

Gender and disaster

Women and children are particularly affected by disasters, accounting for more than seventy five percent of displaced persons. In addition to the general effects of natural disaster and lack of health care, women are vulnerable to reproductive and sexual health problems, and increased rates of sexual and domestic violence. Moreover, gender roles dictate that women become the primary caretakers for those affected by disasters – including children, the injured and sick, and the elderly – substantially increasing their emotional and material work load. Women's vulnerability is further increased by the loss of men and/or livelihoods, especially when a male head of household has died and the women must provide for their families. Post disaster stress symptoms are often but not universally reported more frequently by women than men.

In addition, gender inequality in social, economic and political spheres results in vast differences between men and women in emergency communication; household decisions about use of relief assets; voluntary relief and recovery work; access to evacuation shelter and relief goods; and employment in disaster planning, relief and recovery programs, among other areas of concern in disaster relief.

Women are portrayed as the victims of disaster, and their central role in response to disaster is often overlooked. A woman's pre-disaster familial responsibilities are magnified and expanded by the onset of a disaster or emergency, with significantly less support and resources. Women play a central role within the family, securing relief from emergency authorities, meeting the immediate survival needs of family members and managing temporary relocation.

To target scarce resources effectively, disaster practitioners should be aware of gender patterns in disaster, and respond appropriately. Seeing disaster through a gender lens can help identify key issues for policymakers, planners and practitioners, expose critical system gaps, and bring a gender focus into the analysis of disaster mitigation and response.

Incorporating gender issues into disaster management requires;

- ❑ Generating sex disaggregated data for community vulnerability and capacity assessments (See tools on mapping gender-based vulnerabilities [MS Word 39 KB]; and
- ❑ Identifying those women who are marginalized and particularly at-risk, including economically destitute women, women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities, women with chronic disabilities or health problems, women subject to gender based violence and women with insufficient security and privacy in shelters.
- ❑ Engaging women as full and equal partners in community-based disaster mitigation and planning, and integrating women at the highest levels of planning and decision making in camp environments (particularly with respect to the health needs of women, including reproductive health services) and employing women as primary distributors of emergency rations and medical supplies.

Useful information

- ❑ Gender considerations in Disaster Assessments
WHO, Department of Gender, Women and Health (GWH), 2005.
- ❑ Six practical rules for working with women and girls by Elaine [Enarson](#)
This 2-page awareness raising document provides a list of practical points to promote.
- ❑ Gender and natural disasters, PAHO
This is a fact sheet on women in the disaster process including vulnerability, response, and the need for gender analysis.
- ❑ Integrating gender into emergency responses
A quarterly update from [BRIDGE](#), raising gender awareness among policy-makers and practitioners
- ❑ Gender and health in disasters
A briefing note prepared by WHO on current research concerning gender and disasters, research gaps and implications of current research for disaster relief programmes and policies.

Useful links

- ❑ Gender and Disaster Network

An international forum for discussion, networking, and information exchange including topical bibliographies and reports on applied projects or research in progress, book reviews, current information about relevant conferences and other events, a bulletin board for employment, scholarship or funding opportunities.

- ❑ [The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response](#)

Referred to as the Sphere handbook, this sets out what people affected by disasters have a right to expect from humanitarian assistance (Sphere Project).

- ❑ [WHO, Department of Gender, Women and Health \(GWH\)](#)

Further information and links on gender and disaster.