., Chile Earthquake in 2010, Drury et al., 2016; Kobe earthquake in 1995, Kurimoto, 2019). As suggested in the collective action literature (e.g., social identity model of collective action; van Zomeren et al., 2008), individuals' engagement in action is predicted by group identification. In other words, individual's psychological connectedness with their group predicts their willingness to take collective action.

Community members support each other, act united, and aim to overcome the effects of the emergency when they share the same goals and same identity (Ntontis et al., 2018). However, keeping the support and solidarity sustainable or achieving shared goals is rare. For example, in the aftermath of different disasters such as, Peruvian earthquake in 1970, the riverbank erosion in Bangladesh in 1984, and bushfires in Australia in 2020, even though disadvantaged groups were affected unequally because of the result of systemic injustice (Adams et al., 2011; Elhawary & Castillo, 2008; Henkel et al., 2006; O'Brian et al., 2009; Vardoulakis et al., 2020; Zaman, 1989), they did not come together to take political action (e.g., riots, demonstrations, and protests) or actions declined after a while (e.g., protests after Hurricane Katrina, Nossiter & Eaton, 2007).

As was evidenced in the previous literature, post-disaster justice campaigns and actions can succeed in organizing when empowerment is achieved via receiving support from community members and allies from wider communities (e.g., protests after Emilia Romagna in 2012; Hajek, 2013). In the literature on collective empowerment, it is suggested that common self-categorization -- sharing a social identity and a sense of unity among groupmembers -- leads to expectations of mutual support in achieving group goals (Drury & Reicher, 1999). Therefore, a sense of empowerment can be the outcome of the collective action (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Drury & Reicher, 2020). However, previous research on collective behaviour has mostly examined empowerment as something that happens to participants. In the present research we examine empowerment as a process that participants take strategic steps to achieve shared goals. In addition, the role of expected support can be seen as coming together and acting as one with the wider group of people who did not experience the disaster from the first-hand. Therefore, these shared goals and empowerment process can be achieved by receiving help from this extended group (allies).

Even though studies from different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, political science) evidenced successful action and post-disaster justice campaigns in the aftermath of disasters, empowerment processes of these actions have been left unexplained. To understand this empowerment process, in this study, we addressed the following questions: first, for those affected by the fire and supporters from wider communities, what were their reasons for coming together and self-organizing to campaign for justice in the aftermath?; second, what strategic steps did campaigners take to achieve their shared goals during the empowerment process?; lastly, how did reaching out to allies from wider communities contribute to collective empowerment and therefore the justice seeking goals?

Current Study

Grenfell Tower, in North Kensington, London, was a 24-storey housing block that contained 120 flats in mix of social housing and private homes. It was managed by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management organization (KCTMO) on behalf of the local authority, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). The fire occurred on 14 June 2017. Once the fire started from the fourth floor, it was out of control within 30 minutes because cheap and flammable cladding was used during refurbishment projects carried out by KCTMO the year before (Bulley, 2019, p. 10). Seventy-two people lost their lives and over 200 people from the building and the neighbourhood lost their accommodation in the aftermath. Even though residents repeatedly voiced their concerns about fire safety in the tower four years before the fire, necessary actions were not taken by the council and KCTMO to make the building safe (Booth & Wahlquist, 2017).

Similar to the previous disasters (e.g., Drury, et al., 2009a; Kaniasty & Norris, 1999; Solnit, 2009), campaigners, volunteers and people affected by the fire came together to meet survivors' material needs. Subsequently, they escalated their efforts by campaigning against the way that they were treated by the local authority before and after the fire (Booth & Wahlquist, 2017; Booth, 2018). Even though the council provided money for temporary accommodation (hotels and private homes) immediately after the fire, it was reported four years after the fire that five families were still temporarily housed in private rented accommodation inside the RBKC, and, one household was, again, temporarily housed outside of the borough (Andersson, 2021).

Survivors and bereaved families created Grenfell United, a group which campaigned for justice and, more broadly, for safe homes for social housing

residents. Specifically, campaigners who supported Grenfell United aimed: (1) to hold the authorities responsible for their decisions in the refurbishment and their subsequent inaction in the recovery phase, (2) to ensure that similar events would never happen again, (3) to honour those who lost their lives, and demand that survivors are heard by the wider community (Grenfell United [GU], 2019). One of the most powerful features of the campaign was the monthly Silent Walk that was organized by a community member who lived opposite the tower (Tekin & Drury, 2021). In these walks, community members (residents of RBKC), people from different parts of London (residents from other boroughs), and supporters from other cities came together to walk silently around the Grenfell Tower area every month to honour the 72 victims and to seek justice for the survivors and bereaved families.

