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Domestic Violence after Disaster

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Disasters expose aspects of social life that are "not so readily visible in less stressful conditions of everyday life" (Merton 1970) when "members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system" (Barton 1970; see also Perry and Pugh 1978). Disaster victims are more likely to be groups of individuals who have the least amount of power and resources to recover or escape from difficult circumstances such as the aged, poor, minorities, and women (Blaikie et al. 1994; Merton 1970; Quarantelli 1977; Phillips 1990). Disasters, then, should reveal the existence and problems of gender stratification and its consequences, among them domestic violence. In this chapter, we explore how three communities perceived postdisaster violence and how they chose to respond.

WOMEN, DISASTERS, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Little research exists on women's vulnerability to disasters, their roles in disaster response/recovery, or how communities respond to their vulnerability. Existing studies illustrate women's lack of power in the household to make decisions such as whether to evacuate during a cyclone (Haider et al. 1991), who receives priority for food and medical resources (Blaikie et al. 1994), or participation in emergency response, reconstruction issues, and mitigation planning (Noel 1990; Phillips 1990). Women in Hurricane Andrew lacked adequate resources to protect their homes, transportation resources for travel to relief centers, access to information about available aid, and qualifications for disaster assistance. Exacerbating their situation, they also experienced increased caregiving responsibilities for children and elderly relatives (Morrow and Enarson 1996). Gelles (1995) noted, without supporting documentation or elaboration, that "wife abuse increased in the wake of Hurricane Andrew in late summer 1992." Other researchers have also reported a potential increase of violence postdisaster (Honeycombe 1994; Dobson 1994; Palinkas et al. 1993; Williams 1994; Morrow and Enarson 1994).

Theoretically, and as Merton (1970) alleges, we might expect to see this social problem increase and become more visible. When domestic violence increases after the stress of disaster (Bolin 1983; Barton 1970) other conditions must already exist, such as gender stratification (Schecter 1982), including social, economic, familial, and psychological oppression (Finkelhor et al. 1983; Straus et al. 1980; Walker 1984; Pagelow 1984; Adler and Denmark 1995). Stress, such as the disaster event itself, is not a sufficient condition to initiate violence (Straus et al. 1980). Rather, an individual's place within the social structure influences the likelihood of him/her becoming a disaster victim or of experiencing conditions that may worsen their vulnerability (Blaikie et al. 1994; Bolin and Bolton 1986; Bolin 1982; Vyas 1986). Inequitable gender systems, or patriarchal control over women's lives, underlie violence (Dobash and Dobash 1979). As Yllö (1983) outlines, "the brutalization of an individual wife by an individual husband . . . is simply one manifestation of the system of male domination of women." Thus, disasters can show us the darker side of family life as well as the oppressive conditions that generate such conduct.

THREE CASE STUDIES

We selected three research sites that had experienced disaster to examine the extent to which community organizations either perceived and responded to domestic violence in the aftermath or did not. The first, Santa Cruz County, California is situated on the coast of Monterey Bay seventy-four miles south of San Francisco. On October 17, 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake (7.1 magnitude) shook the cities of Santa Cruz and nearby Watsonville, about twenty miles southeast of Santa Cruz, killing seven people. Santa Cruz, a city of approximately 50,000 people, is a progressive west coast town with a fair amount of existing social services, awareness of social problems, and experience with previous disasters. Citizens pride themselves on their social programs such as the Commission for the Prevention of Violence against Women established in 1981. At the time of the earthquake, Santa Cruz had many women in prominent leadership positions including the mayor, emergency manager, and Red Cross director. Nearby Watsonville also provides battered women's shelters. Watsonville's population of approximately 33,000 is 61% Latino with a predisaster predominantly Anglo political structure. Fewer Hispanic women than Anglo women utilize shelters or counseling programs in Watsonville.

