Understanding the gender dimensions of emergency management: Resources & strategies for change

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Starting points: key assumptions

- Disasters happen to women and men, but not identically
- They unfold in highly gendered conditions because our everyday lives are highly gendered
- Yes, women are often at increased risk
- But both women and men have critical gender-based needs--and gender-based strengths and resources, too
- The working culture of emergency management organizations calls for a self-aware gender lens
What is “the gender lens” in EM?

- It is not...
  - a fad
  - a luxury
  - “identity politics”
  - a political agenda
  - anti-male discrimination
What the gender lens offers

- An equitable & smart way to use the nation’s resources
- A strategy for addressing all vulnerabilities and building on everyone’s capabilities
- A way of fully engaging us all in reducing risk
- A bridge to the future—our next generation of emergency managers
Beyond the stereotypes

Men in crisis are (?)
- Heroic
- Active
- Independent
- In control
- Unfeeling

Women in crisis are (?)
- Needy
- Passive
- Dependent
- Out of control
- Emotionally overwhelmed
Ten “take away messages” from research and practice

1. Sex & gender matter in disasters
2. Sex & gender matter in wealthy nations like the US
3. Both differences & inequalities matter
4. Capacities & vulnerabilities are created by sex/gender
5. Sex & gender are cross-cutting risk factors
6. Sex & gender also directly increase risk
7. Sex & gender matter in men’s lives, too
8. Overall, women are most affected
9. Women are organizing everywhere to reduce disasters
10. Tools and resources for change are available
1. Sex & gender matter in disasters

- Values & practices of EM
- Stereotypes & myths
- Everyday routines & relationships—division of labor
- Gendered social institutions
- Awareness & communication
- Exposure & susceptibility to risk factors
- Control over key survival resources
- Capacity for self-protection
2. Sex & gender matter in rich countries

- Structural inequalities exist everywhere
- Global trends & patterns affect the US
- Many of these put women and men differently at risk, e.g.
  - Social isolation
  - Hyper-urbanization
  - Family structure
  - Health disparities
  - Employment rates/job conditions
  - Immigration & language
  - Fear and violence
3. Both differences & inequalities matter

- Differences based on sex/sexuality/gender
  - Reproductive
  - Gendered personalities
  - Sexualities
  - Division of labor

- Inequalities based on sex/sexuality/gender
  - Intimate relationships
  - Household roles and power
  - Economic and political
  - Institutional
4. Both capacities & vulnerabilities develop

- Capacities, e.g.
  - Gender norms
  - Life experience
  - Social networks
  - Work-based skills

- Vulnerabilities, e.g.
  - Mobility
  - Risk perception & risk tolerance
  - Responsibilities & roles
  - Limits in access to & control over key resources
5. Sex & gender cross-cut all other risk factors

- Through the life course
- Across income & ethnic groups
- In high-risk groups, e.g.
  - Poor (predominantly female)
  - Frail elderly (predominantly female)
  - Homeless (women less often in shelters)
  - New immigrants (men more often employed, women more isolated)
  - Single parents (fathers have higher incomes)
  - Persons with disabilities (women more exposed to violence, poverty)
6. Sex & gender have direct effects, too

- Physical & mental health
- Reproductive conditions
- Exposure to interpersonal violence
- Economic & housing security
- Efficacy, self-confidence, self-determination
- Political power
- Professional authority
7. Sex & gender matter in men’s lives, too

- All bodies are sexed
- Gender is an integral part of everyone’s identity
- Men accrue gender power
- Men interact in gendered ways
  - With other men & with women
- Social institutions reinforce traditionally dominant forms of manliness
8. Women are most affected

- Pregnancy, birth, lactation
- Mental & physical health
- Expanded family care
- Heading households alone
- Help-seeking roles
- Home = workplace
- Exposure to violence, abuse
- Fewer resources for protective action/recovery
- Less often heard or regarded

But which women? Why? How? When?
9. Women are organizing internationally to reduce the risk of disasters

- Conferences & workshops
- At the grassroots
- In the workplace
- Through UN agencies
- As emergency managers

Recommended: Gender Equality and Disaster Risk Reduction Workshop (Honolulu 2004) Conference Proceedings:
http://www.ssri.hawaii.edu/research/GDWwebsite/
10. Tools and resources are available

- Guidelines & templates
- Case studies
- Teaching & training resources
- Policy frameworks, e.g.
  - Six Principles for Gender-Fair Response in English, Spanish, French & Creole
- Gender & Disaster Network
- EMPOWER
- New! US Gender & Disaster Resilience Alliance (stay tuned)
Gaps, missed opportunities & challenges

Examples (close analysis needed)

- US women/men rarely identified in specific high-risk subpopulations
- Texts overlook gender & disaster research, e.g. findings on evacuation, risk perception, economic recovery
- Trainings/training modules lacking on gender & disaster
- Public awareness materials rarely highlight gender roles or relationships (capacities/vulnerabilities)
- Risk communicators rarely target women/men
- Sex/gender issues rarely reflected in risk mapping
- Women’s organizations/men’s organizations not included as stakeholders
- Women’s organizations working with high-risk groups not prioritized in preparedness campaigns, e.g. infant care, battered women
- Family support rare (child care/dependent care)
- Lack of attention to gender segregation and stratification in EM orgs

What do you see?
US Gender & Disaster Resilience Alliance

- Coming soon! Sister network to global GDN
- To work together toward gender equity in our disaster planning, e.g. through
  - Teaching and training, policy change, good practice guidelines, new research priorities
- To build a social movement for change based on parallel campaigns and a broader base
  - Environmental, children’s rights, disability rights, climate change, human rights
- To engage women and men equally in the challenges of building a safer, more just and more disaster resilient nation
Some questions for discussion

- Observations and perceptions
  - What gender issues have you seen in the field? In your office? Which need most attention?

- Making change
  - What sources of support exist for gendering EM in the US? What are the barriers? What resources are needed?
  - How can advocates for change best work with allies?

- Training & teaching
  - How are gender issues currently taught? What training resources are most needed? What would they look like?