

**WOMEN IN DISASTERS:**

**CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Exploring the Issues Seminar**

**May 5-6, 1998  
Vancouver, British Columbia**

**Emergency Management Division  
Justice Institute of British Columbia**

**B.C. Association of Specialized Victim  
Assistance and Counselling Programs.**

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## OVERVIEW

Women's complex roles and resources in disaster have not yet been fully recognized nor the special needs of vulnerable women fully incorporated into disaster planning and response. The 1995 focus on women and children as "keys to prevention" during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) highlighted the need to better understand gender issues in disaster contexts.

Toward this end, a 1990 conference on women and disaster was conducted in Costa Rica targeting Latin America and Caribbean societies, followed in 1993 by a symposium of women's groups gathered to consider disaster issues in Queensland, Australia. More recently, a 1997 conference in Pakistan provided a South Asian focus on sustainable development, disaster reduction, and gender equality as well as media work in disasters.

Sponsored by the Justice Institute of British Columbia in conjunction with the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs, *the BC conference on "Women in Disaster: Exploring the Issues"* brought a uniquely North American perspective on women's experiences in disaster. The diverse audience ensured wide-ranging expectations, lively debate, and varying perspectives, interests, and needs. Over 130 women participated, including provincial emergency managers, voluntary relief workers, local emergency practitioners, graduate students in disaster social science, municipal and provincial officials, women's service staff, and disaster victim/survivors.

Conducted over a two-day period, the event included academic presentations by disaster researchers, community responders, and keynote speakers from Canadian and US women's services, informal networking, and four break-out sessions focused on identifying key issues and identifying action steps. Experienced local emergency practitioners served as voluntary panelists and facilitators for each of the four workshops.

Financial support from the BC Ministries of Human Resources, Attorney General, and Women's Equality enabled the active participation of two key groups, among others: volunteer relief workers from the provincial Emergency Social Services agency; and staff from sexual assault centres, transition homes, specialized police-based victim assistance programs, and Stop the Violence counselling services. Two keynote presentations and many workshop discussions addressed violence against women after disaster and the needs of service-providing organizations working with vulnerable women.

Recognizing that many gender issues arise for other women's services, for professional women in emergency management, and for male victims and responders, this forum primarily highlighted issues facing women relief volunteers and women at risk of violence. Participants called for more attention to these related issues in future symposia and for more opportunities for networking. Toward this end, contact information was collected and later distributed to all participants.

These proceedings summarize or reproduce keynote presentations, identify workshop themes and participants, and include recommendations forwarded at the conclusion of the conference.

In addition, a resource handbook was distributed to conference participants. This packet included background readings, planning guidelines, a bibliography on gender and disaster in disaster social science, and other resource material.

To order copies or for additional copies of these proceedings, contact: *Ross McIntyre, Emergency Management Division, Justice Institute of BC, 715 McBride Boulevard, New Westminster, BC, V3L 5T4. Phone: (604) 528-5790. Fax: (604) 528-5798.*

**“Gender and Disaster: What are the Issues?”** (synopsis) Dr. Elaine Enarson, Visiting Scholar, Disaster Preparedness Resources Centre, University of British Columbia

This overview focused on forces gendering the social experience of disasters. Power relations of age, race or ethnicity, social class, and gender shape the social experience of disasters just as they frame that “normal” life which is so profoundly disrupted by events like floods, toxic spills, or earthquakes. These gender patterns have significant effects on community disaster planning, response, and recovery.

Drawing on original interview data and photographic overhead transparencies of women in disaster contexts, dominant media images of women in disaster were presented and critiqued. From disaster movies like *Volcano* to newspapers and picture books portraying women in floods and hurricanes, women are represented primarily as passive, tearful, and needy victims—when they are depicted at all. Like the female geologist trying to warn emergency managers about an impending volcanic eruption, the concerns of wives and mothers are often trivialized as female hysteria. Moving furniture out of the way of flood waters is interpreted as bothersome female “panic” rather than rational household preparedness.

International disaster researchers are now documenting the wide range of skills and resources women bring when individuals, households, organizations, and communities must cope with disasters. These include household preparation and clean-up, providing or arranging evacuation space and services, on-site search and rescue, indirect disaster response jobs like nurse and crisis line worker, home repair and refurbishing, the paperwork of the relief and recovery process, voluntary disaster relief work, and informal political leadership during the recovery period. Marginalized in disaster social science, emergency management organizations, and the public imagination, women’s work is, in fact, not marginal but central to preparing for, responding to, recovering from, and mitigating community disasters.

Certainly, many women are hit hard by disaster and gender relations in culture and society tend to put women at special risk, some more than others. But focusing on women primarily as victims to the neglect of their capacities and resources misrepresents the actual experiences of women and men and negatively affects the culture and practice of emergency management.

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**“Women’s Voices in the Red River Valley Flood”** (synopsis) Dr. Karen Grant, Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Manitoba

This presentation summarized the findings of an on-going study conducted by Drs. Karen Grant and Nancy Higgitt of the University of Manitoba, based on interviews with 26 flood-impacted women in the Winnipeg area. The study is designed both to document the health and social impacts of the 1997 Red River flood on women and to examine the nature of women’s work on behalf of their families and households.

Following an overview of the flood’s impact on southern Manitoba and analysis of the social nature of disaster, the presentation turned to the nature of women’s work. The women interviewed undertook a wide range of disaster work, from temporary diking to “countless hours in the kitchen, preparing meals, serving meals, and cleaning up after meals” to feed the sandbaggers. They also tried to prepare their households before the flood and responded to emotional needs during and after the crisis. “Keeping things normal under abnormal circumstances was a full-time job, and for many, often easier said than done.” A year after the flood, “many hours each and every day are still spent on the 1997 flood.”

This rich qualitative data documented how the flood affected women’s health, families, and neighborhoods, and provided insight into women’s behind-the-scenes caring, negotiating, and mediating roles. The authors hope that as more women tell their stories, women and men alike will better appreciate the significance of “women’s work” during crisis and “the need to provide the material and socio-emotional resources to women so that they can do this essential work.”

Dr. Grant concluded with a reminder that “Women need to be included—not just to pick up the pieces—but to help frame how communities will respond in the first place. Women need to be at the table, as partners in the decision-making process. They have much wisdom to bring to how we deal with disasters.”

For more information or to request copies of the paper in its entirety, contact the author at the address below.

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**“When Gender Matters: Women’s Crisis and Recovery Needs”** Dr. Elaine Enarson,  
Visiting Scholar, Disaster Preparedness Resources Centre, University of British Columbia

In a recent assessment of 20 years of disaster studies, American sociologist Dennis Mileti addresses all nations when he concludes (Natural Hazards Observer, September 1997, p.3):

We ask the nation to acknowledge that we will never be totally safe from disasters. We ask that those who are charged with making national and local decisions acknowledge that *they are designing the disasters that future generations will experience*. And we seek to begin a nationwide conversation that will lead to actions that link hazard mitigation and disaster response to the broader goals of sustainability (emphasis added).

In this spirit, vulnerability theorists strive to identify the root causes embedded in the routine structures of society which transform natural events like mudslides, bush fires, or cyclones into human calamities. Among these are economic globalization and rising economic insecurity, hyperurbanization, and environmental degradation. Complex and interdependent technological systems (as, for example, in the 1998 Canadian ice storm); aging transportation infrastructure and nuclear facilities; population trends also increase people’s vulnerability to hazardous conditions, e.g. our more mobile and transient population with rising proportions of single mothers, poor people, migrants, refugees, and households headed by the frail elderly.

Because these root causes reflect deeply embedded economic, social, and political trends across the globe, sociologist Eli Quarantelli and others conclude: “The future will not simply be the past revisited; it will get worse.” A cursory glance at recent headlines from BC suggest the patterns: “*New report indicates many in New Westminster are living on the margins, sleeping on the street or fighting to keep accommodation.*” “*Thousands of Lower Mainland immigrant women are grindingly poor, exploited as home workers.*” “*Ever-growing elderly population will swamp existing institutions in next century.*” The relentless accounts of violence against women in our morning newspapers (including violence in reception centres during the recent ice storm) reminds us how vulnerable women and children are both to violence and to disaster.

### **The Social Construction of Disaster Vulnerability**

People, households, and settlements do not experience the same disaster event the same way: some are far more vulnerable than others both to immediate impact and to long-term recovery. Case studies and accounts from the field indicate that pre-disaster resources are reliable indicators of disaster vulnerability. Predictably, the postdisaster needs of many social groups will exceed the resources available to them as significant resources are differentially distributed within societies. *Key survival and recovery resources include:*

- income, savings, credit, insurance
- land, livestock, tools
- secure employment; job skills
- health and nutrition; food security
- appropriate and secure housing
- functional literacy; bureaucratic skills

- extended households; strong kin networks
- low ratio of adult dependency in household
- access to public and/or private transportation
- time
- social networks; community integration
- political power and influence
- power in the household
- access to knowledge, skills, money for home preparation
- access to emergency shelter; emergency communication networks

These key *survival and recovery resources are distributed unequally* across societies and between societies. Accordingly, relative disaster vulnerability reflects hazardousness of place in combination with hazardous life conditions created by power relations in households, communities, and societies. In similarly hazardous environments, not all social groups are impacted identically. Those most hard hit are likely to be:

- recent residents, immigrants, migrants
- socially isolated households
- non-speakers of dominant community language
- poor and low-income households
- single heads of households
- seniors; frail elderly
- children and youth
- physically or mentally disabled
- physically or mentally ill
- undocumented residents
- refugees
- indigenous populations and subordinated racial/ethnic groups
- tourists/transients
- institutionalized populations; transition homes
- renters; homeless residents
- women

### **Why Gender? Why Women?**

Though gender assumes no universal meaning, gender relations significantly affect the daily lives of women and men—before, during, and after a calamitous event like a nuclear accident, earthquake, tornado, or toxic spill. On balance, men tend to have greater access to key survival and recovery resources and hence are less vulnerable than women to disaster.