Lancaster, Texas, which served as a second research site, is located twelve miles south of Dallas in Dallas County. Its 1990 census population was reported at approximately 23,000 people. A major tornado destroyed a three-square-mile working-class neighborhood on April 25, 1994, as well as most of Lancaster's historic town square, killing three people. Lancaster relies heavily on the social services of nearby Dallas and does not provide shelters, Red Cross, or Salvation Army services within the city proper. One not-for-profit community agency acts as a referral service for Lancaster residents. Politically, Lancaster is conservative

with the majority of civic and community leadership positions occupied by men; however, at the time of the tornado a woman served as Lancaster's mayor.

In August 1992 Hurricane Andrew devastated the southern portion of Dade County, Florida. The Greater Miami metropolis was home to nearly two million people and the infrastructure that supported a population of about 375,000 people in South Dade was virtually destroyed (see Enarson and Morrow, Chapter 17, this volume). At the time Dade County was operating two battered women's shelters supported through dedicated sources of funding. The shelter that served South Dade was damaged during the storm, but remained in operation.

Data Collection and Triangulation

We collected data through semistructured, open-ended interviews, using both the organization and the community as units of analysis. Open-ended interviews allowed us to pursue promising leads, and to identify emergent themes and issues. Our purposive sampling included respondents in emergency management, city offices, disaster organizations such as the Red Cross or Salvation Army, domestic violence shelters and counseling organizations, and informal organizations that provided disaster victim assistance. Respondents included those knowledgeable of organizational operations, goals, and clients. We conducted a total of eighteen interviews, representing seventeen organizations. Ten additional informants provided further information and assistance.

To further establish credibility and trustworthiness of the data (Erlandson et al. 1993; Lincoln and Guba 1985), we gathered documents such as organizational reports, media accounts, census data, brochures, and other potentially useful materials (Plummer 1983). These documents allowed for comparisons between types of data that enhanced accuracy of the findings through triangulation (Kirk and Miller 1986). Local news accounts and interviews with emergency services personnel enabled us to identify an early concern about domestic violence in Santa Cruz. In cases where we used news accounts, notoriously unreliable in disasters (Fischer 1994), we compared them to our interview data to assess their accuracy.

While we were not able to empirically document the extent of domestic violence as a result of the disaster, we did notice that increases or decreases did not matter to respondents. Basically, if respondents thought a problem existed, they took action; conversely, if they denied a problem existed, they did nothing. Both routes of action, based on perceptions and assumptions, carried consequences and raise important questions. This observation initiated further data analysis that proceeded simultaneously with data collection (Lofland and Lofland 1995). We transcribed and analyzed interview and documentary data. Patterns emerging from the data were coded into categories. Constant comparative analysis confirmed the category within which the data should be placed (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Bogdan and Biklen 1992). Three main organizational response patterns emerged and serve as an framework for our findings.

Before the Disaster: Perceptions of Domestic Violence

Prior to the Loma Prieta earthquake Santa Cruz County, California had four organizations with missions to deal with domestic violence issues. Furthermore, our Santa Cruz County interviews revealed a high level of overall concern about domestic violence. Thus, not only did perceptions of domestic violence exist within some segments of the community, but also individuals and groups had acted upon those perceptions to establish organizations to assist domestic violence victims. Prior to the earthquake an infrastructure was in place to deal with domestic violence.

In contrast, prior to the tornado that virtually destroyed the historical downtown and adjacent working-class neighborhood of Lancaster, Texas, no social services directly addressed domestic violence. If anybody needed assistance, that person was directed to social service agencies twelve miles north in Dallas.

Dade County, Florida at the time of Hurricane Andrew had an extensive law enforcement and judicial process in place to combat domestic violence, including automatic arrest procedures, accessible temporary injunctions, and a separate domestic violence court unit with its own judges. Two shelters for battered women were operated by the county.

After the Disaster: Defining the Problem

Three of the four representatives of domestic violence centers in Santa Cruz County perceived domestic violence to be a problem after the disaster, continuing predisaster beliefs. Some felt domestic violence had increased as a direct result of the disaster. A representative of a battered women's shelter in Santa Cruz (as quoted in a local news story) said, "There's a huge problem beginning to arise. We're really concerned about the explosion. There are huge problems in both domestic violence and sexual abuse" (White 1989). A Santa Cruz city-appointed commission reported, "10 days after the quake . . . calls for rape soared and sexual assault was at an all-time high since 1982. [S]exual assaults went up 300 percent after the earthquake" (Kelly 1990).