A public inquiry was initiated to determine what happened during the fire, why it happened, and what could be done to prevent anything similar happening again. To demand a debate in Parliament and to include survivors and bereaved families in the inquiry process, at least 150,000 people needed to sign a petition. The petition closed with 156,835 signatures (Petitions, UK Government and Parliament, 2018). Before the Parliamentary debate occurred, however, the Prime Minister conceded that two community-chosen experts would be involved in the inquiry process. The success of the petition is *prima facie* an example of reaching out to allies to enable community members to achieve goals they could not accomplish alone.

Our study aimed to understand the strategies that were taken by the campaigners who sought justice in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. Based on the literature on disasters, we were particularly interested in whether and how campaigners reached out to others. Based on the social psychology literature, we asked whether and how campaigners achieved specific goals (partial goals or main

goals) by following certain strategies, such as connecting with others, during the process of empowerment. We interviewed people affected by the fire and supporters from wider communities to ask them what reasons and aims motivated them to be involved in the campaigning process after the Grenfell Tower fire disaster, and how they explained their steps to achieve partial victories during their campaign.

Methods

Interviews

In terms of recruitment criteria, we¹ sought to interview 15 participants who attended campaign activities once or more and anybody who was willing to share their experiences. Before introducing our research to our interviewees, between October and February 2017, we attended various campaign events such as monthly Silent Walks and meetings of different campaign groups. We interacted with campaigners during those events and had a chance to share our research aims during our informal conversations. Later, after community members become familiar to us (e.g., inviting us to their upcoming events and including us to some of their WhatsApp groups), we asked their willingness for participating in our research. We approached 40 people but 25 of them chose not to participate². We carried out semi-structured interviews with 8 female and 7 male participants. Nine of our interviewees were residents who lived around the Grenfell Tower area and six interviewees attended campaign activities from different districts in London and beyond. Three of

¹ This research was conducted by two researchers. The first author took overall responsibility for the research, designing the study, collecting interviews, transcribing, analyzing, and reporting the results. The second author took responsibility for supervising the first author by attending the campaign events together with the first author, revising the report, providing feedback and suggesting academic resources to the first author.

² Some of them stated that because they still felt trauma, they were not ready to talk about the issue. Some of the others said they felt politically unsafe to talk about the issue.

our local interviewees, who lived around the Grenfell Tower (who are the residents of RBKC), had lost their loved ones in the fire (See Table 1).

Shortly after we completed seven of the interviews, news came through that the petition was successful. This was therefore an opportunity to ask participants about the steps that campaigners took to achieve that success. Therefore, we made small changes to our interview schedule by including a few more questions about campaign strategies during the petition, and we then interviewed eight more campaigners. We therefore had two different waves of interviews. We began the first wave in February 2018 and ended April 2018. We began our second set of interviews in May 2018 and ended in June that year.

Interviews lasted between 43 minutes to 90 minutes each, with a mean average of 62.4 minutes. The interviews usually took place around the Grenfell Tower area in Notting Dale, West London. We carried out two of them in other places (Brixton and Hastings) because these interviewees were from these places. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Both interview schedules began with open-ended questions about participants' experiences of being involved in the campaign. The other sections of the interviews comprised questions on topics related to their identities, perceptions of other supporters, local authority, government and campaign activities. We asked '*How would you describe yourself?*' to understand how they defined themselves. The question '*What sort of people are involved in the campaign?*' was to understand how they saw other supporters. Lastly, we wanted to learn what activities were successful from their point of view; for this reason, we asked '*what do you consider as successful steps during the campaigning process?*' The full schedules are in the Supplementary Materials.

Table 1: Demographics of the interviewees

Interviewee No	Age	Sex	Location	Group Affiliation
1	28	Female	North Kensington	Local Campaigner -lost a loved one
2	40	Male	Hastings	Campaigner from another city
3	40	Male	Brixton.	Campaigner from wider community in London
4	38	Female	North Kensington	Local Campaigner lost a loved one
5	37	Male	Another borough in London	Campaigner from wider community in London
6	45	Male	Another Borough in London	Campaigner from wider community in London
7	40	Female	North Kensington	Local Campaigner
8	42	Female	North Kensington	Local Campaigner
9	57	Male	North Kensington	Local Campaigner – lost a loved one
10	36	Female	Another borough in London	Campaigner from wider community in London
11	38	Female	Another borough in London	Campaigner from wider community in London
12	63	Male	North Kensington	Local Campaigner
13	41	Female	North Kensington	Local Campaigner
14	38	Female	North Kensington	Local Campaigner
15	34	Male	North Kensington	Local Campaigner

Analytic Approach

Thematic analysis was used in this study to provide a rich description of the data in relation to the research questions on reasons and aims, factors in success, and the role of shared social identity. This analysis method helped us to examine experiences, meanings, and the subjective reality of the participants in relation to their reasons for campaigning, aims of campaign activities, and strategies to achieve their campaign goals. Moreover, thematic analysis also gave us an opportunity to acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and in turn the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings.