Significantly, population trends indicate *women are likely to become progressively more vulnerable*. Among the main social trends impacting women disproportionately are an aging and feminizing population, rising rates of female-headed households, increasing mobility, migration and immigration, declining “free time” in dual-income households, rising rates of female poverty, homelessness, and violence against women, and the erosion of public-sector social and human services significant to women.

Like men, women are not impacted identically by disaster but have differential access to key survival and recovery resources. *Disaster planners and responders can anticipate that these groups of women in their communities will be especially hard hit:*

- poor or low-income women
- senior women/frail elders
- women with disabilities; severe mental or physical illness
- women heading households/single mothers/widows
- refugee women and the homeless
- indigenous women/minority women
- immigrant women/women with language barriers
- isolated women/rural women
- women with large families
- battered women/women at risk of violence
- 

### **Violence against women and disaster**

Reports from service agencies indicate that women are at increased risk of violence in the aftermath of disaster, for example in the wake of Saguenay floods and the 1998 ice storm and following recent US earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods.

Domestic violence and sexual assault centres report increased case management with existing clients and women newly impacted both by violence and disaster. Though decreasing during the immediate crisis, violence against women may increase during the lengthy recovery period—as long as six months or a year after the event. Because disasters can force women back into dangerous relationships, increase financial and housing stress, and re-traumatize recovering women, the postdisaster needs of disaster victims who are also at risk of violence include:

- physical security during crisis (72 hours) if living in shelter
- safe and secure evacuation space for women in shelter
- access to appropriate physical and mental health services
- increased children's services
- continuity in counselling relationship, more support groups
- assistance securing disaster relief funds and goods
- legal, employment, and financial assistance
- affordable, safe housing in the postdisaster housing market

Victim service agencies will be significant 'backstage' disaster responders to women and children in crisis after disaster. They may also be directly and indirectly impacted.

*Mitigating the effects of disaster includes planning to identify their needs and support their work throughout the disaster cycle.*

### **Women's services respond**

"What we give them is all that they have," a domestic violence worker in an active seismic zone said of the losses suffered from a simple fire in the shelter. For women in crisis, transition houses and counselling programs offer lifeline services and potentially life-saving safe

space. Other women's services provide vital support and resources to women challenged by the conditions of everyday life, among them:

- immigrant women's services and First Nations women's groups
- community women's centers and senior centres
- advocates for homeless women, domestic workers, migrants
- disabled women's groups
- support groups for single mothers, widows, HIV-positive women and others
- government bureaus and departments
- women's coalitions, political groups
- child care/dependent care networks
- crisis lines and other community mental health services

What happens to women's services—to their staff, facilities, volunteers, equipment, supplies, board, clients, finances, and funding agencies—in the aftermath of a major ice storm, earthquake, tornado or flood? While the emergency needs of those in child care facilities, schools, nursing homes, hospitals and similar institutions have been identified, the needs of women's services and their clients have not.

Because the demand for social and human services increases during disaster recovery and women are particularly hard-hit, women's services play a key role in long-term community recovery—yet must respond with reduced resources, including:

- on-site emergency sheltering and response (who planned?)
- disrupted communications (where is everybody?)
- damaged or destroyed office equipment, furniture, vehicles, tools, supplies, files, computer disks (how to replace?)
- damaged or destroyed facility; evacuation and relocation (how? where?)
- reduced staff, volunteer time, board time, available overtime (who?)
- increased staff turn-over, absenteeism, conflict, stress (how to help?)
- disrupted grant deadlines, fund-raisers (now what?)
- disrupted community and interagency networks (what's happening?)
- invisibility in recovery process; competition for scarce funds (why women?)

### **Women and community response to disaster**

Assessing community resources such as grassroots women's services as well as vulnerabilities, like local patterns of violence against women, is an important part of disaster planning. In addition to being highly vulnerable, many women are also active and resourceful disaster responders.

In their personal relationships, households, workplaces, and communities, women's gendered life experience makes them central players in disaster response and recovery. They participate actively (if "off stage" or behind closed doors) in disaster response and recovery through:

- household, workplace, and family preparation, response and recovery
- emergency site organizational, physical, and emotional skills
- 'backstage' labor in support of front-line responders

- ‘comprehensive responder’ occupations like nursing or primary schools
- women’s services and community response agencies
- accessing relief agency resources
- community knowledge
- kin and friendship networks
- ‘hands on’ caregiving skills and responsibilities to children, the ill or disabled, and other dependents needing attention through the disaster cycle
- ‘emotion work’ with children, partners, friends, and disaster-impacted clients or customers during evacuation and recovery
- recovery resources from women’s professional and service organizations
- voluntary roles in neighborhood emergency preparedness and communication
- occupational roles as emergency practitioners
- formal and informal political leadership in disaster-impacted areas
- community organization in “emergent response” groups
- crisis workers responding to critical human and social needs, e.g. hotline staff and volunteers

### **When Gender Matters: Planning For Women Through The Disaster Cycle**

Understanding gender relations in impacted populations helps practitioners organize gender-sensitive programs and policies. Case studies from the developed and developing world indicate that women have specific needs before, during, and after disaster events. This evidence indicates that planning and response agencies in the private and public sectors should:

- Conduct *self-assessments* for strengths and weaknesses in gender equity
- Provide *staff training* in cultural diversity, gender relations and economic issues through the disaster cycle
- Ensure *gender-fair work practices and policies*
- Strive for *gender balance and cultural diversity in employment* across organizational departments and hierarchies
- *Identify and meet the needs of women as responders and victims*

The specific needs of women through emergencies will vary and can best be assessed by gender-sensitive vulnerability and capacity analysis, but may include the following:

#### ***Communications and preparedness***

- including emergency warnings specifically targeting women, using community languages, women’s networks, and innovative communication (e.g. printed shopping bags, school publications)
- communicating through women’s organizations to reach non-majority language speakers, isolated women, low-income women
- expanding outreach to relevant women’s groups, agencies, and coalitions
- adding crisis line numbers and women’s services contact information to relief referrals

- consulting with women community leaders on language or cultural needs, life cycle issues, service or information gaps

### ***Emergency relief***

- eliminating mandatory evacuation based only on gender
- identifying alternate evacuation space for women at risk or needing privacy
- supporting women in caregiving roles in relief centres
- providing on-site, culturally-appropriate, and gender-sensitive crisis counselling
- offering on-site respite care for dependent caregivers
- providing on-site child care at relief distribution points
- administering benefits appropriate to multiple family forms
- including trained women and men in disaster outreach

### ***Emergency shelter and temporary housing***

- identifying alternative safe space for abused women
- identifying and eliminating risks to women's security, e.g. poor lighting
- providing gender-sensitive mental, physical, and reproductive health services
- providing on-site support for caregivers, e.g. community centre, child care centre
- arranging public transportation (bus, jitney) to job sites, child care, relief agencies
- providing on-site access to needed employment, legal, and social services
- identifying women and children at risk of violence in temporary housing

### ***Long-term recovery***

- representing women on community decision-making bodies, e.g. home-based businesswomen on business recovery task force, low-income women on housing committee
- recognizing gender-specific social impacts and recovery need, e.g. of family day care providers, abused women, home-based businesses, home health caregivers
- providing gender-sensitive mental health services
- ensuring access to women disaster counselors and female outreach workers
- recognizing caregivers to evacuated families as disaster-impacted
- prioritizing recovery assistance to highly vulnerable women, e.g. widows, single mothers, isolated women

### ***Community-based mitigation***

- identifying local women's groups, organizations, and agencies as community partners in disaster readiness
- recruiting and retaining women to professional and technical positions in emergency management agencies
- expanding recruitment of emergency volunteers from under-represented household types, age groups, social classes, and ethnic groups

## **The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through the Eyes of Men**

Is gender a woman's issue? While often less salient to men, gender shapes the work, relationships, health, leisure, language, sexuality, and family lives of men and women alike. Masculinity certainly shapes men's social, psychological, material, and political responses to disaster. For many, power and control issues are particularly significant.

Disaster scholars, community groups, and disaster response and planning agencies rarely analyze the distinct vulnerabilities and capacities of men and women. *Community-based disaster readiness recognizing masculinity and disaster concerns will include:*

- targeted emergency communications recognizing gender norms in male hazard awareness, household preparedness, emotional recovery, etc.
- access to nontraditional occupations and roles in emergency management
- community-based strategies for educating boys, teens and adult men about the human impacts of disaster
- support services for men in caregiving roles, e.g. single fathers, disabled spouses
- organizational practices sensitive to men's family responsibilities, e.g. in dual-career responder couples, dependent caregivers
- predisaster mental health initiatives targeting at-risk first-responders
- workplace-based programs identifying at-risk men severely impacted by disaster
- gender-sensitive disaster mental health outreach to especially vulnerable men, e.g. first responders, rural men in communities under stress, unemployed men, socially isolated men

An active partnership of men and women analyzing gender issues before, during and after disaster will help families and communities prepare for and mitigate the effects of disaster.

