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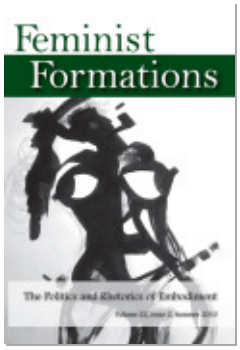

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Battered Women, Catastrophe, and the Context of Safety after Hurricane Katrina

PAM JENKINS AND BRENDA PHILLIPS

Feminist practice, activism, and scholarship have played critical roles in bringing the problems of domestic violence to light, shaping legislation to empower victims and championing improvement in advocacy and outreach. Yet many women and children not only continue to suffer from this form of personal violence, but suffer doubly when large-scale catastrophes strike—even as large numbers of volunteers turn out to respond, donors overwhelm local communities, and people open their hearts to those in need. This paper examines domestic violence and disaster in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans while concomitantly contributing to the literature that demonstrates ways in which feminist orientations can make vital differences in disaster contexts. We show that by listening to the voices of victims in postdisaster contexts, new insights can be gleaned as to how to make all women safer during disasters. Domestic-violence survivors often experienced heightened levels of violence during the hurricane and its aftermath; however, even in that difficult context, some women made the choice to leave abusive situations and advocates responded in new ways to help these women meet their unique needs.

Keywords: domestic violence / Hurricane Katrina / disaster / disaster recovery / evacuation / safety

After both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, one young, female deputy sheriff responded to domestic violence calls in a coastal Louisiana Parish. As she tells it, she replaced her cell phone and computer with a machete and shotgun because snakes and alligators were ubiquitous after the storms. During one call she faced a huge alligator in front of a trailer. At first she thought she should shoot it, but the alligator's proximity to the trailer made that too risky. Remembering that "alligators don't like lights and sounds," she turned on her siren and flashing lights and the alligator slowly moved away. She was surprised that not everyone who heard her story knew that about alligators—in her everyday life this knowledge is vital. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita challenged so many of us in so many ways by destroying local resources and undermining abilities to respond. This young deputy met the challenge with local knowledge and a creative, nonviolent approach.

Disasters often rip open communities and expose previously hidden or ignored inequalities. Victims and survivors[1] of domestic violence, like many women in disasters, are often members of the "invisible"; the

severity of Katrina, in particular, exacerbated the invisibility and vulnerability of both (Seager 2005). Many women affected by domestic violence during and after the hurricane became "refugees"—that is, the forcibly displaced—and thereby linked to other women across the globe who have experienced such dislocation from place, family, and friends (Zalewski 1995; Felten-Biermann 2006). Thousands in New Orleans endured horrific living conditions, such as in the Superdome and Convention Center, while hundreds died in their flooded homes or on roadway overpass "islands."

Many women also survived, saved others' lives, and work now to rebuild the city. Yet they do so in an increasingly dangerous city with heightened crime rates, including a sixty-eight percent jump in reported rape, increasing rates of interpersonal violence, and rising rates of mental illness (McCarthy and Philbin 2007). Although most disasters do not generate such antisocial and destructive behavior, Katrina seems to be qualitatively different. Perhaps it is the regional hit suffered by the entire Gulf Coast, which inflicted damaged on many of the domestic violence shelters, sent staff into the Diaspora, and undermined local funding. Maybe it is due to the rupture of social networks that would otherwise offer protection. Then again, this increased vulnerability could be in play because people often ignore the issue of domestic violence in general, and seem to forget about it almost completely after disaster. Instead other priorities displace the individual human suffering, which in this instance is now hidden in Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) trailers and dispersed across the nation, as evacuees wait to return or rebuild their lives, too many times in concert with their abusers. For these reasons, we believe that their narratives documenting the violence and voicing their survival are a particularly important component to documenting the story of disaster and gender.

This paper explores a way to understand what happened in this disaster to women who are victims and survivors of domestic violence. It is not just that they are victims of violence, nor is it just that they are victims of disaster. It is at the intersection of these two sets of ongoing events where our understanding and knowledge is challenged. First, Katrina undermined regional capacity to respond and taxed national reserves as well (Quarentelli 2005). Second, and just as important, it is an *ongoing* event. The flood waters may be gone, but what remains are dislocated lives. Women who are victims of domestic violence are caught in this vortex and their abilities to keep themselves and their children safe are increasingly challenged. Theoretically and in praxis the experiences of battered women in this catastrophe seem to us much like canaries in a mine—predicting future conditions for other women in the next disaster.