We mainly used the theoretical (deductive) type of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) since our research questions aimed to understand social psychological processes of campaign groups based on the social identity approach. Therefore, many of the themes that we found, such as 'reaching out to allies', 'building shared identity', and 'sense of community', had a theoretical background. However, some of the themes evident in the interviews and relevant to the research questions were not necessarily related to social identity - such as 'problems before the fire', 'authorities neglect', 'authorities treat rich and poor unequally', and 'trauma after disaster'. Therefore, we also employed the inductive type of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The steps that we followed during the analysis were as follows. First, we listened and transcribed the fifteen audio-recorded interviews and read the transcripts several times carefully to identify the codes that enabled us to develop themes. Second, we chose the codes that were repeated by the interviewees and identified them according to our research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Later, we labelled, described, and grouped those codes systematically to generate themes. Fourth, we

identified our themes depending on the categories of the codes to present broader patterns of meaning across the data. Later, we reviewed the themes across research questions to ascertain reliability and validity of the categories. Lastly, the themes that directly address the research questions were selected and cross-checked against the data.

Analysis

The analysis is organized as follows. First, we present the thematic analysis results of our first wave of interviews (focused on reasons for and aims of campaigning); then, we present the analysis of second wave (focused on achieving campaign goals).

Wave 1

Reasons for Campaigning

In response to our questions about reasons for campaign, interviewees mainly focused on three different themes (see Figure 1).

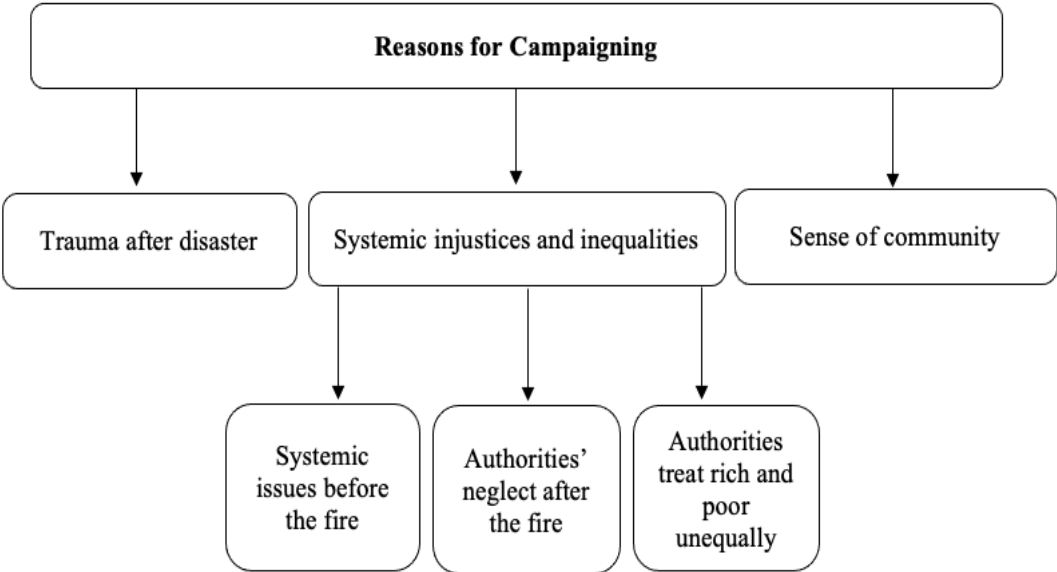


Figure 1: Three themes and subthemes in participants' reasons to be involved in campaign activities.

Trauma after disaster

Five of the interviewees in the first wave stated that they decided to participate in campaigning activities because even if many community members did not live in the building, everybody locally felt traumatized after the fire. Extract 1 presents the comments of one of our interviewees who lost loved ones during the fire:

Extract 1. I walked around for months and months on end. I couldn't understand by how and why I was feeling like this. I know why because I was traumatized by what I saw. We were helpless to those people dying. You couldn't do anything and that ripped something out of me and I couldn't go back to my normal life. My children, my family I forgot all of them, I didn't give them that time. They were my first concern, and then, after the tower, it was like 'yeah they are ok', I have looked after them for so long, they are ok. Grenfell needs me right now. It wasn't just a point of that Grenfell needs me, I needed Grenfell, I need it. Even if you told me to stay away, I couldn't stay away. I didn't know how to shut off, I didn't know how to close off or think about something other than Grenfell apart what I saw. I witnessed that night, and then meeting families after, and the aftermath of nobody coming to help and we see and witnessed altogether just try and get help to these families, you know.