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### **“Disaster and Domestic Violence: Evaluating an Innovative Policy Response”**

(synopsis) Dr. Victoria Constance, Sam Houston University (formerly with the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence)

Anticipating increased violence against women in the aftermath of massive flooding in the US Midwest in 1993, the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence worked proactively to educate state officials about the risk to women and the needs of programs serving them in the aftermath of disaster. Dr. Constance's presentation summarized both the need for the initiative and the process of bringing it about.

Drawing on first-person quotations from women in Missouri shelters, the presentation was a moving account of how floodwaters and violence were related in women's lives. Women spoke of unemployment, lost housing, destroyed cars, increased tension at home and then violence, drawing the pieces of the story together in clear and simple language. Documenting women's experience of both violence and flood impact was an essential part of the model: "What was really powerful for us...was to hear the women's stories...We were battling a very large system that didn't believe women were flood-affected, that didn't believe that their being flood-affected had anything to do with their violence."

These written stories from women were captured as part of the documentation and research phase of a major government grant to member programs of the Missouri Coalition. Recognizing that substance abuse and domestic violence are often linked, the Coalition successfully lobbied to extend a disaster recovery grant targeting substance abusers to shelters assisting women and children experiencing violence. Anticipating that the 35 flood-affected programs would shelter 660 persons statewide (including mothers with children), Dr. Constance reported that, at the end of the first year, 3,406 women and children found safe refuge during this very difficult postdisaster period. By any measure, this unique model of service delivery to flood survivors was successful.

The presentation concluded with the recommendations of the Missouri project, proposing a new model of collaboration between women's services and emergency responder, specifically that:

1. Federal disaster relief funding and program designs will recognize the immediate and long-term need for domestic violence crisis intervention services, intervention services, residential programs, and ongoing support services for disaster survivors concomitantly suffering from increases in substance abuse and increases in interpersonal violence;
2. Planning for federal disaster relief funding and grant designs to states will utilize the community-level expertise and identification of disaster-affected populations served through domestic violence programs to effectively foster both immediate and long-term recovery;
3. Domestic violence coalitions, recognized as a centralized source of planning, education, and service provision through federal disaster relief programs, will allow cost-effective and cooperative structures of service provision to disaster-affected communities. The involvement of these non-profit, non-governmental networks will further strengthen the abilities of state bureaucracies to effectively collaborate with community-based programs providing emergency services to disaster victims;
4. Federal disaster relief funding of collaborative efforts among disaster response services of substance abuse treatment and domestic violence programs will enhance the services provided to disaster survivors. Such funding would enhance the

cooperative aspects of cross-screening protocols, cross-referrals, cross-trainings and cross-utilization of services, especially as outlined in the unique Missouri model of service delivery.

The presentation highlighted the many barriers to overcome as this unique model was developed, from lack of visibility of violence against women in disaster and bureaucratic obstacles to the lack of a common language enabling communication between government officials and women in the battered women's movement. The talk provided insight into how women might move beyond these barriers to work effectively with state mental health officials and others to meet the needs of women hard hit both by disaster and by domestic violence. The need for a common language was echoed throughout the conference in other presentations and in remarks from the floor.

For more information or to request copies of the paper in its entirety, contact the author at the address below.

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**“Women In Disasters: Exploring the Issues“** Tracy Porteous, BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance & Counselling Services

Between the years of 1987 and 1994, I worked as the Executive Director of the Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre. Before that time I worked there in many other positions--from volunteer on the 24-hour crisis line, as someone who would accompany women who had just been sexually assaulted to the hospital and to the Police (if they so chose to report), to volunteer trainer and coordinator, to counsellor in the Emergency and Justice Related Support Program. I say all this by way of describing the experience of many feminists working at front line social service agencies providing a response to violence against women.

In fact there are numerous such agencies across BC, including 23 Sexual Assault/Women Assault Centres; 45 Specialized Victim Assistance Programs; 80 Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs; 80 Transition Houses and Safe Homes; and 50 Children Who Witness Abuse Programs. From a more general crime perspective, there are also approximately 60 Police based Victim Assistance Programs across the Province. These services have varying mandates, and for my focus this morning, I will be focusing more directly on the services specifically for women.

This network of women's services is set up primarily to respond to women who have experienced sexual assault, sexual abuse in their childhood's, or abuse in the context of a relationship. *These services are in large part the primary responder for all of the violence-related needs of the women in their communities across British Columbia.* Many started out on the '70s and '80s as small grassroots women's organizations attempting to break the silence that has shrouded these issues historically.

Now, in the 1990s, these services have become large social service agencies responsible for large budgets and many staff. They are considered by Police, Crown, and the authorities for justice, social services, and health to be integral in the immediate crisis response and provision of ongoing services. These services coordinate their efforts in communities, and work along side the systems to ensure that women receive the services and responses they need. These services:

- acknowledge a woman's experience of violence
- understand that because of social attitudes, the stigmatization, and fears that they will be judged, and blamed and shamed, that women don't come forward to report these crimes
- recognize the varying ways that power and control within a patriarchal society result in oppression
- recognize the additional barriers and levels of oppression women face who have disabilities, who are women of colour, aboriginal women, lesbians, are old, are poor.

But before I talk about the services in more detail, I wish to outline all the components we have been working very hard on in developing *a continuum of services*. The services work to ensure that we have a Crisis Intervention Continuum. That is:

- Woman centered 24-hour crisis lines
- Immediate crisis intervention response at the hospital
- Protocols with hospitals, the police, prosecutors, other social services
- Policies and legislation that support women to report and provide for fair treatment and timely services

- Shelter
- Counselling (individual; groups)
- Support for family, friends and children
- Offender treatment programs
- Education and training for: front line staff, volunteers, policy makers, police, prosecutors and the judiciary, within universities, other professional groups, and the public
- Bridging and employment programs for women
- Support and debriefing for front line respondents--counsellors, police, hospital staff
- Self Defense Programs that include assertiveness training
- Prevention Programs

*I also want to visit the incidence of violence against in women that happens every day in every city and every town in this country every day—women are maligned, humiliated, shunned, screamed at, kicked, punched, beaten, raped, physically disfigured, tortured, threatened with weapons and murdered.*

We know that many people have a sense that violence against women exists and that many women live with violence on a daily basis. However, we also know that many people do not have a real perception of the physical, psychological and spiritual repercussions of violence and how the experience and fear of violence affect the daily existence of all women.

Almost daily, newspapers, and radio and television broadcasts carry chilling reports of women harassed, women terrorized, women raped, women shot, women killed. And the accounts that reach the media are only a fraction of the events that never get reported and that remain invisible. We know by conservative estimates that:

- Women are singled out and sexually assaulted every 6 minutes in Canada. That works out to one in every five women!
- And that means in BC alone, we have over 200,000 women who either have been or will be sexually assaulted at some time in their lives. And of those women, 1 in 5 attempt suicide!
- One in 6 Canadian women are beaten by their male spouses.
- Two women are murdered every week in Canada by their male partners.

And those women who are more marginalized--such as First Nations women, women of colour, immigrant women, disabled women, poor women--are even more vulnerable to violence in their lives.

Having said all that, *I want to share with you my story of coming to realize that Emergency Preparedness was something women service providers had to get involved with.*

In the early part of 1990, a report came across my desk at the Sexual Assault Centre which was entitled, "Violence Against Women in the Aftermath of the October 17, 1989 Earthquake." The quake happened in Santa Cruz, just outside of San Francisco. The report was done by the Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and surveyed agencies which provide services to women who have been battered or raped to assess impact

on clients. *This report indicated that violence against women was a major concern after the disaster, in that::*

- Santa Cruz Victim Witness Program reported that rape calls soared after the first 10 days after quake;
- Santa Cruz County Sex Assault Response Team reported that sex assaults went up 300% after the quake; Santa Cruz Police Department also reported an increase of sex assault and domestic violence;
- Santa Cruz District Attorney reported that after the first week, the workload became very heavy. There were many sexual assaults and domestic violence cases reported. The office also dealt with its first reported gang rape case and reported that homicides related to domestic violence were also up;
- Santa Cruz Sheriff Department said, not only did crimes increase in the first month after the quake but the crimes were stranger than usual;
- A number of agencies were temporarily closed immediately following the quake. Some of their facilities were completely demolished;
- Once phone service was restored, services were getting crisis calls and requests for services from people stressed by the quake (loss of jobs, housing). Many people had "old wounds opened" and wanted service for issues unrelated to quake;
- For some women, the trauma of the quake reawakened the pain of previous assaults and abuse. One agency reported that more adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse were calling, more were experiencing traumatic memories and requests for support groups and individual counselling increased, increasing the wait lists;
- Sexual Assault Survivors reaching out increased too with one agency receiving a 25% increase in crisis calls, including quake-related sex assaults, and others being re-traumatized as the quake raised feelings of the same powerlessness and loss of control that the original sexual assault;
- Most agencies recommended the importance of free/accessible counselling to help people come to terms with their feelings about the quake;
- The Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Education Project reported that once they reopened they found their clients were so overwhelmed by basic survival, i.e., shelter, food, etc. that all the agency's efforts had to focus here;
- Crisis calls and requests for Temporary Restraining Orders for women who were dealing with domestic violence dramatically increased;
- Child Abuse went up as well. It was said that parents who have a hard time coping with their children had an even harder time after the quake when their kids became regressive and clingy due to the traumatization;
- Loss of jobs, possessions, housing were narrowing women's choices. As we know, increased uncertainty about one's financial independence made it even harder for women to contemplate leaving abuse situations;
- Many women reported that their male partners discounted their fears and men, because of their socialization, weren't expressing their fear—it was coming out as anger;

- Community outreach and education was found to be essential. The problem was that while the general population was in need of education and information, such as the relationship between stress and violence against women and where people could go for help, all services were stressed to the limit in responding to the immediate crisis;
- The Men's Alternative to Violence Program expressed it in a phrase "The quake is not excuse: call before you hit!" They urged that information on coping with post-traumatic stress syndrome be made public along with instructions on how to purify water and turn off the gas, and that an information campaign on violence prevention should be part of the City's Emergency Management Plan;
- Disaster relief funds look primarily at material damage infrastructure, housing, revenues. But who is looking at the need to fund response to deeper psychological issues that arise such as stress, anger, fear, system abuse. Disaster relief should include preventing a violent aftermath.