This paper is grounded in three sets of overlapping literature—that on disasters, the sociology of gender, and domestic violence. Although disaster research has existed for well over a half century, gendered examinations

have been relatively recent. In the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, researchers focused on the relevance of gender for understanding disaster experiences (e.g., see Fothergill 1999; Enarson and Morrow 1997, 1998; Stockemer 2006). Gendered social systems are affected by disaster and "the social experience of disaster affirms, reflects, disrupts, and otherwise engages gendered social relationships, practices, and institutions" (Enarson and Morrow 1998, 3). Likewise gendered systems affect disaster experiences. As one example of gender and life safety, OXFAM (2005) found that 80% of those who died in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami were women and children. Traditional work roles placing women on the shoreline awaiting returning fishermen and culturally influenced, gender-specific clothing that became entangled in the waters contributed to women's higher death rates.

Battered Women and Disaster

Feminist disaster researchers who recognize these problems have provided not only gendered analyses of domestic violence in disaster contexts, but an extensive set of practical materials as well (for example, see various guidelines at the Gender and Disaster Network website, www.gdnonline.org). Information from the existing literature formed the basis for our inquiry and shaped our perspectives on Katrina and the post-Katrina capabilities of the greater New Orleans set of domestic violence providers. From this literature we learned that:

- Domestic violence will continue postdisaster and may escalate.
- In a catastrophic context, the local set of domestic violence providers will be challenged to respond. They will experience internal agency difficulties and also problems in working with local police, attorneys, and others who also are overwhelmed and lack resources.
- The protective environment that surrounds domestic violence survivors may collapse in a catastrophic context.
- The existing disaster response and recovery system will be unprepared, and possibly unwilling, to address the domestic violence problem; they may not recognize it as disaster-driven, but rather as a pre-existing problem that is not their responsibility.
- Catastrophic events will undermine, disrupt, and destroy social networks that would otherwise provide safety nets.

Feminist scholarship demonstrates that gender serves as an organizing principle through which to view the experience of disaster (Enarson and Meyreles 2004; Enarson and Morrow 1997; Enarson and Phillips 2008; Fothergill 1999). For example, women tend to organize recovery activities

based on a gendered division of labor and take responsibility for households and families—standing in lines, assisting other family members, and holding it all together (Enarson and Morrow 1997). Women have bravely challenged powerful recovery organizations, working hard to ensure that women's issues earn attention and funding (Enarson and Morrow 1997). Gendered disaster research suggests both vulnerability and capacity for women facing disaster, and that predisaster, gender-situated issues will likely remain and could worsen after a disaster.

Specifying levels of postdisaster violence remains methodologically and realistically difficult, comparable to predisaster attempts to enumerate those affected. Shelter providers report increased calls, overrun shelter facilities, and limited police ability to respond after disasters (Santa Cruz 1990). What is clear is that a problem exists and remains under-recognized and often unsupported (Wilson, Phillips, and Neal 1998; Enarson and Scanlon 1999; Clemens et al. 1999). After disasters, recordkeeping often becomes difficult. However, after the 1997 Grand Forks flood, researchers found that domestic violence increased significantly and that disasters like this may heighten anxiety, depression, and hostility (Clemens et al. 1999). Enarson (1999) uncovered increased numbers of crisis calls, protection orders, and referrals from emergency rooms after the Grand Forks flood. The bulk of the calls came from existing clients, a pattern which may indicate that those at risk remain or have to move into vulnerable situations.

While an important finding from Grand Forks is that social networks probably play vital protective roles acting as "buffers" to reduce violence, women may be exposed to more abuse postdisaster due to a disaster's impact on these and other support frameworks (Clemens et al. 1999). Even more troubling, shelters and providers may find themselves in situations of even more limited resources. Fischer (2005) indicated that the level of response to gendered violence prior to a disaster influences response levels afterward. Further, Wilson, Phillips, and Neal (1998) discovered that new organizations may not emerge to address the problem, which often happens for other unmet needs. After Hurricane Iniki damaged Kauai, local shelters faced extensive power losses and problems paying staff. Even more seriously, one shelter director discovered that those violating protective orders did not go to jail but were given citations instead (Enarson 1999). Moreover, Weist, Mocellin, and Motsisi (1994) suggest this is not only a U.S. problem, but rather one with global import. What happened to women in this storm named Katrina, and to battered women specifically, is a part of a larger pattern of inadequate international response to women's needs in both disaster and nondisaster settings.