[Alice.³ Local female campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre for Grenfell survivors and bereaved]

As Kaniasty and Norris (1999) suggested, trauma is experienced collectively among the community members after a disaster. Therefore, shared reactions of

³ All names have been changed to preserve interviewees' anonymity.

people help them to overcome trauma collectively. In extract 1, the interviewee implied that gathering together is motivated by the traumatic event. As she stated, her daily rituals and primary concerns were disrupted with the fire. She indicated that she needed to stay with the other community members to overcome the trauma together, even at the cost of her own family. The activities helped them to overcome trauma as well as addressing the need they perceived in survivors and bereaved families. In addition, by stating 'we see and witnessed together' she emphasized the sense of 'we-ness' among the community members. Besides the support, she explained this sense of we-ness when stating how community members felt helpless when they were neglected by the authorities (both local and national government).

Systemic Injustices and Inequality

Consistent with previous disasters (e.g., Aldrich, 2013; Hajek; 2013; Oliver-Smith, 1991; Quarantelli, 1988), people lost their lives, loved ones, and accommodation, because of the *systemic injustices* in the Grenfell Tower fire (Kernick 2021; Renwick, 2019). Interviewees talked about these injustices under different topics. Therefore, we can explain this theme via three different sub themes.

The first sub-theme that we found is *systemic issues before the fire*. Six of the interviewees in the first wave argued that they were already campaigning in the area of Grenfell Tower even before the fire because of the issues around gentrification. Extract 2 provides a statement from one of those interviewees who lost one of his friends during the fire that they attended the previous campaign activities together:

Extract 2. So, like I said, Freddie was there on the 14th floor and we'd been working together for three years prior to the fire and various other struggles with this land: with library, with the Maxilla nursery, the local stables, the

college... you know... trying to stop them shutting down the local communities.

So, we were already there.

[Bill. Local male campaigner. Interview; in a community space near Grenfell Tower]

By referring to 'struggles with this land', the interviewee implied that gentrification was happening around the area prior the fire. This quote is also an example that campaigning was already a part of the culture of community of North Kensington. When the participant stated that "trying to stop them shutting down the local communities" they were referring to the fight among community members and the local authority (the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea - RBKC). For many years, there was a battle between community members and the local authority (RBKC) about the ownership of the land, and the fire was the deadliest consequences of authorities' decisions about the area (e.g., using flammable cladding for social housing buildings) (Bulley, 2019; Kernick, 2021). By stating 'we were already there', the interviewee in extract 2 emphasized that injustices have already brought people together against the actions of the local authority relating to the local control of space.

The second sub-theme under the systemic injustice and inequality was *authorities' neglect* in the recovery phase, referring to both the local authority and the UK government. Extract 3 provides one of the comments of one of our interviewees when we asked her reason for campaigning:

Extract 3. we needed to think for the community and make sure that those things were set up and put place in. Like, something as simple as clothes. The government didn't think about them at all. like I remember yesterday these

families walked out with their pyjamas and some ran out with even shorts. They literally they lost their everything and the government didn't run with any form of provisions...nothing, nothing, we waited and waited and waited and they didn't do anything, so we had to do.

[Alice. Local female campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre for Grenfell survivors and bereaved]

Consistent with previous disasters (e.g., Hurricane Katrina, Mexico earthquake), all of the interviewees (seven) we interviewed in the first wave stated that there was no response from the authorities for nine days after the fire. Besides the local authorities (RBKC), as stated in extract 4, the UK government was seen as inadequate in attempts to provide essentials such as clothes for survivors; therefore, campaigners came together to locate resources for these immediate needs. By stating 'we had to do', the interviewee emphasized that supporters of bereaved families gather together because there was no other help from authorities. In other words, supporters were obligated to create strategies to help each other because of the lack of response from the authorities.

The third and last sub-theme that we found in the accounts of interviewees in response to the question about reasons for campaigning is *authorities treat rich and poor unequally*. Four of our first-wave interviewees stated that social housing residents, working-class and ethnic minority groups, do not receive the same service and resources from the RBKC (the local authority) as wealthier residents received. As illustrated in this quote from someone who lost loved ones in the fire, this inequality was their other reason to support campaign activities:

Extract 4: If it had happened uptown, everyone would have got involved and sorted it a long time ago. They'd put up a whole tower block in a month if they wanted to. People who are supporting it want to see some results in terms of justice, and justice is going to take on different forms.

[Zack. Local male campaigner. Interviewed in a sport centre near Grenfell Tower]

By referring to 'uptown', the interviewee emphasized that wealthier communities would receive necessary support if the fire happened in their buildings. The interviewee also suggested that the reason of people who support campaign activities is to receive the same support and resources from the RBKC. 'Justice' is described as 'equal treatment' from the local authority.

Sense of community

Sense of community was the last theme that was evident in some of the interviewees' accounts of reasons for campaigning. Five of our interviewees in the first wave stated that they participated in campaigning activities because they had strong commitments to their community. Thus, one of the interviewees (extract 5) stated that she felt emotionally obligated to help her community after the fire:

Extract 5. it might sound very selfish, but, for me, because it's the area that I have come in to work, people that I know survived down there, people died I knew... So, for me, I felt like I had to be here.