Lancaster representatives from an organization with a mission that includes counseling and shelter service referral to Dallas for abused women observed a different disaster outcome: "there was not a noticeable increase in domestic violence" in the community. In addition, respondents from other established organizations in Lancaster did not discern an increase in domestic violence after the tornado. A member of the Lancaster police department said that, "the department answers four to five family violence type calls a day; one or two a day . . . end up in an assault. Our incidents of family violence have remained virtually the same, prior to the tornado in 1994 and after the tornado." However, one Lancaster church noted a rise in domestic violence "in late summer, early fall" (four to five months) after the tornado. Perhaps these incidents never came to the attention of the police.

By most accounts domestic violence increased in Dade County after Hurricane Andrew. Switchboard of Miami's Helpline reported a 50% increase in spousal abuse calls (Laudisio 1993) and related suits in Dade Circuit Court in 1992 increased by 98% over the previous year (*Miami Herald* 8/22/93). Examining the number of injunctions filed in domestic violence cases over the period from 1990 to 1995, Morrow (1997) found a decline right after the storm—which court staff attributed at least in part to the inaccessibility of government services—followed by a sharp rise through the early months of 1993. Since this follows the general upward trend that began several years ago as a result of reforms in the criminal justice system, it is impossible to determine how much of the increase was due to post-Andrew conditions. However, in a random survey of 1,400 homes undertaken by a state agency two months after the hurricane, 35% reported that someone in their home had recently been stressed to the point of losing verbal or physical control (Centers for Disease Control 1992). Enarson and Morrow (1997) reported additional evidence of violence against women in their qualitative study of women's lives after Hurricane Andrew. The shelter in South Dade was virtually empty right after the storm, but later added extra staff to meet the increased demand.

We believe that organizational response developed in communities that had already defined domestic violence as a problem prior to disaster. Awareness of the existence and extent of violence against women likely sensitizes organizational personnel to the presence of postdisaster violence. The Santa Cruz and Dade communities had already defined domestic violence as a problem prior to disaster, which led to providing predisaster counseling and shelter services to abused women. These services continued to respond to postdisaster violence. In Lancaster, it is possible that perceptions of domestic violence or a significant lack of services may have been a factor in not identifying violence or in not responding.

Taking Action: Common Responses

The most common action taken after each respective disaster was providing counseling and shelter services to abuse victims. Organizations that became involved in a perceived postdisaster domestic violence problem did so under the following conditions: (1) they existed prior to the disaster; (2) they had a preexisting mission related to domestic violence; (3) they defined domestic violence to be a problem after disaster; (4) they operated within a community context supportive of their mission before and after the disaster; (5) they were experienced in providing domestic violence services such as shelter and counseling.

We believe that action did not take place under some or all of the following conditions: (1) predisaster concern or awareness about domestic violence was low in the community; (2) organizations devoted to domestic violence did not exist prior to the disaster; (3) domestic violence is not defined as a postdisaster problem. Santa Cruz County and Dade County identify domestic violence as a social

problem. Organizations and residents in these communities have been educated in recognizing signs of the presence of domestic violence and provide alternatives to violent situations. There are several organizations in the Santa Cruz County area devoted solely to providing services for victims of domestic violence (e.g., counseling and shelter) and officially sponsored shelters exist in Dade County. In contrast, the Lancaster community has no organization solely committed to servicing victims of domestic violence.