New Orleans: Local Catastrophe and Local Context

The obvious starting point to assess domestic violence in a disaster would seemingly stem from traditional information sources such as law enforcement calls for service, arrest reports, hospital records, shelter populations, and surveys of residents and social services (New Orleans Mayor's Advisory Committee Yearly Report 2007). Yet when the levees broke, the city came to a complete standstill with nearly all infrastructural components either destroyed or seriously damaged (Laska and Morrow 2006). Since that time, police have faced an increasing rate of stranger violence and crime in a city that has not been able to retain sufficient numbers of officers to manage daily crime. As with other types of interpersonal violence, incidents of domestic violence before the storm were believed to be undercounted. After the storm, most institutions that serve survivors of domestic violence are struggling to function at a prestorm level, thus capturing those figures was and remains illusive.

We can start, though, with what we knew prestorm. Since the mid-1990s, statistics in New Orleans were gathered on all the measures provided by law enforcement and social service agencies. New Orleans, as with many other communities, had begun to rely on the federal Grants to Encourage Arrest funding through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which encouraged a partnership among law enforcement agencies and service providers. Consequently much of what agencies came to know about battered women was based on a variety of criminal justice statistics.

In a study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (Tjaden and Toennes 2000), it was found that violence against women in intimate relationships occurred more often and was more severe in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Women living in these areas were more than twice as likely to be victims of intimate violence compared with women in more advantaged neighborhoods. This same study reports that African Americans and whites with the same economic characteristics have similar rates of intimate violence, but African Americans have a higher overall rate of intimate violence due in part to the fact that a higher proportion of them experience economic distress and live in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Benson and Fox 2004). Given New Orleans' relatively large African American population, prior to Hurricane Katrina women there were at greater risk of experiencing intimate personal violence than women living in many other places in the United States.

Prestorm Context

Before Katrina, while there were concerted efforts to increase women's safety, providing services for victims was difficult in a city with high rates of poverty and community violence. Pagelow's (1984) model shows that

women are more likely to leave abusive relationships when they have both the institutional and social support needed to survive. Prior to August 2005, there were five battered women programs south of Interstate 12 in Louisiana. Beginning in the early 1990s, an influx of federal funding from the VAWA grants had helped to support some personnel and programs. The models used in this programming were based loosely on earlier feminist reasoning that emphasized holding perpetrators accountable and providing safety for women. Also there were concerted attempts to professionalize the staff and to add more clinical support for shelter residents. Given the lack of widespread infrastructural support for and data on victims of domestic violence, we chose to report protective orders and police calls for service, which are consistent and commonly used criminal justice measures.

In August 2005, there were eight domestic violence detectives in the New Orleans Police Department, one housed at each of the eight police districts. After the storm, only three domestic violence detectives remained and all originally were housed in trailers behind Crescent House, a local battered women's shelter. Now all of these detectives work out of the newly opened Family Justice Center.

In 2004, the total number of protective orders issued statewide was at an all-time high with 23,255 registered with Louisiana Protective Order Registry (New Orleans Mayor's Advisory Committee Yearly Report 2007). In 2006, the protective orders were down state-wide to 18,544, with the decreases occurring in the areas hardest-hit by Katrina. In 2006, domestic violence calls for service decreased all over the city (down forty-five percent from the first six months of 2005). In the two districts most affected by the storm, the decrease reflected the population shifts. In the Third and Seventh Wards (Gentilly, Lakeview, and Eastern New Orleans) not only was there major home flooding, but the flooding destroyed police buildings. In both those districts in 2006, the reporting (calls for service) decreased more than seventy percent.

These statistics convey a static picture in a landscape that is changing everyday. What emerges shows that, at that time, fewer cases were showing up in the court system as evidenced by the reduction in the number of protective orders, especially in Orleans Parish and the reduction in domestic violence calls for service. These numbers, however, do not capture the patterns and social context of abuse. We turn next to that context.