*So, after reading this report, and knowing that my community and entire region is considered to be a high earthquake risk zone, I got to thinking:*

*What plans were in place with the mainstream services? What about our services, the need for preparing for increased need while things would be in a state of disarray? Our building was located in a brick building, built in 1910, not seismically sound I doubted.*

*What about funding? At that time we had an approximately \$600,000 budget, 30% of which came from charitable dollars—and in the event of a major disaster, all those donation would probably go to disaster relief funds. So we needed to set up some advance agreement, I thought, with Government for increased funding in the event...and also with other women's services in Victoria and up island for possible help with staffing.*

*What about the staff? It would be likely that our building would be demolished-- where would we work from? What about their safety? How would we be able to continue to pay salaries if our bookkeeper was injured or unable to get to our computers?*

*What about evacuation of clients and staff if it happened during office hours? What about women whose first language is not English--are the planners doing anything about reaching out to all communities?*

*What about insurance and any preventive measures we could take, and education of the staff and readiness training? What about outreach education and what is our role on city committees dealing with these issues? Do the Police and Crown know that this is something we all need to be ready for?*

*What about women's transition houses? Would they still be standing, or would those women be expected to be housed at the same relief centres that their abusive husbands went to? For that matter, what about all women in general, and considering the high percentage that have experienced violence, would they feel safe being housed at mainstream relief centres?*

*What about our crisis line, a critical link between women and services. What can be done if anything to get that link up and running as soon as possible?*

*I went to the Ministry of Attorney General to discuss my concerns and to ask that we start some dialogue at the provincial level to look at funding agreements and planning needs. There was “no money” nor much interest in something that may never happen. I also went to Victoria City Hall Social Planning Committee, which I was a member of at the time thinking—hey, all these people needed to realize that we were in need of some coordination and collaboration. So we struck a subcommittee to start to look at the issue. We invited all those who were responsible for emergency planning to a number of different meetings, where we proceeded to really get nowhere. It seemed to me that the attitude of most of the people responsible for emergency planning was at the same place the police attitude was before the issue of violence against women really came out of the closet.*

Now I don't want to offend anyone here, and I am sure there are many now who are more open to looking at how we can all work together, but back then I found I ran into barrier after barrier. These barriers seemed to be fixed:

- on attitude, i.e. women have no place at these tables, e.g. "we can't be concerned about special interest groups;"
- on denial, i.e. there was a real disbelief in the Santa Cruz report, and people were unwilling to believe we would have the same problem here. Racist attitudes, e.g. "our population may be different than that in the US;"
- on turf, i.e. there already were mainstream social services such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army with contracts with the provincial government to provide shelter, food, clothing, etc., and they didn't seem to be welcoming of our willingness and desire to get involved;
- on personal denial, i.e. a number of people I spoke with (people in Government, not especially those responsible for emergency planning) would become overwhelmed on a personal level when discussing earthquake risk in this area in general, and start talking about what they should do at home.

Our committee put forward the idea of getting emotional preparedness information in the PEP household brochure on what to do about gas and water, etc. While people thought that was a good idea, we were unable to see any concrete movement.

The subcommittee at city hall worked on this issue for 2 years, and I believe the fact that here we were, a women's service ready, willing and able to assist with planning for our specific constituency, and the fact that we got nowhere, suggests that the systemic barriers and problematic attitudes need to be addressed by the Province. *I believe it puts us only in a win/win situation to be ready and able to respond.* Not having women at all these emergency planning tables will only be a set up for not responding well to women and their specific needs.

***So, what else do I know after that frustrating journey?***

- Women's service providers need to be at the planning tables. We have tremendous knowledge about issues of violence that will assist the development of an effective community response. At these planning tables--ahead of time--press releases can be drafted letting people know that violence against women is a reality and information can be given to let people know where they can get help.

- Arrangements can be set up with Police so that they will be prepared to deal with an influx of reports.
- Better yet, information can be added to the Provincial Emergency Program brochure about emergency preparedness, letting people know what to expect psychologically. This way we can hope to possibly prevent some men from "acting out their fear" by committing aggression.
- We can talk to Mental Health who in some communities have emergency response volunteer counsellors or plans for outreach teams. Perhaps women's services staff can work with these teams so when violence issues come up they can be handled sensitively.
- We can plan ahead so that the women in transition houses won't be evacuated to general relief shelters, as that could be where the person who abuses or threatens them is sent.
- We can make arrangements with PEP and BC Tel to have our crisis lines be designated a priority. This way there will be women's services accessible.
- We need to ensure that information is available in different languages and geared to different communities and for women who are deaf and hard of hearing. These women, if not the representatives of the women's services, need to be at the planning tables too.
- We can set up "mutual agreements" with neighbouring women's services, as the community hardest hit by disaster may be inundated with service demand and may need help, or they may have lost staff/volunteers in the disaster. Better to have a plan ahead of time.
- Also, it will be important that all the Staff/Volunteers/Board have knowledge of and a copy of the disaster response plan as we won't know who will be able to travel to a designated service area.
- We can work with the emergency planners and have our venue assessed as to whether it would likely survive an earthquake or major flood. If not, where will you run your service from?
- We need to prepare the women involved in our agencies, staff and volunteers, as the more prepared they and their families are, the sooner they will be able to turn their attention for others.
- We can designate staff and volunteers to report to their own neighbourhood relief centres to assist and be able to respond to violence-related issues.
- We can know ahead of time what we will do regarding pay day for staff and employment standards and program standards.
- We need agreements now with the Provincial Government that in the event of a disaster we will be guaranteed more funding. After the Vernon massacre, the women's services there and the Police Victim Assistance Program had a full fledged disaster on their hands. They were inundated with calls, people needing support and information, and more women wanting to report domestic violence. Our Association was on the phone asking them what they needed most. They said more staff so we assisted in lobbying for a crisis grant so they could bring in some help. But this took weeks and meanwhile they were alone, short of staff to deal with the situation. I have been raising with the Ministry of Attorney General since then the need to have something in place so assistance is automatic. *In that time of crisis, women's services shouldn't be having to fight and lobby and justify funding.*

I could go on but mostly I want to say—this is exciting! I am glad we are here finally, after all these years, moving one step closer to being prepared and to developing the critical relationship with the Emergency Planning Community.

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**“An Emergency Management Perspective”** Ruth Harding, Regional Emergency Planning Coordinator, Greater Vancouver Regional District

Tracy Porteous wondered what emergency coordinators knew about this topic and I can tell you that at that time we knew nothing about it. Working at BC Tel I had made some inquiries internally about what we could do and I talked externally with lots of the organizations that I was connected to about how we might get these issues on the table—and no one was interested at that time, early on. Obviously today, with the municipal emergency planners that you've got here and the people from places like Emergency Social Services, I think those times have changed.

I have a few things I can suggest that you might want to follow up on when you go back to your agencies. First, Industry Canada has a telephone priority service--and I use the word 'priority' with a lot of clarification. In the event of a disaster, if the telephone infrastructure is still in place, in general know every one phone call to get in to a disaster area is worth 10 phone calls out. But it is people in the disaster area that need to call out, not the people outside of a disaster area that need to call in...

What you need to do is contact your municipal emergency planner and have them list one of your phone numbers as an essential line. The system is called Line Load Control. Your municipal planner will then send that information to the provincial government and it is collected provincially as a data base that is sent off to Industry Canada...If there are 10 lines open and 11 people pick up the phone and want to make a call, the first 10 who have the priority listing will get that priority and the minute one of those 10 hangs up then the next person will be able to get to call. We're not talking about denying people services... Because of the amount of work involved, it's not immediate—there is an approval process in place. It can take up to a year for that to get on the system...and it takes certainly a month or two for your municipality to get all of their phone numbers together...In the province it ultimately goes into the Provincial Emergency Program. The whole system is actually under the authority of Industry Canada. They are responsible for putting all of the numbers together on one data base. They don't know who's attached to which phone number. They just get the numbers and then that goes to BC Tel. The other thing that you need to be aware of is that if you're using any other service provider I can't guarantee that this will work.

The other thing you can do is contact BC Cellular. Cellular phones are expensive but they have a special program...For roughly \$10 a month you can have a cellular phone only for use in emergencies--you don't get any cheap discount rates, but it's specifically for emergencies. BC Cellular also does a priority listing and that is separate to what the province and the federal government do so you should contact BC Cellular as well about having those phones on a priority list...This is something to set up right now and not at the time of the disaster. Now if the disaster is such that the whole area is impacted, it could well be that we'll lose a switch and you won't have service anyway.

The other thing you need to know is that all these coin-operated call boxes, no matter where they are, are listed on that essential line. So even in your agencies, please don't pick up your phone and when you have no dial tone immediately hit the return, because every time you hit that carriage return it classes as being a new call and is the same as putting the phone down and picking it up. It is those kinds of things that overload the switching mechanism that people come to think of as the phone service being 'out.' What we've actually found from the

Northridge earthquake and Hurricane Andrew is that if you can hold on to that phone long enough, in most cases you will get dial tone. We're so used to the dial tone already being there, that when it's not we start messing around with the phone. You may have to hold on to the phone for two or three minutes.