Defining social problems as unmet community needs establishes priorities for action. For example, a Lancaster community agency representative stated that "job loss and other stresses, especially financial stress [were the] most noticeable [problems]" following the tornado. In contrast, a representative of the Santa Cruz County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) showed that "the rates went up almost 600 percent in terms of the reports of domestic violence . . . in a four month period after the earthquake." A Dade County respondent stated that "increases in domestic violence were immediate. We got a lot of phone calls, but probably the best indicator is that the number of requests for injunctions to bar contact went up." In the end, those who experienced domestic violence as a result of the disaster had only preexisting organizations to turn to for help.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

How organizational personnel perceive domestic violence issues before a disaster strongly influences the perceptions and handling of domestic violence issues after a disaster. In each setting, we observed that these predisaster perceptions influenced postdisaster response. In Santa Cruz and Dade Counties, organizations have a long-standing history of advocating for women and against violence. Thus, when the disaster events occurred, existing organizations (both domestic violence and many disaster or community service related organizations) were already in place to handle any incidents of domestic violence.

In none of the communities did we see the mobilization of any new postdisaster groups or organizations to assist victims of domestic violence. The lack of mobilization may be attributed to the predisaster social context—but for opposite reasons. In Santa Cruz and Dade counties, the presence of support systems for domestic violence prevented the generation of additional unmet needs. Since already existing domestic violence, social service, and disaster organizations were handling the domestic violence issue, there was no perceived need for new organizations to form. In Lancaster, the opposite was the case. Here, the predisaster perception that domestic violence is not a problem extended to the postdisaster setting. Since there were no perceived "unmet needs" generated, no emergent or ad hoc groups formed around this issue.

Disaster contexts provide theoretically rich sources for better understanding the lives of women in relationship to their communities because they reveal so much about human and organizational behavior. Evidence suggests that communities

need to be ready to respond to the likelihood of increased violence against women after disasters. More empirical work is needed to establish the nature of the association between disasters and domestic violence. If there are increased incidents, when are they most likely to occur, immediately after impact or six or more months later? Regardless, some communities and organizations may choose not to act.

We need to know more about community contexts to see what linkages exist between preexisting conditions and postdisaster consequences. We do not need more information, however, to know that when domestic violence occurs, intervention programs should be in place to respond. We need to find new ways to convince communities of the need for these services, including the uninterrupted continuation, or increase, of services after a major disaster. Victims may not know where to turn for help after an event. They may perceive that the community defines other problems as priorities, leaving them without needed intervention and resources. Because women may feel that they have no other alternative but to stay in an abusive environment, more injuries and deaths could result. Lack of community perception and action could heighten women's disaster vulnerability.

Most disaster organization personnel are not trained to deal with domestic violence. Counseling, for example, is a high-stress and very sensitive endeavor. If violence increases, clients may quickly deplete counseling and shelter resources. Organizations that service disaster victims routinely are not likely to address the needs of violence victims. Agencies that normally provide shelter and counseling may also be destroyed or unable to fully operate, therefore eliminating these resources victims. Unmet domestic violence needs may further strain public safety organizations. Disaster organizations thus need to know more about the potential for postdisaster violence and expand their personnel or establish mutual aid agreements with appropriate agencies.

We also support mission-specific training programs for emergency management personnel and other disaster responders. Successful domestic violence response depends upon highly trained personnel who are sensitive to women's vulnerabilities and typically community-based (Schecter 1982; Pleck 1987). To make a difference requires acceptance of this problem as the "responsibility of the community to stop" (Schecter 1982).

Communities with existing domestic violence programs need to develop plans for postdisaster response. Disaster managers, planners, and relevant organizations need to network in advance with these programs. Not doing so is likely to exacerbate women's vulnerability (Neal and Phillips 1990; Morrow 1995). Coalitions should be developed in advance between domestic violence interveners and emergency managers. Disaster managers, however, must be made aware that many communities have no resources for battered women and that most existing shelters have waiting lists (Pleck 1987). Thus, they may need to be ready to intervene on behalf of women faced with the double threat of disaster and violence.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shelters should be established in communities where there are none.
- Shelters in each community need to have their own disaster plan, tied to the community emergency management plans.
- Disaster workers need training to be aware of the potential of domestic violence during recovery and to deal with the situation (i.e., knowing who is able to provide victim services).
- Mutual aid agreements between disaster organizations and domestic violence shelters need to be established for operation in disaster situations.
- City and county emergency/disaster plans need to incorporate any domestic violence shelters in the community into the response/recovery planning process.
- Trained disaster workers or domestic violence counselors need to be placed at the disaster assistance site or, at least, be on call to assist these victims.
- Public service announcements about domestic violence, available resources, and service locations should be increased after a disaster.