Methods

Measuring phenomena in a postdisaster context is, at best, difficult. In this context, we approach our understanding from the perspective that we can capture the actual lives of people, "grounded in their people's actual

experience" (Phillips 2002, 203). This paper is part of a larger project that documents the resilience, resistance, and change of the advocates providing a variety of services to victims and survivors of domestic violence. The data used herein derive from focus groups with survivors, interviews with advocates, secondary data on the incidence of domestic violence, and observations at community meetings. To capture the local domestic violence realities, these multiple techniques allowed varying perspectives to emerge; methodologically such triangulation also enhances the credibility of the data (Erlandson et al. 1993).

Talking to Survivors and Program Staff

As programs for victims of domestic violence returned after the storm, five focus groups were conducted with survivors in two programs. These focus groups documented how the events of the storm and its aftermath affected a woman's decision to leave her abusive partner. Participants of these focus groups ranged from women who had left their abusive partners pre-Katrina to those who had left after a year post-Katrina. Each focus group lasted for approximately one and a half hours and included ethnographic note takers. Shelter staff also participated in order to be present and available for the survivors. Focus groups ranged in size from six to twelve participants. The participants were sixty percent African-American, thirty-five percent white, and five percent Asian and Latin. We used these focus groups for two reasons: 1) to capture narratives explaining any link between the disaster and a woman's decision to leave an abusive situation; and 2) to create a forum in which women might exchange ideas on ways to create greater safety for battered women. Interviews were conducted with shelter staff at a variety of the programs post-Katrina. The interviews covered the difference in service provision before and after Katrina and how the storm impacted their services. These interviews were conducted over the phone with a variety of providers (shelter counselors, shelter directors, and other shelter staff). Initial interviews focused on information rather than description. Eventually interviewees were selected to provide in-depth descriptions of their lived experiences (Seidman 2006).

Observations

By late fall 2005, community meetings about domestic violence reconvened in Orleans Parish. Once a month, legal and social services providers came together to discuss the issues surrounding domestic violence in the area. Other related meetings occurred between November 2005 and November 2007—nearly twenty in all. Observations of these meeting and their proceedings were documented (Emerson et al. 1995; Spradley 1980).

Data Analysis

Over time, all interviews, as well as meeting and focus group notes, were reviewed and then coded into the major categories discussed below (Creswell 2007; Yin 2003). At each stage of the analysis, the findings were checked by comparing them to issues raised by the advocates and survivors in a variety of settings. From January 2006 to September 2008, the themes presented below concerning the link between domestic violence and disasters were discussed at advisory and steering committee meetings, as well as in focus groups.

Leaving New Orleans

After a catastrophe of Katrina's magnitude and the dislocation of so many residents, the dynamics and patterns of domestic violence appeared to remain in the same state of flux as the rest of the city. Before the storm, almost eighty percent of the city was evacuated, yet evacuating those involved with domestic violence, both survivors and staff, proved challenging. Evacuation and decision-making about evacuation is part of life in South Louisiana, and some programs, such as Crescent House (the only shelter in Orleans Parish), successfully evacuated its residents and some staff to the Baton Rouge Battered Women's Program. Yet the speed and direction of Katrina outpaced many others' efforts.

From first-person survivor accounts and reports from advocates, victims of domestic violence faced difficult decisions throughout the evacuation. To illustrate, one woman described a range of custody problems she faced prior to the storm ranging from the late return of her daughter to not knowing where her daughter was to threats and intimidation about custody. She grew very worried about the storm and evacuation, was afraid to leave her child with her ex-husband, and literally sneaked her child out of the house. Advocates report custody arrangements have lingered as long-term issues of concern after the storm. If it was the noncustodial parent's weekend, the children often evacuated with them. Because of the length of the evacuation, some custodians, primarily mothers, are still fighting (more than two years later) to retrieve children back from the noncustodial parent.

Initially after the storm, nearly all of the victims of domestic violence whom we interviewed found themselves living in potentially threatening situations with few options for escape. One woman talked about her decision-making process:

> *I had no roof over my head, no place to live, so I put up with it for 9 months. I left for a few days because of physical and verbal abuse, would go to friend's house or to ex-husband's house where my children live, saw it was upsetting*

the children. I made a choice that I was going to leave for good after too many times going back.