[Karen. Local female campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre for Grenfell survivors and bereaved]

As Stevenson and colleagues (2021) evidenced, pre-existing community identity predicts helping behaviour in the context of an emergency. The interviewee in extract 5 described her sense of community belonging with the place that she worked around the area and the people that she lost during the fire. In the extract, by stating 'I had to be here', she expressed the feeling of obligation for helping the community members that she belongs to.

Aims of the Campaign

In relation to our questions about the aims of campaign actions, the responses of our interviewees can be organised into three different themes (see Figure 2).

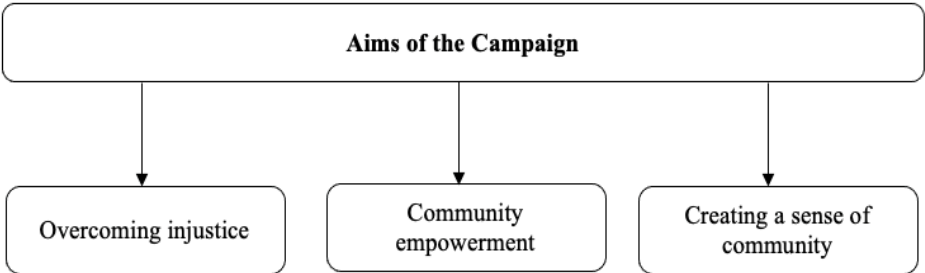


Figure 2: Three themes of campaign aims.

Overcoming injustice

Consistent with the previous disasters (e.g., Hillsborough), in the context of Grenfell Tower fire, people lost their lives because of systemic injustices. Therefore, when we asked people for their aims, the first theme in the responses was that of *overcoming injustice*. When we asked them what they meant by 'injustice', six of the first-wave interviewees stated that they wanted the people responsible for the fire to be held accountable. In addition, they also argued that health and safety conditions of social housing residents in general need to be improved by the UK government.

Many campaigners stated that they took successful actions such as monthly Silent Walks because they could achieve gathering hundreds of local and non-local supporters in the same area to walk all together (Tekin & Drury, 2021). Below, one of the non-local participants stated that campaigners will continue their actions until the responsible people were held accountable:

Extract 6. you know, we are there to remember every single month of the tragedy that has happened, until somebody goes to prison, until justice is done because nobody is going to prison till now.

[Chris. Non-local male campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre run by Grenfell survivors and bereaved]

Even though the interviewee in extract 6 was not a local campaigner, he used the word 'we' when he talked about campaign aims. The language of 'we' shows an implicit sense of shared identity based on the shared sense of injustice. By saying that 'we are there to remember every single month', the interviewee means that Silent Walks bring community members and supporters from wider communities together to seek justice.

Community empowerment

All of our interviewees in wave 1 stated that the authorities were neglectful. Therefore, community members had to develop the capacity to act to take care of their needs themselves, they said. For this reason, interviewees felt they had to take steps to empower their community. Therefore, we named this next theme *community empowerment*. Extracts 7 presents the comments of one of our interviewees on campaign aims:

Extract 7: Oh, the community responded in a way that the government didn't respond. So, we came together immediately without questioning and we had to be intuitive. We hadn't been in that situation before, but we found a way to deal with it at the time whole it was happening.

[Zack. Local male campaigner. Interviewed in a community space near Grenfell Tower]

The interviewee emphasized that campaigners created their own supporting strategies because the government did not respond in a way that the community members needed. By stating '...but we found a way to deal with it at the time whole it was happening', the interviewee suggested that empowerment is a process where community members achieved by working together from the first day after the fire. They had to create and sustain community empowerment, and campaign activities served this aim.

Creating sense of community

We named the last theme about the aims of campaigns as *creating a sense of community*. One of the interesting findings is that even though campaigning began because the community members had a strong sense of community, five interviewees in wave 1 also stated that they aimed to keep united and gain more supporters against injustice. Below, in extract 8, we present one of our interviewees' responses when we asked her the campaign aims:

Extract 8: Keep staying together. Keep coming together and in unity and love as that's what we all say in unity and love. One for all, all for one is the saying around here now

[Carol. Local female campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre organized for Grenfell survivors and bereaved]

By stating ‘keep staying together’, the interviewee emphasized the pre-existing solidarity around the area. In other terms, it can be mean that people were already taking their actions together; therefore, one of their aims is to keep community together. By mentioning ‘unity’ and ‘love’ in the campaign events, she also emphasized that unity around the area is one of the campaign aims.

Wave2

After the successful petition, we aimed to understand how campaigners felt they achieved their goals. For this reason, we began our second set of interviews by including more questions about the successful steps taken by campaigners.⁴ In the second wave of interviews, we identified two themes in their accounts that related to ways to achieve campaigners’ goals: ‘reaching out to allies’ and ‘building shared identity’ (see Figure 3).

