

Who Helps in Global Disasters? It's Not Being Neighbours, it's Feeling Neighbourly

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The need for international community support, coupled with a lack of funding for that support, are recurrent features of global disasters. The instability of governmental aids suggests an important role for research into factors that influence individual efforts to help the victims of such disasters. The amount is very low for individual cross-national helping at the moment; people are not inclined to help victims from other countries. A neglected perspective in understanding why people do or do not help concerns physical and cultural proximities between the individual helping and those receiving help. As the refugee crisis has become widespread in countries from Asia and Africa to Europe and North America, this research investigated helping refugees. Its specific focus was on Syrian refugees

and it answered the question of whether physical proximity is necessary to motivate helping, and whether having cultural proximity could compensate where helper and helpee are in different parts of the world. Survey data collected from individuals with different physical and cultural proximities to Syrian refugees showed that although physical proximity is important for offering help to such victims, cultural proximity is the main factor for promoting help even in the absence of physical proximity. These results point out the importance of designing charity appeals and campaigns that signal the cultural bonds between the helper and the helpee, rather than physical closeness to witness the sufferings of the victims.