Overcoming Barriers
The role of gender in disasters

By Sarah K. Miller, MPA, CEM
Background

- How I got here.
- Why should you care?!
  - Men and women experience disaster differently, and thus our approach to planning should take that into account.
Vulnerability

- Specific to disasters: those who lack the resources or capacity to adequately provide for themselves during a disaster and the ensuing recovery period.
What Role Does Gender Play

- Gender is a complex social process
- Gender marks difference and is a source of identity
- Gender constrains or liberates
- Gender is a division of labor
- Gender is relational
- Gender is institutional
- Gender is politic
- Gender is dynamic
Are women vulnerable?

- Some key US statistics on women
  - More likely to live below the poverty line
  - More likely to be single head of household
  - More likely to live with disabilities or mental illness
  - More likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual assault
  - More likely to live into old age (80+) and be widowed
Are men vulnerable?

- Yes.
- Most of the things that can happen to women can also happen to men.
More on Vulnerabilities

- Based on the statistics, women are more vulnerable than men
- Types of disasters statistically show different gender based vulnerabilities
  - Tornados: Women have higher mortality, due to poverty and lower grade housing
  - Heat: Men showed much higher mortality in specific Chicago example
- Others
Around the World

- Women are more vulnerable in every country
- Vulnerability looks different in developed countries vs. developing countries
- Vulnerability looks different in disaster vs. war
Cultural Inferences

- Until 1978, all hurricanes had female names
- Jerry Falwell blamed 9/11 on “nonconforming” women
- Disaster movies often portray women in a helpless and hysterical manner
Role of the Media

- How does the media shape our perceptions of gender in disaster?
Role of the Media

- How does the media shape our perceptions of gender in disaster?
  - Contradictions
  - Women as helpless victims
  - Women as organizers and coordinators
- Why should we care?
Media in Specific Disasters

- How did the media portray women in:
  - Hurricane Andrew
  - Northridge Earthquake
  - 9/11
  - Hurricane Katrina
  - Others
Specific Men’s Needs

- What are some specific needs of men in disaster?
Specific Women’s Needs

- What are some specific needs of women in disaster?
Incorporating Specific Needs

- Mitigation
- Planning
- Response
- Recovery
Post Disaster Violence

- Violence against women increases post disaster
  - Increased number of assaults
    - +46% after Mt. St. Helens eruption
  - Increased lethality of assaults
    - In Homer, AK, after Exxon Valdez spill
  - Increased brutality
    - Post Hurricane Katrina
- More referrals to domestic violence shelters
  - Grand Forks, ND post Red River flood
Brief Case Study
What Can We Do?

- Beyond incorporating specific needs, what else can we do to address gender differences in disasters?
What Can We Do?

- Beyond incorporating specific needs, what else can we do to address gender differences in disasters?
  - Increase access to affordable housing
  - Design gender sensitive risk communication
  - Ally with gender based organizations
Identifying Partners

- Potential partners
  - Domestic violence advocates
  - Domestic violence shelters
  - Food banks
  - Mental health organizations
  - Emergent post-disaster groups
  - Others?
Connecting With Partners

- Organize with them
- Incorporate into local plans
- Assist them in their planning efforts
- Connect them with each other
- Goal is to ensure their continued existence in your community post-disaster, when you will need them more than ever.
Questions/Discussion
Additional Resources

- Women Confronting Natural Disaster: From Vulnerability to Resilience; Elaine Enarson; 2012
- Women, Gender, and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives; Elaine Enarson and P.G. Dhar Chakrabarti; 2009
- Sexual Violence in Disasters: A Planning Guide for Prevention and Response; Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault; 2008
- Gender Considerations in Disaster Assessment; World Health Organization; 2005
- The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women’s Eyes; Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow; 1998
Online Resources

- Gender and Disaster Network: www.gdonline.org
- US Gender and Disaster Resilience Alliance: www.usgdra.org
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