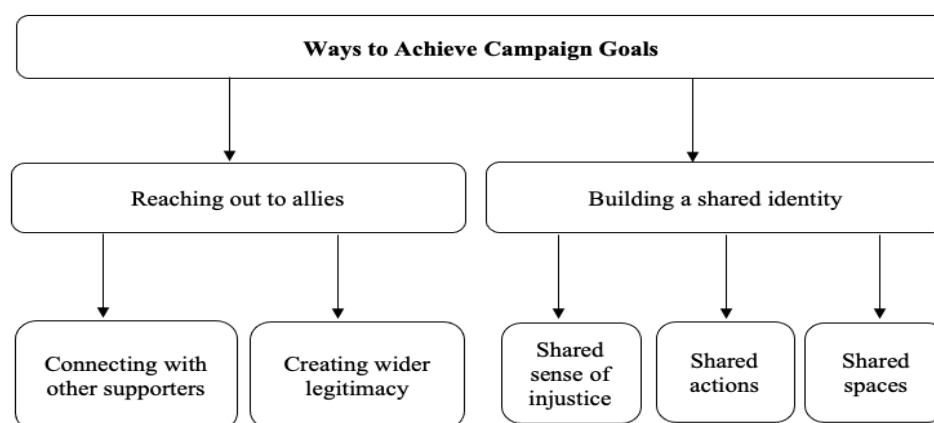


Figure 3: Two themes and their sub-themes for the ways to achieve campaign goals

⁴ In relation to the *aims of the campaigners*, interviewees in the second wave gave similar responses to those in the first wave.

Ways to Achieve Campaign Goals

Reaching out to allies

When many interviewees commented on activities to achieve their goals, their statements under the theme of *reaching out to allies* mainly referred to relations with people who were not from the area (i.e., external relations). We found two different sub-themes here. The first sub-theme was *connecting with other supporters*. Six of our wave 2 interviewees stated that ‘coming together’ and showing that they are one big group made the government see them as a powerful force able to make a change in society. Extract 9 presents a comment from one of the local campaigners:

Extract 9: Edinburgh and different little towns, Hastings, you know, from Brighton and Bristol to most of the big cities to Liverpool to Manchester to Birmingham... So, yes there is definitely a feeling that lots of people are supportive and I think lots of people were very touched, very moved by what’s happened and want to do something to support. I think social media has been a big help in that because otherwise people wouldn’t know how to connect in and wouldn’t be able to find the information

[Chloe. Local female campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre near Grenfell Tower]

Previous literature on allyship defines allies as members of advantaged groups who take action to improve the conditions of disadvantaged groups (Louis et al., 2019). In our context, rather than using the term ‘members of advantaged group’, we considered allies as the ones who support campaign activities even though they did not experience the disaster first-hand. For example, in extract 9, by stating the names of towns and cities, the interviewee emphasized that support came from other

communities. Besides wider communities in London (residents of other boroughs), people from outside of London also united with campaigners in different ways.

The second sub-theme was *creating wider legitimacy*. By creating activities that many others nationally could support and get involved in, campaign participants were able to demonstrate the wider legitimacy of their demands to external audiences (e.g., local and national authorities). One of the campaign strategies that they used was the petition. Below, in extract 10, one of the local campaigners stated that petitions were useful actions that enabled campaigners to take the issue to the national level (i.e., parliament):

Extract 10. I think petitions are definitely way useful because it brings it to a national level. If it gets to parliament, then at least it's being spoken about in the news, and then, the debate is going to be actually happening. So, it's actually in their minds. They [the authorities, the government] have to take a day out and talk about that.

[James. Local male campaigner. Interviewed in a community space near Grenfell Tower]

In the first sentence, the interviewee emphasized the importance of petition as a way of campaign action to reach authorities (the UK government). Because the fire happened as result of systemic injustice, campaigners took actions for change at the systemic level. Therefore, as the interviewee suggested in the second sentence, the petition aimed to create a debate in the parliament. When campaigners aimed to reach out the authorities, they decided to take a legitimate action, creating a petition, which requires to reach out to as many allies as possible. Therefore, the interviewee

described petition as a useful action to achieve the goals of making the Grenfell community more visible to the authorities.

Building a shared identity

Building shared identity was the other main theme that we found in relation to talk about achieving campaign goals. This theme is related to other ingroup members (i.e., internal relations). We found three different sub-themes. The first was *shared sense of injustice*. Many interviewees in wave 1 stated that their main aim in supporting campaign activities was to overcome the injustice that they experienced in the aftermath of the fire. Seven interviewees in wave 2 stated that this aim brought them together. Creating a sense of togetherness and solidarity, in order to achieve campaign goals to overcome injustice, campaigners identified themselves under a shared identity which we named as *the shared sense of injustice*. Many interviewees stated that nobody was held accountable after the fire; in addition, there was no policy change in relation to safer social housing; therefore, campaigners continued their activities together. As one of our interviewees stated in extract 11, the sense of injustice was the main idea that brought many supporters together:

Extract 11. Well, you have a responsibility after Grenfell. It's our legacy. Seeking justice works in different ways, holding people accountable by making sure there's a better way for this and justice about the tragedy never happening again. Beyond the culprits of this tragedy is about the system that didn't work. That system needs to change.

