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

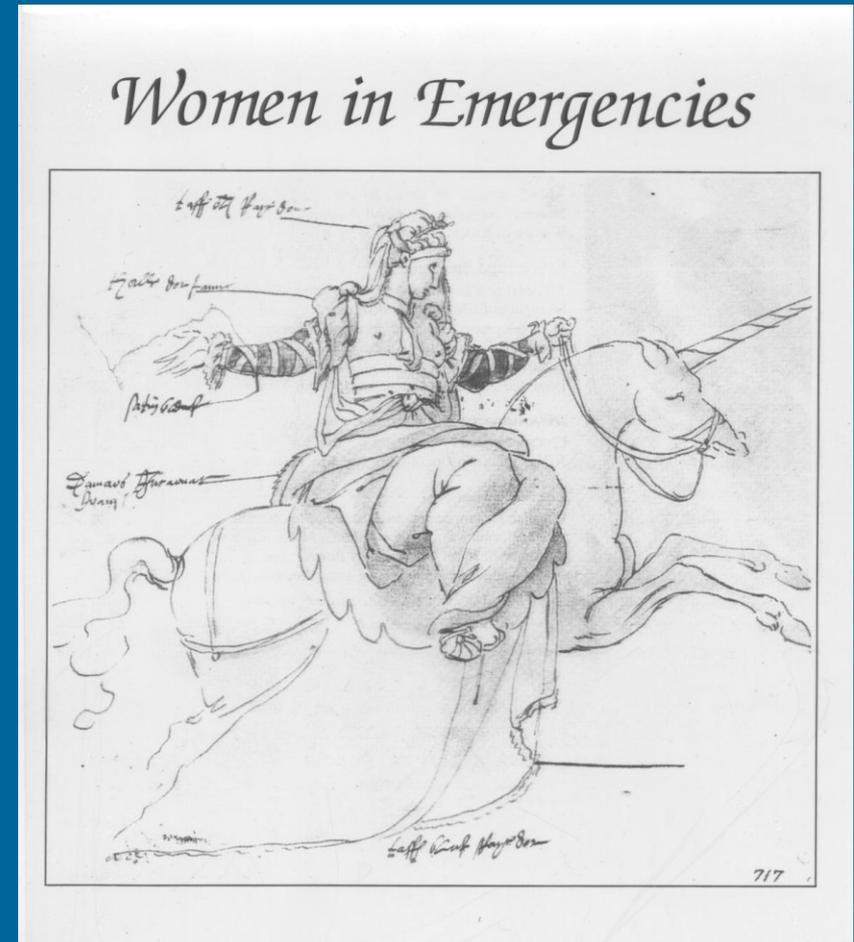
Dr. Elaine Enarson
EmForum, March 10 2010
enarson@gmail.com

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

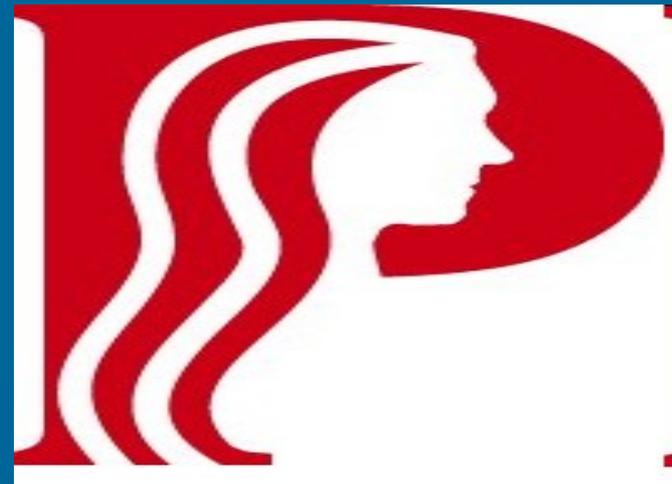
But which women? Why? How?
When?



9. Women are organizing internationally to reduce the risk of disasters

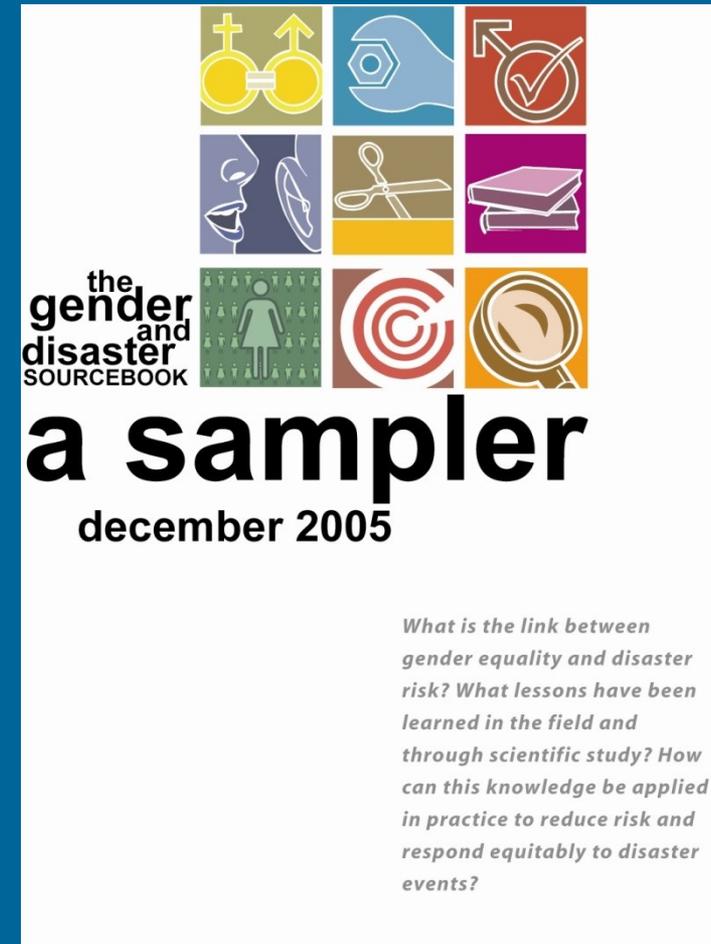
- ❑ Conferences & workshops
- ❑ At the grassroots
- ❑ In the workplace
- ❑ Through UN agencies
- ❑ As emergency managers

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?
-