Having asked around and finding that as emergency managers this wasn't a focus, I think some of the suggestions I would have for you are:

- In all cases, go back and talk with your municipal emergency planning coordinator. That person is going to be your key for any emergency planning that you do. That person is your resource person. They're not going to come and sit down with you and write your emergency plan, but they'll be able to tell you where to get the resources. They may even have the information about when courses are being offered.
- The Justice Institute does lots of courses. You can get on the mailing list or call up the Emergency Management Division that Ross McIntyre is in and ask what courses are available. And I would also suggest that if there are enough of you wanting a very particular kind of course, as a group of associations approach the Justice Institute to actually develop those courses for you.
- You should also use the provincial emergency program. In the Lower Mainland and the Valley there are two or three areas... They are a resource for you. They have information and are also able to tell you what courses are available.
- There are organizations out there like EPICC (search for Emergency Preparedness for Industry and Commerce Council on the Internet). That's an association made up of government, utilities, insurance agencies, people who are doing their emergency preparedness plans--anyone that wants to be a member can join. They also provide information to their memberships. They have newsletters and they also put on courses.
- When you're talking to your emergency program people, there are several things you need to know. You need to know about alternative locations. Your municipality will have predefined locations that they'll want to use as a first point of call, whether it's a reception centre or an evacuation point. You need to talk to them and let them know the specialized needs that your community has. You may discover that your municipality can't address those needs, but may be able to if you work hand in hand with them. And if they can't, then you know that that's something that you're going to have to do. So who is it you contact? Maybe you're in a building that has a landlord. Go to your landlady, tell her the specialized, secure location that you need and how many people you might possibly need to have in there. Given the earlier presentations, you can probably estimate that your numbers are going to increase.
- From an emergency management point of view, what we have found is that we have a six-week window when an event happens, whether it's the earthquake in Kobe, Hurricane Andrew... We've all got programs that we want to happen, we've all got things that we need funding for—and nobody listens. But the minute there's an earthquake, you can get things in and everyone wants this to happen. Now in your instance, disasters for you include the Vernon massacre and the Montreal massacre. I'm sure the need for your services increase. So you might want to look at those kinds of windows of opportunity. If there is a disaster somewhere...if it works for your agency, use that as leverage to say

‘look, this is what we’re talking about, it could happen here, this is what we’ve been trying to tell you.’

- Make sure you have earthquake insurance, not just for your contents but to pay your staff and get yourselves alternative location.
- As groups with the like service you provide, maybe you want to do agreements in kind with your like organizations. If somebody has a bigger crisis than you, talk to them...It could even be a fire on the street that your building is on that doesn’t give you access to your building. Say ‘look, in the event of a major crisis or disaster, would you be able to take one of our people and give us one phone so that we could still have some kind of outreach?’
- Talk to your telephone service provider. There is a cost to it but you can get 1-800 numbers. They don’t have to work here in BC. If you’re a client, you don’t care if the actual switch is in Alberta, they’re using your phone number.

You need to think about those kinds of things. There are two more things I just want to touch on that have to do with funding. I think we need to be creative...If it’s not already on your agenda, through the courts and the Attorney General, you might want to put on the table questions of having the abusers pay money to your organizations that are supporting the people that they have abused, as part of their penalties. You represent a constituency of hundreds and thousands of women out there—get their signatures. If it means dedicating a volunteer to writing letters monthly, if you’ve got a few thousand letters each month going to your MLA or to Glen Clark, it’s got to have some effect. So let’s make the users pay for the services that we’re providing.

Last but not least, think about referenda so that you put the question to the populace in your municipality saying ‘Are you willing to spend an extra 50 cents per household per year to fund a group of women’s service providers?’

So those are some of the things that you can do. And from the emergency management perspective I would encourage you to immediately start talking to your municipal and your provincial emergency managers and coordinators.

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**“From the Margins to the Center: Women and Mitigation”** Dr. Elaine Enarson, Visiting Scholar, Disaster Preparedness Resources Centre, University of British Columbia.

What makes a community safer? Certainly structural mitigation like dikes and building materials, sound public policy and land use planning, international dialogue and collaboration, and innovative emergency communications technologies all play a part. But disaster reduction also means addressing root causes of vulnerability.

The 1990s brought a new focus on community development--if only to stretch scarce dollars beyond emergency relief to reduce future costs through more sustainable social and environmental development. NGOs argue from their field experience that effective long-term disaster recovery projects must be designed to empower as well as assist impacted groups. Whether in Afghanistan or British Columbia, recovery projects must enhance human, social, and ecological development and be designed with the active participation of locally vulnerable populations.

Yet hazards mitigation and management in Canada and the US is still largely regarded as the province of experts, certainly more technical and structural than “political” and well removed from the question of gender equality. I want to discuss an alternative vision today in which disaster mitigation is a project of social organization and social justice. In *Disaster Mitigation: A Community Based Approach*, Andrew Maskrey writes (1989:40):

[I]nstead of dealing only with the effects of hazards, mitigation must also address the underlying causes of vulnerability. In addition to physical measures such as reinforcing buildings or raising dykes, mitigation must become a developmental activity which focuses on factors such as land ownership, wealth distribution, rapid urbanisation, and the destruction of natural resources and seeks to address the real causes of poverty and underdevelopment. (emphasis added)

Because vulnerability theory recognizes gender inequality as a root cause of vulnerability, it follows that gender equity is a key development activity. *Gender-fair emergency management demands inclusive, democratic, and participatory models of community-based disaster mitigation which fully engage women not only as victims but as resourceful community actors.*

We are on the right track. The current view that “all mitigation is local” encourages flexible community networks, supported by different levels of government and with open membership. But, as a key US document on mitigation states, “the core would probably be those involved with local and state planning, natural resource and emergency management, business groups and technical specialists and scientists from appropriate public and private entities.” *Are you included? Are the women you represent or their interests represented?*

In contrast, gender-inclusive community-based mitigation is a grassroots people-based project, integrating disaster readiness into issues around which communities are already organizing, from sustainable resource management, fair housing, land rights, or barrier-free accommodation to violence against women. In this model, community organizing for more

egalitarian and sustainable societies is at the heart of both community development and disaster mitigation—and women’s active participation is essential to success.

To return to my original question, communities are safer and more disaster resilient when they are more *egalitarian*: when women and men work together across racial and class divisions than when women are unemployed because child care centres were flooded out or in battered women’s shelters because they bear the brunt of their partners’ despair. Disaster-resilience is advanced by working toward more egalitarian households, neighborhoods, and societies. Our communities are safer when they are *more integrated*: when people draw on informal networks and relationships to work together without the rule book and across cultural, political, generational, and gender barriers. Building networks and coalitions is essential to effective disaster mitigation. And our communities are safer when they are *more empowered*: when all the “stakeholders” have a voice and vulnerable groups sit at the table with planners to identify, articulate, and advocate for their own needs. Community organizing to empower marginalized populations mitigates disaster too.

### **Getting there from here: models from the US, Africa, and Pakistan**

In 1995, the Central American Resource Center and other community-based organizations in Los Angeles formed the **Emergency Preparedness and Response Network of Los Angeles**, California (ENLA). They were responding to hard-learned lessons:

The experiences from the last two major emergencies in LA, the civil unrest of April 29, 1992 and the Northridge Earthquake of Jan 17, 1994, have shown that low-income and minority communities need to be more prepared to respond to crisis situations. During disasters, these communities are hit the hardest and have fewer resources available to recover.

At that time, 32 agencies signed on and created Agreements of Collaboration providing for agencies to share services and assistance in case of disaster, from shelter and food to information. Later these agencies united as the Emergency Network of LA in order to: “enhance preparedness for and coordinated response to disasters by facilitating linkages among LA County Community-Based Organizations and Government and the Private Sector.” ENLA purchased first aid supplies like cots and ham radios and member agencies participate in quake education and preparedness trainings using ENLA’s multi-language booklets and videos.

Recognizing that the “people who are most at risk from disasters are the same people who are vulnerable in their everyday lives,” this grassroots group targets the poor, people living with disabilities, those unable to effectively advocate for themselves in English or who are undocumented. The network accomplishes its work through functional groups in such areas as food, homeless services, health services, etc. Responding to reports of women’s experiences in Miami and elsewhere, ENLA has recently added a women’s committee. They plan “to work to develop the disaster awareness and skills of organizations that serve women,” noting that women provide “a large part of the leadership in formal and informal human service networks on a day-to-day basis” and that women’s organizations “offer a natural and effective means to transmit recovery information to many women who would otherwise be outside the information loop.” This regional coalition is an excellent model of community-based and gender-sensitive disaster mitigation.

**Women Will Rebuild Miami** was an ad hoc women's coalition which emerged in response to the gendered politics of recovery after Hurricane Andrew—specifically, the elite male-dominated private group (We Will Rebuild). This informal group was responsible for distributing millions of dollars in private donations and, later, government relief funds. With origins in a local feminist collective, Women Will Rebuild criticized the exclusionary practices of the good-old-boy network and its priorities. Over 40 women's organizations eventually joined the coalition, which came to represent all major ethnic, political, religious, and social groups in the area. Adopting consensual decision-making and seeking ethnic diversity, the group worked to increase women's representation on the We Will Rebuild executive committee and to target ten percent of all donations to meet the needs of women and children. While neither goal was met, most participants concurred when interviewed five years later that women's needs during and after a major disaster would never again be invisible. Gender bias was identified as a barrier in disaster relief and new bonds were formed between women from many different communities in Miami.

