

Northeastern Japan: 90% of disaster casualties drowned

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More than 90 percent of the people confirmed dead in the March 11 earthquake-tsunami disaster in the most severely hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima died from drowning, while over 65 percent of them were aged 60 or older, according to the National Police Agency.

Those in their 70s comprised the largest share of the victim total at 24.0 percent, it said. The tally illustrates that many seniors failed to escape the disaster on time and were trapped by the tsunami.

As of April 11, out of 13,135 quake victims in the three prefectures on whom the police have completed autopsies, 12,143, or 92.5 percent, drowned, it said in a report released Tuesday.

Of the remainder, 148, or 1.1 percent, died of burns and 578, or 4.4 percent, were either crushed to death or died from injuries, while the causes of deaths for 266, or 2 percent, could not be identified, the agency said.

The percentage of deaths by drowning was the highest in Miyagi at 95.7 percent, followed by 87.3 percent in Iwate and 87 percent in Fukushima.

The agency believes that deaths by drowning as well as the large majority of crush and injury deaths were the result of the massive tsunami, highlighting the difference between the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, in which over 80 percent of the victims died in collapsed houses. Many of them had survived but were unable to be freed as later fires consumed whole neighborhoods.

Among 11,108 victims of 3/11 whose ages were identified, those aged 60 or older accounted for 65.2 percent. Those in their 60s stood at 2,124, or 19.1 percent, while those in their 70s were 2,663, or 24.0 percent, and 2,454, or 22.1 percent, were aged 80 or older.

Kyodo

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* <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110421a5.html>