The disaster also created situations where women found themselves in dangerous situations they could not have anticipated. Due to the massive loss of local housing and disruption of familial and social networks, women reported that they had no alternative but to return to their abusive spouse in order to receive FEMA monies. Conversely, some reported that an abusive spouse tracked them down in order to be part of the household that received the FEMA monies. One advocate reported a typical story:

A domestic violence victim evacuated to Houston with her children and received a FEMA voucher to house her and her children. At that time there were, and still are, two open criminal cases against the husband in New Orleans. They had been living apart and she not yet received her divorce. He initially evacuated to Lafayette. He was able to find her, and he moved into her apartment in Houston and won't leave as he argued that the voucher is meant for him also. Her divorce attorney told her she cannot get the divorce until they are living apart. She now has the choice to move out with nothing or live there hoping the police can come should the continuing verbal abuse escalate.

At the same time, the disaster and relief response created opportunities for women to leave their abusive partners and create new patterns of safety. Court advocates report that some of their former clients called in late 2005 and 2006 to say they were now safe and using their FEMA monies to build a life elsewhere.

Coming Home to New Orleans

Yet women came "home" as well. Local programs report that they are seeing as many (in some cases, more) women since the storm, particularly given the lag in repopulation of the city (Landry 2006; Standifer 2006). Our data reveal that the storm and its related response and recovery efforts exacerbated domestic violence patterns of behavior. Critical recovery issues faced by survivors of domestic violence included housing shortages, a lack of transportation, restricted access to health care, loss of neighborhood and community, loss of jobs, loss of informal support systems, isolation in some neighborhoods, and crowding in other living situations.

Social, Medical, and Institutional Context

The storm and the levee breaches changed not only individual lives but irrevocably altered many aspects of city infrastructure and services. From the water that stayed in the streets and homes for two weeks to the lack of potable water in some areas for more than a year, the infrastructure of

the city at all levels has been slow to come back. When a woman who is a victim of interpersonal violence returns, she faces a number of barriers to her safety.

Law Enforcement Response

As we know, law enforcement is one of the first groups that some women call in a crisis (Dutton 1998). Yet almost three years after the storm, many aspects of law enforcement in New Orleans remain in a crisis state. Virtually every aspect of the criminal justice system was damaged or destroyed by the effects of the hurricane, including the courts, jails, and police. Before the storm, the criminal justice system in New Orleans was difficult for many to maneuver through, but after the storm it became even more fragmented and complicated (Fairling and Hopper 2007). In 2008, rates of violent stranger crimes (homicide and armed robbery) reached an all-time high for what was already a violent city.

Medical Services

Prior to the storm, medical services were provided through a dual system: private physicians for the insured and public health services for the uninsured. The public health-care system was nearly destroyed by the storm and its aftermath and has been slow to come back (Rudowtiz, Rowland, and Shartzer 2006). In addition, a mental-health crisis in New Orleans has been aggravated by the lack of beds, psychiatrists, psychologists, and community health centers. As of July 2007, ten acute-care hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, long-term disability, and rehabilitation facilities remained shuttered, out of the original twenty-three in New Orleans. For the region as a whole, only four more such facilities have opened since August 2006 (New Orleans Index, www.gnocdc.org).

This structural crisis compounds the vulnerability of women and their partners. One of the women stated that after the storm her husband, a contractor, became more and more dependent upon illegal drugs as his on-the-job stress increased. Eventually she came to believe that she and her children were in serious danger and left. Another woman stated that after the storm her partner's drinking and drug use also increased as did his controlling behavior toward her and her child.

Social Support

When women affected by domestic violence ask for help they commonly turn to their families and friends, especially important support networks in this city (Dutton 1998; Hutchison and Hirschel 1998). In New Orleans, families in many neighborhoods lived near each other and evacuated with one another. Accounts from advocates and survivors report that many of these informal networks have fractured since the evacuation and an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people have not returned home. Survivors

from the focus groups talked about not just losing their homes, but their mothers, their grandmothers, and siblings as well—all of whom may have offered safe refuge. One woman stated:

> *My closest friends are struggling because of the condition of the city. I was staying with a friend, but her roof caved in. I felt like a puppy on the side of the highway, it's rainy and cold and I have no place to go*

Housing

Crucial to women's survival in leaving an abusive situation is the availability of housing. More than four thousand public housing units remain permanently closed down after the storm, stranding thousands of women and children. This lack of housing has led to families doubling and tripling up in small apartments and houses. Some families have lived in tiny temporary travel trailers for more than two years. The issues of less-defensible close quarters and a lack of affordable permanent housing options are problematic for women attempting to create safety.