Women Will Rebuild is an excellent example of disaster reduction through community building—mitigating the impacts of future hurricanes by raising the salience of gender issues in disaster, bringing disaster issues to women's organizations, and laying the groundwork for more integrated response among women and between women's groups and other relief groups.

**PATTAN** is an NGO working in flood-prone areas of South Asia. Recognizing that the normal conditions of daily life (e.g., economic dependence, social invisibility, low employment rates, limited mobility, and marginalization from village decision-making) made floods especially hard on women, the agency addressed these conditions in their relief work. They hired a gender-balanced staff, trained them in gender issues, and formed women-only village committees when they found local village committees dominated by male elites. Local women were given responsibility for distributing food and were registered as the heads of household. This entitled them to receive food items directly, helping to ensure that aid reached women and children in need and protecting women from sexual harassment at the hands of men distributing relief supplies.

PATTAN also implemented an innovative rehousing strategy. Local women were trained in basic book-keeping and given responsibility for handling cash and record-keeping as housing loans were repaid. Their input was solicited into the design of new houses. Most significantly, postdisaster homes financed through PATTAN loans were co-owned by wives and husbands. This strategy both assisted families and empowered women: “When my husband fights with me and tells me to leave the house, I turn around and tell him that he cannot do it since the house belongs to me too” (South Asian Women: Facing Disasters, Securing Life: 60). Housing insecurity was reduced and women have developed new individual and collective strengths. This is an excellent example of how gender-fair disaster mitigation left a flooded community more disaster-resilient.

Finally, a recent workshop conducted in ten Southern African countries illustrates the utility of gender analysis in grassroots mitigation. Projects described in **Reducing Risk: Participatory Learning Activities for Disaster Mitigation in Southern Africa** (Astrid von Kotze and Ailsa Holloway, 1996) brought practitioners and relief workers together in drought-prone areas for six one-week workshops. Adopting an adult community education model of

participatory learning, workshop leaders integrated gender analysis into every aspect of mitigation training.

For example, trainers taught the process of household risk assessment by distributing cards based on real households in Ghana, including single women with and without tools, livestock, and other resources. Participants were asked to decide in 30 minutes which households should be eligible for drought relief loans. They were then asked to analyze the gender and power dynamics of their collective decision-making process. Who spoke most and least? What criteria were used to distribute aid? When they studied community vulnerabilities and resources, workshop participants were also asked to use their own life experience and draw time lines displaying the gendered division of labor. This innovative community education project brings gender issues from the margin to the center of grassroots mitigation and is an excellent model for similar projects in developed countries like Canada and the US.

### **Implications: for disaster scholarship, practice, and community organizing**

A gender-aware model of grassroots mitigation implies *new research partners and new research questions*. We need more research on the root causes of vulnerability in developed and affluent countries. What political, social, economic, racial, and gender structures produce these patterns and how can our disaster planning address them? What models can be identified of women's mobilization around hazard and disaster? What best practices can we document of disaster organizations proactively responding to gender bias and of community organizations undertaking emergency planning? We need more collaborative and action research involving dialogue between practitioners, vulnerable communities, and academics.

We must also *develop new partnerships between emergency practitioners and community groups*. Although women may be active neighborhood volunteers and will certainly be central actors as disasters unfold in real homes and neighborhoods, they rarely have a collective presence in mitigation projects. Planning networks must extend beyond traditional partners like the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and interfaith response groups, to include hotlines, food banks, homeless coalitions, environmental groups, and women's groups. Among the latter, practitioners should network with:

- groups representing women especially vulnerable to disaster, e.g. minority-language speakers, single mothers, frail seniors
- agencies serving women in crisis, e.g. victims of violence, homeless women, women in shelter
- coalitions of child care centres and of family day care providers
- women's health care provider organizations
- women's educational organizations (parents; teachers)
- local chapters of national women's organizations (university, service, professional, business and labor organizations)

Grassroots women's groups can contribute to mitigation by documenting the specific needs of locally vulnerable women; identifying the resources of local women's services and groups (from trained crisis line staff to physical space or national resources); raising women's disaster awareness; and sharing community knowledge and oral history with emergency

planners. We need practitioners at the local level who represent and can work with diverse constituencies.

Finally, *women's services need to take up the challenge of disaster planning* because it will be part of our future or of those we care about. We need to inform ourselves about local hazards and specific conditions creating vulnerability and learn about existing emergency plans, personnel, and resources. We should assess how our own efforts and goals relate, for example, to environmental risk or housing issues. We need to proactively identify and address our internal agency vulnerability, taking a lead role to model emergency planning for other community-based organizations. We need to insist that our funding agencies support this effort toward sustainable community development. We need coalitions at the local and regional levels between seniors, the disabled, migrant workers, low-income families, indigenous communities and others likely to be hard-hit in future floods, earthquakes, or hazardous spills.

Each new disaster is a wake-up call—a strong reminder that we must not continue the past into the future. In developed as well as emerging societies, and in academia, emergency management, and women's services alike, women's expertise and leadership is essential as we shift from disaster aid to disaster reduction through sustainable development.

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***“Hard Lessons Learned in Manitoba: A Personal Account” Susan Goyer, Ritchot, Manitoba***

I started as a volunteer during the 1996 flood. I was a single woman, back at university, retraining as a physiotherapist to get back into the workforce so I could support my three kids and myself. We were still recovering from the flood of 1996 when we got hit with the blizzard of '97 and then the flood of 1997. I started, like every other disaster manager that I hear about here, as a volunteer.

Before the flood, I identified the vulnerable people in my community who were being overlooked and ignored. I started phoning the municipality and organizing to get them help. I knew the die was cast the day our road got cut off. I was in the middle of building a 30,000-sandbag dike and our road washed out. I had to leave my home and go down and spend four and half-hours trying to locate somebody who would say ‘I am in charge.’ I did this because I needed to rescue 200 volunteers off our road. I had high school students trying to walk off a road that was 4 feet deep in rushing water full of icebergs. I needed to get four armed personnel carriers and a troop carrier to come back and do this rescue. It took me four and a half hours. I started with Water Resources, the RCMP, the municipal leaders, and the army. No one was in charge; there was no chain of command. This was 1997. This was our second flood in two years.

We had an emergency plan in our municipality. Nobody worked the Plan. It fell apart. We had staff—I think seven people—who were trying to run a disaster plan for 5,000. They did not know where to second people from. We looked in envy at the City of Winnipeg with all of its resources. Later we received criticism from our provincial emergency management organization because the municipality “never asked for help.” My municipal councilor says that they did ask for help.

I have become the middleman, mediating between our community and some of the government officials as well as the municipality. Some days I just want to go—no more secrets, I do not want any more secrets. I have people saying “We did this and they didn’t” or the government will come to me and say “Susan, you need to go to your municipality and stress to them that they need to invite us in to do preparedness training in your community.” So I went to my local leader and said, “[She] wants to come and do training. When can we arrange for her to come?” And [he], the local coordinator said, “You can’t plan for a disaster. How would we plan for a disaster?” Another said, “We’ll do it ourselves. What can they teach us?” I was thinking, “Look in the mirror. We just spent 30 million dollars trying to clean up this municipality and only \$5 million to prepare.” The arrogance on both sides is sometimes appalling.

And so because the Rural Municipality was disorganized... during the next flood I feel that the main problem is going to be a lack of trust in government. Our residents are solid prairie folk. They have lived there for generations. Some families have owned their land since the 1800s. Sure, some of us are new but lots are pioneers who have an oral history. They know by the current where the water comes from. They know when it should come. But nobody asked them. They are the users of the system but they are never consulted from the top down.

Now fortunately, the Manitoba Water Commission did hold local meetings on a regional basis and they heard us. Two weeks ago they released their report. They invited myself and a few others to come in for a special debriefing before we held our own press conference. They

*heard* what we had to say. And they *strongly* recommended that for all future planning, the users of the system be consulted. That is just such a huge step forward for us if it happens

I had seven feet of water on the main floor of my home. I lost part of my home. I lost my job. I lost a dear friend who died of a heart attack while evacuating his family. I lost a year of my life. And so, as part of the evolution, I started being an advocate for the community. The very first thing I did when I was evacuated was, with Laurie Allen who is now the chairman of our Action Committee, organize the Red River Drive Community Association. We recognized that we were just a group of homes, almost 300 families, south of Winnipeg. We are not a town; we are not a village. We are not on the map. We are really no man's land. We were a bedroom community to Winnipeg. We were just a group of people sharing the same space.

Now, that being said there were several groups in our community who were interconnected families. Initially when I was hired as the re-entry coordinator, several of the groups of people that I had to work with consisted of three and four generations: great-grandmother, grandmother, children, and grandchildren. And so if you have five or six homes in an area where they are all from the same interconnected family they cannot help each other. I called into Winnipeg one day pre-flood and said "I need volunteers out here for sandbagging." "Where do you live?" "South of Winnipeg." "Do you pay Winnipeg taxes" "No." "Well, find your own volunteers." I said, "I can't! Our whole area is going to flood and we can't ask our extended families to help because they all live here. We're trying our best but we are all flooding." And the phone hung up and that was the end of that. Winnipeg was flooding this year so a lot of our last year's volunteers went into Winnipeg. It was a real problem and in consequence the trust of the residents of Ritchot and the Red River Valley was severely eroded. There was also a lot of conflict over the duties of the military and again another level of trust was eroded.