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Case Studies of Women Responding to Disaster

Generalizations about the vulnerabilities, as well as strengths, of women faced with disasters must be built from solid knowledge of the daily circumstances of women around the globe. To this end we now move to a series of case studies that provide rich description of women from a wide variety of cultural, social, and economic settings responding to an equally wide assortment of hazards.

Farzana Bari provides an excellent description of the complex ways in which ideology constructs gender identity in Pakistan, including the inferior status that places women at extreme risk during floods. Her message, however, is one of hope, describing the creative way women organized a grassroots group to focus on immediate needs, which also lead to community action addressing the larger problems of development and empowerment. Of special interest is the successful campaign to get joint husband-wife ownership of replacement housing.

The next two contributions are from Australia, where a successful symposium of community-based women's groups recently examined gender issues in disaster. Using the theoretical framework of ecological postmodernism, Helen Cox examines how women coped, accepted their losses, both human and material, and moved on with their lives after a major bushfire, often providing important community leadership. She focuses on how these rural women accept the constant threat of fires as a price paid for their way of life. C. Christine Finlay gives a similar picture of strength through acceptance as she describes women's experiences during Australian floods. Far from being a "problem group," women in these flood-prone areas tend to accept floods as a normal part of life as they perform important activities for their families and communities, demonstrating capacities that move beyond gender stereotypes. She makes interesting comparisons between these "normalizers" and others.

On a more personal note, Carrie Barnecut describes rewards she has gained though an extensive career as a disaster volunteer. Now a professional emergency

planner, she describes some of the challenges faced by unpaid and paid women disaster workers, as well as the unique contributions they are making to the field.

Carolina Serrat Viñas provides rich contextual data on how women in two contrasting communities organized to draw attention to local needs after the 1995 earthquake in the Mexican state of Colima. Her work indicates that husbands of employed wives were more accepting of their organizing activities, and she documents the creative ways women organized to maximize the effectiveness of their demands while appearing to stay within acceptable cultural limits.

It is important to move gender-related disaster work beyond simple comparisons of sex differences, and a precursor to understanding underlying meanings is to collect evidence on how women and men assess risk and make decisions. Paul W. O'Brien and Patricia Atchison report on gender differences in the perceptions and behavior of Californians related to earthquake and aftershock warnings. Women were more likely to believe warnings and, contrary to stereotype, more likely to take instrumental actions to protect their homes.

The setting for the next two chapters is the Miami, Florida region of the United States after Hurricane Andrew. Diane Gail Colina shares her personal hardships as a teacher, wife, and mother moving between a badly damaged school of still-suffering students and a nearly destroyed home full of dislocated relatives during the difficult year after the storm. She paints a poignant picture of struggle and new-found strength. This is followed by our qualitative study of a coalition of women's groups formed to redirect priorities for recovery funds from economic and business interests to the immediate health and social needs of women and children. Arising in counterpoint to the powerful male-controlled establishment group determining the expenditure of millions of dollars, *Women Will Rebuild* was a significant experiment in feminist organizing in disaster context.

The concluding chapters are from practitioners, women with professional experience in disaster response. Doone Robertson discusses the underrepresentation of women in emergency management in Australia, provides evidence of change, and discusses why the resulting programs will be more effective. Some of the earliest calls for a gender perspective in disaster response came from Central America and the Caribbean where conferences were held in 1990. In her condensed summary of the Costa Rican symposium, Letizia Toscani highlights the important community contributions women make when the opportunities are available. Gloria E. Noel gives a Caribbean perspective on the unique health-related needs and contributions of women in times of disaster. She provides detailed guidelines for incorporating the knowledge and skills of women at each level of disaster response.

Together, these contributions provide enlightening examples of the countless ways in which women from diverse settings and circumstances have always, no doubt, risen from the hardship of disaster to add their unique strengths to the rebuilding of homes and communities. Only now, we take note and learn from their experiences.