Without family nearby and given the haphazard repopulation of the city, other women find themselves isolated. Families return to trailers or homes that are far from the next neighbor. Whole blocks in neighborhoods still have only one or two occupied houses. Such isolation increases chances of experiencing both stranger and intimate-partner crime. With eighty percent of the city flooded, the housing shortage emerges as one of the salient factors in a woman's choice to leave. According to advocates and law enforcement, some are making decisions to stay in an abusive situation because the housing shortage does not give them many options. Speaking of one woman, a domestic-violence detective recounted that, "She told me that she would rather stay with her abusive husband she knew, than leave and not know where she was going." Over and over again, survivors worry about where they would go and if they could continue to live with families and friends.

Many families in New Orleans are engaged in some way in the difficult rebuilding effort. Accessing insurance and governmental monies, building material supplies, contractors, plumbers and electricians are all key aspects of the rebuilding process. Yet as of August 6, 2007, only twenty-two percent of total applicants to the Road Home[2] program had gone to closing, and the average benefit per applicant had fallen by more than $12,000 to about $68,700. Further complicating access to these funds is the fact that as of August 6, 2007, 180,424 Road Home applications had been received, which was a far higher number than the 123,000 for which the program was originally designed (The New Orleans Index 2007). Not only is the funding difficult to attain, but for women who are in relationships with intimate partner violence, this rebuilding effort can be directly related to the context of coercion and control. One woman describes

how her husband took the insurance money to "do the work himself," but allowed the family to live in an uncompleted house without doing any repairs. Doing the repairs became part of the issue of control and violence in this home. She left to be safe from physical abuse, financial exploitation, and an unsafe housing situation.

Issues of Work and Child Care

Finding or keeping employment, plus the necessary child care, often are crucial to survivors' safety. A lack of affordable child care was a problem before Katrina, but became even more difficult after the storm. A little more than one-third of the number of daycare centers have opened since Katrina hit, and many of the pre-existing smaller venues of six or fewer children remain closed (The New Orleans Index 2007). At every focus group, when asked what was most needed, the majority of women answered "long-term dependable day care."

Rebuilding the Safety Network in a Post-Katrina Context

Of the five programs for battered women that existed before Katrina south of Interstate 12, three were heavily damaged. One program (New Orleans YWCA) has not come back at all. The St. Bernard Parish program is struggling but is open to nonresidential survivors, and Crescent House in New Orleans, which was flooded and then caught fire, returned. Crescent House did not rebuild the shelter, but is rebuilding its program with a different service model that includes temporary housing, but not as a traditional shelter. Metropolitan Battered Women's Program in Jefferson Parish was not seriously damaged and reopened to more than a full house in January 2006 (Standifer 2006).

The community of advocates and providers in place before the storms have almost all came back. For nearly 15 years, the New Orleans Mayor's Domestic Violence Committee has offered aid with funding and coordinating efforts. With few exceptions, nearly all of the 30 members of the advisory committee returned to the city by late 2005. Aware of the challenging conditions facing domestic-violence victims described above, the committee has worked to help improve outreach and services.

Members of the committee believed that the risk to women post-Katrina was greater than before the storm. While unwilling to say that there were more women in need of service—in part because of the significantly low repopulation of the city—service providers observed that women reported more rapidly escalating violence resulting in more serious injury than pre-Katrina (Landry 2006; Standifer 2006). They also acknowledged a new demographic in those seeking assistance. As one shelter worker described,

> *Now, we see more professional people coming into the program, before we had a lot of homeless people coming to the shelter . . . That's the biggest change for me, we see more professional, working ladies coming into the shelter, families, women with families, and a lot of women with children.*

She continued by noting that,

> *They're new. After Katrina, they're new. We don't have the same people, we have people who had never heard of our program . . . a lot people aren't working, can't pay rent. The population now is totally different. Most, they are so broken.*

Survivors in our study often agreed with this assessment. Some of them talked about being able to live with the abuse before the storm, but unable to tolerate it after. One woman said, "The storm opened my eyes—he didn't provide support." Another woman felt that the storm provided a moment to change her circumstances, "The storm allowed me to leave. We ended up evacuating to different places. I went to North Louisiana, he went west. We came back to the city at different times, and I was able to leave for good."