It became very evident that the policy makers need to consult with the users of the system in order to find out what is going on at the grassroots level and to make decisions about what really needs to be done. It has to be done in a safe climate where you are not afraid of the backlash. I was an advocate for my community and I have to tell you that in October I received \$257 in compensation when I put in \$10,000 in bills. My file was permanently "lost" for two months—it just did not matter who I phoned, when I phoned, my file was gone. So—is that a coincidence, or was that because I was the local advocate? I do not know.

We had money pouring into the Valley to help, most of it under the auspices of the Red Cross. We had a similar problem as described by another speaker in Miami after Hurricane Andrew. We had a committee chaired by a local lawyer with several prominent businessmen who sat on that committee and a flood victim or two. They developed a computer model of how they were going to help us all out, and it quickly became apparent that they identified the vulnerable and the needy as needing help. But how do you define vulnerable and needy?

For those that had over \$100,000 worth of assets and damage, you were identified as being very capable. You had the capacity to recover, and you were "resilient." It did not matter that this was your second flood. It did not matter that you were 50 years old and taking on a \$100,000 mortgage; that means you are paying a mortgage until you're 70. It does not matter that you're 60 years old—you could dip into your retirement income. If you were 50, you could dip into your children's university savings. You were "capable." You had the capacity to

recover. You were “self-resilient.” I would say to them, “You know, we have to redefine ‘self-resilient.’ I went to several conferences—at Floodnet I heard researchers say, “Oh, those people at higher economic and educational levels—we don’t have to worry about them. They have the capacity to recover, they are self-resilient.” But that is not always the case. In our particular farming community, we found that at the end of the charity monies there were some great inequities and in fact I believe that reverse discrimination occurred. And of course there are always those who can work the system to their advantage. I sincerely hope that we can re-examine the use of this model and make some positive changes for the next flood or disaster. Some of the residents really felt that they were being penalized for having a low debt load and for having amassed assets, and two-parent income families felt particularly targeted. They were working hard and this was their reward.

Now, when I was first hired as the re-entry coordinator it was because I was identified as the community volunteer. I asked my municipal councilor, “Why are you picking on me to do this horrendous job of getting 272 families back into an area that was devastated by 10 and 15 feet of water?” We boated for three weeks. The water sat in our homes, soaked up by every fiber of wood. And he said, “Because you built a good dike.” He liked the way that I consulted an engineer; I did my research, and built a good dike. That was all the experience I needed to become the re-entry coordinator!

And you know I very foolishly—mother that I am—took it on. To me it was like a big sandbox. I had this huge area that I had to work with. Over here were the boys and their toys: I had four contracting companies, the front-end loaders, the cats and the bobcats with grapples as well as dumpsters. I learned all about government machine rates and how to be a very careful construction boss because some of these fellows would overcharge to make up for the rates. Over there I have the friends and the relatives, all of the residents and their families. And over here I have the kids. We had to worry about the children because families were fragmented. They went to the reception centers and then they were sent off to wherever they were to stay in temporary housing for the next month, two months, or even a year. Families were split up. Parents were physically and emotionally unavailable to look after their children. So we had to take on some of that, looking after the children, setting up summer camps, setting up day care centers.

The mothers were horrendously over-loaded. The men went off to war; they went off to hunt and do their thing. I am sorry to generalize, but you know we have been watching this pattern emerge. The women stayed home and tended the fire. They gathered the food and carried water and they made sure they had a roof over their heads, whether it was a mobile home or an apartment. They had to rebuild their houses and homes. They had to deal with all of the home bonding issues. Some people are feeling very guilty right now. “They’re getting these beautiful houses with brand-new everything in them; shouldn’t they feel really lucky?” No, they don’t. They feel guilty. They feel guilty because they are not grateful; they just want what they used to have.

I said to this one 82-year old lady who had her devastated home rebuilt by Mennonite Disaster Services, “Well, how are you liking your new home?” She replied, “Susan, I’m like the cat. I just keep looking around for the old couch.” She’s 82. She got out with her car, her cat, and her purse. That is all she that got to take with her. She lost everything that she owned. Her

sister, who lived in a mobile home at the end of my road, was in the hospital having a hip replacement. Her whole family was flooding—sister, nieces, children, grandchildren, everybody. Nobody took care of her trailer and she lost everything that she had collected over 85 years. And yet saying that—two weeks ago I had the opportunity to talk to a woman in our area who lost part of her very large home filled with items from her world travels. She seemed to identify that it was safe to talk. She confided how much it all hurt. And I heard how the stress of the flood was compounding the grief of the death of her daughter many years ago. Apparently she feels isolated because she has so much financially that there is nobody that she could talk to or share her hurt with. They would not understand because she had enough money and so she had “everything she needed.” It seems that there are very few people who understand her emotional needs.

That is something that has really come out as this year has gone on. The flood was over—Mayor Susan Thompson rang the bell, everybody honked his or her horns at noon on Friday and the flood was declared over. And so as it faded from people’s minds and our community struggled on and on and on. We started to feel more and more isolated and more and more vulnerable. “What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I get over it?” And particularly for the women, because they had to look after their husbands, their children, their normal house accounts, their EMO account, their Water Resources account and their business account. They had to go and buy whatever they needed for their temporary home and also their new house and make a thousand decisions every day if they were rebuilding. They had to make the decisions that kept them going in their apartment or their mobile home. They were literally exhausted and worn out, and there was nobody that they felt safe turning to. If they would go out to work and talk on coffee break, people would turn on them and accuse them of expecting the government to look after them. People started to feel very, very isolated quite early on. And we learned that if you do not have your losses publicly acknowledged and if they are not socially validated, it really compounds the grief that you feel. As well you are busy working hard day after day in your community only to look up one day to find that a lot of your community is gone. I have lost three neighbors off my street and I do not have a very big street. They have relocated along with 37 others from my immediate community. We all have our noses to the grindstones. We have to rebuild our lives, our homes and our businesses in a lot of cases. At the same time we struggle to keep our families together. There is not a lot of time to connect with others and to share our feelings.

So what we learned as a community is that we have to stop living in isolation—no man is an island. We need to understand that we are a community and that we need to live within the shelter of each other. We do have a lot to offer each other within our greater community. So we have started to do that, through the resurrection of a community hall for which we are now raising money to relocate so that it can be flood-proofed. Air Canada workers came from Montreal and rebuilt it for us last summer.

I really cannot over-emphasize the need for childcare workers. I worked 18-hour days, seven days a week, for several months on end and my children were left to fend for themselves. My community initially promised that they would like after my kids while I worked but by that promise soon went by the board. There was no trauma team in place. It took three and a half months from the date of the blizzard to get a psychosocial team in place working to

offer emotional support in our community. They had workers in Winnipeg at the reception center, but when we moved home there was nobody there to help us re-enter the flooded community.

It seemed that there were so many decisions that were reactive. There was no one who stepped back and took a proactive planning role. I was always told “There is no time, Susan. You expect too much from us.” But I think in any disaster, somewhere, somehow, someone has to step back from the action and be looking ahead weeks and months in order to do the necessary proactive planning. We could have saved so much time and money and effort.

The other part of my “sandbox” was the volunteers; Green Teams, the Floodbuster students, the Mennonite Disaster Service, the Christian Reform World Church, 100 Huntley Street, and those who came from all over North America to help us. Someone had to coordinate with them, somebody had to find them places to work and supervise what was going on. Somebody had to watch out for the *safety* of all of our workers and our residents. There was no safety officer; no one checked the homes before we went back into them and a lot of them were very structurally unsound because basements were full of water and starting to cave in as they drained. I tried my best while working with the volunteers because we had a lot of mold and a lot of refrigerators and freezers full of rotten food. There was the potential for a lot of lung damage. I was coughing up blood by the middle of July. We all had to make sure that we were wearing proper facemasks and gloves while looking after our health. It is so easy when you get tired and caught up in the moment to ignore your health but we were ultimately responsible for those volunteers coming in from across Canada. Unfortunately we did not have a safety officer anywhere who was identified to do that work. It was just what we thought to do as we were working on a day-to-day basis.

Now I have to tell you, that out of the five or six major agency players in our area, the bulk of the work was supervised by four or five very assertive, aggressive, competitive women. These women really kicked butt. They got the job done and I was really proud of them. I learned a lot working with these women. But while I really felt that they were the ones that got the work done I did worry about their families and their potential for burnout.

I acted as a catalyst a lot of the time between the community, the various agencies and the government. I still fulfill that role today as executive coordinator for the North Ritchot Restoration Community Committee. We have made a lot of changes. We have learned to work with the media and know that the media can be very manipulative. They want to report the sensational negative things but we have learned to try and use them to report the good things. And one of the good things we did that was reported nationally, that you heard about here in BC, was our ladies’ and men’s retreats.

We started to recognize this past February that the women were caving in under the load that they were carrying and so Lorraine Bergmann, another coordinator, decided that we needed to hold a retreat. Initially we thought that we would try to register 20 women. We applied for some funding and, before you knew it, there were 30 women and then 40. In the end we held two different retreats for 86 women in total. There’s a third retreat planned for another 36 women. I was also instrumental in initiating a men’s retreat. It’s being held in two weeks and it is for 20 men.