[Sally. Local female campaigner. Interviewed in a community centre for survivors and bereaved]

She invoked a sense of 'we-ness' when she referred the campaign 'legacy'. She also emphasized that seeking justice was the responsibility of campaigners. Besides holding people accountable for the fire in order to overcome injustices around Grenfell, there was also a wider 'systemic' injustice that needs to be addressed by aiming a systemic change. By emphasizing that seeking justice is a legacy of campaigners, the interviewee created the idea of sharing an identity under the shared sense of injustice'

A second sub-theme that was evident when many interviewees referred to building shared identity was *shared actions* of campaigners. The petition was an example of an action that many people were involved with. In addition, five of our wave 2 interviewees stated that there are also other specific activities that brought them together and led them to be united. Thus, the Silent Walks helped them to act as one and build a shared identity. As one of our interviewees stated in extract 12, by walking together with 'thousands and thousands of people' they kept the community united:

Extract 12. Silent Walk is very powerful because you march with thousands and thousands of people in a very civilised manner whereas a bit of silence it speaks volume. It speaks much more. You remind the community month on month that this is still happening, it should not be forgotten. I think, it unites the community together.

[Meg. Non-local female campaigner. Interviewed in a café]

In the first sentence, the interviewee defined Silent Walk as a powerful activity because it is supported by big numbers of people. Moreover, interviewee also used the phrase 'civilised manner' in order to emphasize the characteristic of the walk.

When the actions are shared by big number of people, solidarity and unity can happen among the people who also share the same aims.

The last sub-theme that we found when interviewees explained the ways that they achieve their goals referred to the *shared spaces* used by community members. These shared spaces, including the 'Wall of Truth' area (a space under the Westway motorway that campaigners gather at the end of Silent Walks), walkways around Grenfell Tower, and community centres - brought people physically together to organize their activities and act as one. As expressed in this quotation from someone who lost loved ones in the fire, these public spaces were only used by the community members or supporters of campaign activities:

Extract 13. If we come here [Wall of Truth area], they [council members] can't come in here. So, it was all about creating a safe zone because people were being depressed by lawyers and by ignorance of council do you get what I am saying. This space is our space, this is our home.

[Alan. Local male campaigner. Interviewed in a community space near Grenfell Tower]

By using the word 'they' to describe council members (or local authorities) the interviewee emphasized that authorities and campaign supporters are separate groups. By referring to a 'safe zone' the interviewee also emphasized that community spaces were places where community members and campaigners feel safe. It was suggested in the extract 13 that sharing spaces is important for creating a safe and inclusive environment and protecting their community from the 'depressing' experiences lawyers and the local authorities created.

Discussion

We aimed to contribute to the general disasters literature and social psychology literature by explaining what kind of strategies campaigners follow in order to achieve empowerment during post-disaster justice campaigns. Therefore, we first aimed to address why people affected by the fire and those from wider communities get involved in the campaigning process. Second, we asked what kind of common aims the campaigners pursued during these post-disaster justice campaigns. Lastly, we aimed to answer what kind of strategies the campaigners followed to achieve their goals for justice; and how reaching out to allies contributed to the empowerment process.

In line with previous disasters, the example of the Grenfell Tower fire also evidences that disasters are the results of systemic injustices and inequalities in society (Cleaver, 1988; Oliver-Smith, 1991; Quarantelli, 1988). People who lost their lives, loved ones and accommodations were mainly working-class and ethnic minority groups KCTMO did not respond to their warnings about unsafe building conditions before the fire (Charles, 2019, p. 172); in addition, there was also an inadequate response from the local and national authorities in the aftermath of the fire. Therefore, again consistent with some of the previous disasters (e.g., Aldrich, 2013; Cleaver, 1988; Hajek, 2013; Solnit, 2009), survivors, bereaved families, community members, and non-local supporters needed to come together to overcome injustice as well as to help each other for the immediate needs.

In addition, consistent with the previous literature, we found that overcoming trauma was one of the reasons that community members came together and supported each other in the aftermath (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999). Using the 'we'

language, interviewees implied a shared identity; therefore sharing the reason of overcoming injustice also motivated people to come together and support each other. As Kaniasty and Norris (1999) suggested, individual reactions became shared reactions when people support each other to overcome trauma collectively.