Not only did the storm change how some survivors viewed their situation, but it also clarified the issues for the advocates in New Orleans. Within a year, the advocates were meeting with the VAWA offices to create a Family Justice Center as a one-stop shop for survivors. By 2007, the Family Justice Center opened with the cooperation of all partners including the city, state, nonprofits, and survivors. In the midst of rebuilding the city, the advocates created a new and better structure for battered women.

Implications for Feminist Research

Feminist literature and feminist organizing is credited with bringing an understanding of domestic violence to light (for example, see Dobash and Dobash 1979; Pagelow 1984; Schechter 1982; Stark and Fliltcraft 1996). Beginning in the late 1960s and extending to the present day, feminist scholars have defined the problem of violence against women as inclusive of domestic violence, spousal abuse, and child abuse. Feminist scholarship explored through the humanities, social sciences, and the arts and its corresponding activism have changed laws, practice, and policy.

Despite media reports to the contrary, people often tend to be quite generous to those affected by disaster and, in general, crime rates drop. Given these heightened levels of prosocial behavior, it seems extraordinarily problematical that support of victims of domestic violence takes a giant step backwards. Further those seeking justice must await an even longer response within a system overwhelmed with basic disaster activities—too often at the cost of their lives.

Traditional feminist epistemologies can make a difference in a disaster context (Enarson and Phillips 2008). Listening to the voices of victims in a catastrophic, postdisaster context provides new insights into how to make all women safe during a disaster. When long term access to housing, transportation, child care, and jobs are scarce, sheltering a woman for four to six weeks, while she "gets back on her feet," will not in a post-Katrina environment make her safe.

The lived experiences of post-Katrina domestic-violence survivors and their advocates highlight several points that can be further refined in the literature on the intersections of domestic violence and disaster. First, Wilson et al. (1998) stated that services continued in communities where there was already support for victims. In New Orleans, the advocates not only provided more services, they changed and altered *how* they provided service, as evidenced by transforming one closed shelter into a much broader program and opening the Family Justice Center. This change in service provision is reflected in how one local shelter changed its structure:

> *I think we were very much caught up in what I call the institutionalization of shelters, kind of becoming institutionalized because we have government money, we have government regulations, and so it's very easy to fall into that trap, to go after money so that you can continue to sustain services.*

In the recovery process, shelter workers began to think that the focus of the work is not at this time to reopen as a traditional shelter:

> *And, I think the storm really has changed my perspective, it's the foundation of why we have changed everything and how we do it here because everything is driven by are we really meeting the needs of survivors, are we hearing their voices. So after Katrina it wasn't so much how do we get the shelter back up and running, but is that the best way to meet the needs?*

Second, Enarson (1999) stated that, after the Grand Forks flood, shelters saw primarily the same women. In post-Katrina New Orleans, those asking for help were not only previous victims, but new faces of the middle class and newly arrived immigrants. Third, the voices of women in the focus groups revealed that the storm not only further marginalized but, concomitantly, also provided a means to escape. The dual-edged reality of this post-Katrina context matters greatly, particularly in how domestic-violence providers should approach future disasters. Fourth, the dedication of many domestic-violence detectives and shelter staff often emerges as a heroic act during the recovery period, particularly when we take into account the challenges involved with their own personal and familial recoveries.

During this catastrophe, when knowledge about victims was not available in ways that were provided by institutional means, advocates began

to rely again on the voices and experiences of battered women. This return to the earlier feminist understanding of domestic violence illustrates how thin in many cases the institutional veneer of protection really was. Whether the more informal response of some service providers in post-Katrina New Orleans will diminish the marginalization, and increase the empowerment, of women should be assessed (Wiest et al. 1994).

Future work on domestic violence and disaster needs to reflect the ongoing struggles commonly associated with different types of community recovery. For a catastrophe of this magnitude, there is no going back to the "normal" of before the storm. There is, instead, the work to be done that takes into consideration the deep effects of the recovery, particularly because issues of women and children do not often emerge in the response and planning in postdisaster context. Holistic approaches must be used to understand the desperate circumstances of catastrophe and how they intersect with gender.

Conclusions

One young woman facing alligators and snakes while trying to create a safe environment is just one example of the agency and creativity that emerged from the storm. This event and its aftermath changed individuals, families, and institutions. From these experiences, there is the potential to change policy and practice in future devastating events.

Clearly policy formulation for future disasters needs to consider how disasters affect victims of domestic violence. This includes determining ways to fairly allocate federal funding to households, training for disaster workers on the vital issues, and researching custody issues for families during evacuation. Federal policies must address the problem of violence in temporary Federal housing, including assurances that survivors will be protected from offenders and enjoy priority in housing arrangements in order to remain separate and alive.

Also funders offering money, donations, and other resources must listen to those enmeshed in the local context. Well-meaning donors may not understand how local circumstances affect individual's options and may not offer what is truly needed. Domestic-violence service providers may need to educate first responders, shelter managers and others involved in response and recovery about the specific issues of domestic violence. Part of their effort can encourage policies regarding the enforcement of protective orders and arrest as a deterrent; any reduction in these efforts is neither warranted nor safe. Emergency-shelter providers can be educated to develop policies posted in shelters regarding violence, can design intake strategies to identify those at risk in a confidential manner, and can facilitate moving those at risk into a safer environment.

But it remains insufficient to focus exclusively on the domestic violence support system. Those who prepare for disasters must also participate in the process. Emergency managers, for example, organize their work activities into four phases of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery—each of which can incorporate domestic violence issues. Mitigation is defined as efforts to reduce loss of life, obviously a goal in concert with domestic violence providers. Shelter providers may work with emergency managers to identify structural points of intervention, such as hurricane clamps on roofs or safe rooms in shelters and other facilities. Donors may want to help with insurance coverage, a nonstructural mitigation measure, to expedite postdisaster rebuilding.

Preparedness involves efforts to plan, train, and get ready for an impact. Emergency managers can assist domestic violence providers with designing shelter evacuation plans, transportation routing, and educational materials. Ideally emergency managers will involve domestic-violence service providers on boards, response teams, and in training opportunities—and vice versa—because the emergency management community needs the insights of providers. Further the preparedness phase is a good time to develop mutual aid agreements that spell out where to send those in shelters, how to provide evacuation transportation assistance, how their services will be continued by regional partners, and vice versa. Finally, each program should have a carefully written plan of how to continue post-disaster operations in several different contexts from small event to catastrophe.

The response phase means that activities are underway to save lives and protect property. Programs, including official disaster shelters, must be prepared to accept and protect domestic violence survivors and to be ready to move them on to an even safer location. First responders and others involved in evacuation must take care not to separate children and mothers, as doing so may result in years of court activity as a mother fights to regain custody or place children at risk. Domestic violence survivors should have priority in securing temporary housing, coupled with adequate security in such housing, particularly when housing, such as trailers, are isolated.

The recovery phase represents the time when healing can take place in a community. Voluntary and faith-based organizations often pour into a devastated area, working on rebuilding homes and lives. These organizations can be tapped into and educated to distribute safety materials, identify those at risk, provide appropriate counseling, and prioritize housing. Usually these organizations work through a local long-term recovery committee, an interfaith organization or an unmet needs committee. Incorporating the specific needs of domestic violence survivors into these organizational structures is an effective means for reaching and serving survivors.

Before Katrina, it was surprising that women left violent situations at all. Now, given the momentous obstacles described herein, the women who leave are remarkable. These women have something to teach us all about resilience, resistance, and rebuilding (Moore 1987). This moment in history has the ability to shift how we view our frameworks about providing service for battered women in a disaster.

Most of the efforts to increase women's safety in the ongoing recovery of the storm happened outside of the normal recovery discourse. Providing services for victims and survivors of domestic violence is rarely mentioned in any of the plans for recovery. As with most other disasters, gender issues specifically are not part of the mainstream of the recovery model (Schwoebel and Menon 2004). For women in general and battered women specifically, the advocates and the survivors themselves are doing the work to rebuild the safety net and to refashion services.

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Notes

1. In this paper, we refer to women who experience interpersonal violence as both survivors and victims. We acknowledge that the women we refer to in this study have survival strategies that are life-saving.

2. The Road Home program is designed to provide compensation to Louisiana homeowners affected by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita for the damage to their homes. The Road Home program reports to be the largest single housing recovery program in U.S. history. The Road Home program, through the state government, uses federal funds to disburse to residents who suffered damage to their homes, and also includes some grants for mitigation of homes and for some rental property.

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