We also found evidence in line with previous literature by suggesting that coming together and supporting each other is motivated by community identity. Moreover, keeping this sense of community identity can also be the aim of this collective response. Previous studies on prosocial behaviour and community identity suggested that while psychological sense of community (Omoto & Packard, 2016) can motivate people for community help (e.g., volunteering), community identification can also be built as a result of helping community members (Bowe et al., 2020). As we also found in our analysis, sense of community was a reason for gathering together as well as being an aim for campaigners in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Contribution to the literature

According to ESIM (Drury & Reicher 2005), empowerment can emerge as a result of participating in collective action. Besides supporting this suggestion, in our analysis we suggested that empowerment need to be considered not just as an outcome but also as an aim – i.e., as a process whereby people strategically take actions for example to link up with allies. Our brief review of this literature on disasters suggested that disaster communities often seek to reach out to allies to meet their needs for justice (e.g., Aldrich, 2013; Cleaver, 1988; Oliver-Smith, 1991; Funabashi & Kitazawa, 2012). However, what kind of steps they follow and what kind of activities are organized to reach out these allies haven't been the primary

consideration of previous literature. Therefore, the present study is the first that we know of that has looked specifically at the question of how the empowerment process is deliberately undertaken by campaigners who aim to achieve justice by reaching out supportive others or allies who were not directly affected by the disaster first hand.

Previous research suggests that, in the context of an emergency or disaster, shared experience of a threat can motivate sharing a sense of social identity; therefore, prosocial behaviours during disasters can be a function of these shared identities (Drury et al., 2009b). Moreover, it was also suggested that pre-existing community bonds, like sharing a community identity, can also predict helping behaviour when there is an emergency (Stevenson et al., 2021). However, how a history of activism can motivate further support to fight for justice in the context of a disaster has not been explained. The history of North Kensington seemed to have had an effect on strategies of campaigners when they organized their campaign activities in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. Because community members came together to achieve their goals on different occasions in the past (e.g., saving the local library, local nursery, local staples), they have already had the cultural resources and skills to act. Our interviewees stated that there was already a battle between authorities and working-class residents of the area even before the fire over injustices, and so there was a continuity from the campaign groups and identities before the fire to the reasons people had for getting involved after the fire (Bulley, 2019; Kernick, 2021). Therefore, the history of North Kensington and experiences of activism have already created strong community identification. Therefore, the strategies for community empowerment could be achieved easier because people were familiar with steps that they need to take for seeking justice.

Previous research on collective resilience when there is a disaster suggests that a social identity can be shared among strangers (Drury et al., 2009b). In the

context of Grenfell Tower fire, strategies to receive support happened in two different ways. First, campaigners maintained the sense of community with their internal audiences which are community members. Second, campaigners organized their activities and achieved the empowerment process by reaching external audiences who are the allies from different communities. By doing so, campaigners expanded their campaign aims as well as expanding their audiences. For example, our non-local participants provided information about injustice of unsafe homes affecting many others across the country, not just those at Grenfell. Therefore, in addition to explanations using the social identity approach and collective resilience, our study contributes to the literature by focusing on the strategy of including others in community-based action while fighting for justice against authorities and systemic inequalities.

Limitations and Caveats

Our study has certain limitations. First and foremost, the practicality of our methods was an issue. Although Grenfell United was the leading campaign group, there were also over 200 campaign groups in the area (Still_I_Rise_GT, 2018), and so interacting with all the groups was not possible for practical reasons. Second, we had a small sample. Within this already small sample, we had two waves of interviews (seven for the first wave and eight for the other wave) reflecting the timing of the petition. Therefore, we only asked half of our sample about the petition (second wave). However, both of the first and second wave interviews provided similar answers to our questions about reasons and aims of the campaigns. Another point about our small sample is that because the fire and what happened in the aftermath were very distressing topics, people were not always willing to talk about the issues. For this reason, we had to keep the number of our sample small. In

addition, because the topic is also politically sensitive, some people expressed fear of being identified by the authorities. For this reason, many people that we asked for an interview declined our request.

Third, the definition of 'success' usually depends on the context. We were able to identify a success of the campaign (i.e., the petition). However, when we asked our participants' thoughts on success, many of them stated they had not achieved their goals because the inquiry process was not completed, the responsible people or companies were not held accountable, and people who had lost their homes were not rehoused. Because justice-seeking was still an ongoing process and the longer-term consequences of the campaigning process is not reported in this study.

Conclusions

Disasters do not always affect just particular communities, as they can have implications for wider populations, who may therefore come together to support survivors and bereaved families. In the aftermath of disasters, empowerment process can be strategically enacted by the campaigners when they aimed to achieve justice. Besides sharing a shared social identity among community members, reaching out to allies can have an effective role for this achievement. Our work contributes to the literature by being the first study that explains the steps in the aftermath of a disaster are taken deliberately. Besides sharing identities, people actually plan their strategies to overcome injustice during the empowerment process.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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