We arranged for a team to come and offer Raike and therapeutic touch, we offered free massages and raffled off 12 manicures. I was scared to death that we were going to open Pandora's box--you now, we would get these women together and the story telling might open up the emotional floodgates. I worried that we needed to have a plan in place to help women with debriefing—because everyone has been too busy working to debrief. That is something that has not really happened. So Lorraine and I hired some facilitators to help with this. To start with we needed to know how to process grief. And then identify where we are today emphasizing our strengths. What can you draw on? Let's have something hopeful! And then we identified envisioning the future. We know from the research done on the Holocaust and Vietnam that what keeps victims going and turns them into survivors is being able to envision their future. What will there be at the end of the road? What is your light at the end of the tunnel? Yes, you are going to be able to move on someday. And it's real, it's tangible, it's there, you can feel it. You can smell it. Unfortunately, I can still smell the flood even if it is all in my mind! But hopefully some day we will all be able to smell the flowers – of course only after we replant them all. But that is another problem – loss of genetic rootstock and our familiar landscape.

So that is what we left the women with. - A vision for their future. We had a three-day retreat in a hotel, with a pool and weight room, coffee shop, nice meals, karioke machine, and massages. An amazing number of women had never had a massage. They were *so* grateful. And it was free. We did it through student masseuses. The feedback we got was incredible. They want more. Where are we going to get the funding? The Red Cross is leaving at the end of the month, and we are going to have to be very creative to find out where the funding can come from.

If we can send these women back home to their families, strong, productive and hopeful then the families will become strong, hopeful and productive and so will their communities. I think that by identifying the women as the major caregivers in the community we have done a really wonderful piece of work to ensure the survival of these communities over the next several years—hopefully, before the next flood hits!

Unfortunately let me tell you about the local store - liquor is running through it like a river. Liquor comes in our community one day and flows out the next. Substance abuse is high and marital discord is high. Marriage retreats have been well attended and more are planned. I do not know about domestic violence. This has been really interesting for me. I am going to go back with open eyes and start looking around to find out where that piece fits for us.

I have to tell you that the residents have been very concerned that monies were well spent. However, I never once heard the words 'sustainable development' used by anyone in government, but I sure know that the residents were really concerned that a lot of the mitigation measures that we are doing right now are *not* sustainable development. Building 15-foot high hills and 30-foot deep ponds in order to flood-proof is not sustainable development. We need to be looking at other means of protecting these communities. And some of these have been identified and they seem sensible.

The one major lesson for me is that no one offered care to the caregivers. There was very little debriefing done. There were very few meetings to allow the caregivers to identify the loads that they were carrying and to caution them against working these crazy hours for days on

end, and urging them to take the time off and get the space they needed. People gave 500% to this project. While it is commendable, the burnout is horrendous and the burnout just impacts back on the residents through the silencing response.

The other lesson learned is that we cannot invite workers out to work in these disaster areas without ensuring that they have some understanding of post traumatic stress syndrome and how to deal with victims and survivors of disaster while understanding what they have been through. This includes treating the residents with respect and listening to their local knowledge and their wisdom. Workers need to respect the wisdom of the people that they are working with. This did not always happen.

And the third lesson learned is that we had real trouble communicating with each other during and after the disaster. We are going to get some funding and set up a website on a dedicated computer run out of the RM. It will have a variety of different functions. We will be able to use it to advertise a lot of the things that others and we have done here during this disaster. We will be able to communicate with residents and get them more involved in their local government. Hopefully this will require our local government to be more accountable and responsible. It is my belief that this is how we need to rebuild the trust that was eroded during the flood, by getting people more involved in local government. It will also help educate the community about disaster preparedness.

Communication is a real difficult thing to do post-disaster. You have people living out of the immediate neighborhood, all the regular channels are disrupted, there are not enough people around to spread the word, and people stop coming to the local events. We had a lot of helpful seminars or workshops in the first year. But a lot of the residents were too busy working, too busy surviving. It got real basic. It got real basic for me. At night I would go to bed wondering - where am I going to get clean water? Is my septic system going to keep working? (In fact it's being dug up right now as I speak.) Do you have a roof over your head? I moved five times in five months. Do you have clothes? Is your family together? So when people are worried about those basics they are not going to the trauma talk or the other wonderful workshops that were set up for us. We need them now, a year later. Unfortunately, our funding is up for our trauma team and they are leaving the area. And people are just now at the stage where they are lifting their heads and saying "Oh, gee, I really need to go talk to someone, I really need some help." Now they are open to this help but it is almost too late.

Suicides—we know that suicides are on the increase but nobody talks about them. Somebody asked a speaker from Grand Forks at our conference, "were there suicides?" He said "Yes, but we've chosen not to advertise them." I guess if you tell people that suicide is an option that means that they are going to do it! I know that's a myth, but this is the thinking—let's not talk about suicide because we are all going to go out there and imitate it. But we have had a completed suicide in Manitoba and we have had several attempted suicides and people tell you that they are thinking about it – often. Finally, in late February/early March we had a suicide workshop for the workers in the area to recognize and be more alert and responsive to the needs of those people who are at that level of distress and despair.

Marital break-up is a real problem and I am certainly going to inquire about domestic violence. Unfortunately in our smaller, religious communities—and I know it's there, I'm not

fooling myself--we do not have local shelters, and I know it's going to be really well hidden. We are going to have to find some way to provide a safe outlet for people to seek help.

The last thing I would leave you with is, to paraphrase Larry Whitney... In our area we have many hills and ring dikes so we focus a lot on flood forecasting and water levels. But floods are not just about engineers. They are about people. And it is not the magnitude of the losses that people experience that affect them the most - what I think affects people the most is having lost a sense of control over your own destiny. And so, if we as policy-makers or advisors to the system can allow the users of the system to voice their wisdom, voice their local knowledge, have a say in what is being done for them, then that that will mitigate the magnitude of the losses that they are feeling. A sense of control will give them the ability to envision a future for themselves and enable them to walk on and work towards that future. We really have to turn on and tune in to the eternal optimism that we all have as human beings. Thank you.

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### **WORKSHOPS**

This conference brought together a diverse group of emergency planners, responders, women's services, academics and others. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four introductory group discussions for responses from the field to conference presentations. Following this first general workshop, participants selected one of four thematic workshops to attend for both days.

After brief presentations by panelists, workshop participants explored both general issues and specific change strategies. Workshop facilitators made presentations to the general audience summarizing the issues raised during the first day, and, on the second day, the specific recommendations put forward by the group. *Participatory workshop discussions were the basis of the conference recommendations.*

#### **A. Women Emergency Managers And The Disaster Workplace (Day 2: “Changing organizational culture and practice”)**

Facilitated by Ruth Harding, Regional Emergency Planning Coordinator, Greater Vancouver Regional District. Panelists: Amber Teed, Nus Whunee Training; Rosanna von Sacken, Manager, North East Sector Emergency Program.

Of main interest to volunteers and professionals in emergency management and response, the workshop begins with brief presentations from experienced women practitioners. Panelists and participants will consider how, or whether, the workplace culture supports women or men in nontraditional roles, learn what draws different women to various kinds of emergency work, and identify opportunities for change as well as barriers. Do women bring different perspectives, issues, skills or concerns? What would gender-balanced emergency management look like? The discussion will also consider organizational responses to issues raised by gender integration.

Q: What draws women to emergency work and why? How did you get started? How has gender shaped your work experiences?

Q: Is there a “glass ceiling” or a “sticky floor” for women in emergency management? For which women, and why? Are men in emergency management typecast?

Q: How do gender stereotypes impact the daily routines of your agency? Does this make a difference for employees, volunteers, or the public?

Q: Who supports nontraditional roles for women in emergency organizations? How? Why?

Q: What barriers exist to change in your agency? Who or what have you seen work effectively to broaden opportunities?

#### **B. Work and Family in Disasters: Caring for Caregivers and Responders. (Day 2: “Supporting caregivers and responders: institutional models”)**

Facilitated by Mary Clappa, President, Epicentre Inc. Panelists: Brenda Fox, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Ministry of Human Resources, Emergency Social Services; Brenda Broughton, Director, Employee Assistance Program, Family Services of Greater Vancouver; Delaine Milette, Assistant Coordinator, Victim Services

This workshop is geared both to traditional disaster responders and to agencies and individuals likely to become informal responders. Panelists will set the stage by identifying work/family issues for women as voluntary responders in the home and community and through Emergency Social Services. How significant is women's work behind the scenes and in support of male responders? Who supports women or women's services in crisis? What gender issues arise for men as emergency responders and family members? The discussion will include strategies for supporting both formal and informal caregivers and responders, male and female.

Q: In your experience, what kinds of disaster work (paid and/or unpaid) do women and men take on and why? How does this impact family life?

Q: Who in practice provides voluntary or paid emergency care to disaster victims? What problems arise for them before, during, and after an emergency, and why?

Q: How do family roles support and/or complicate your own work?

Q: How has your agency dealt with potentially conflicting work and family responsibilities? Has this been effective for co-workers, managers, and/or family?

Q: How can dual-career emergency couples (nurse/firefighter) plan to respond both to family and to disaster?

Q: How can communities support nonprofits and other informal responding agencies through the crisis and recovery periods? Who are these informal responders?

### **#3: Gender Issues in Emergency Relief (Day 2: "Gender-sensitive emergency response: action plans for agencies")**

Facilitated by Lynn Orstad, Emergency Coordinator, City of Richmond. Panelists: Cynthia Davis, Coordinator, Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre; Doreen Myers, Executive Director, BC Emergency Social Services Association

Emergency responders and representatives from women's services will take a "nuts and bolts" look at crisis relief for women in crisis. Do women and men have distinct needs for emergency assistance? How will your agency meet the needs of women across cultures, in different stages of life, and with different personal resources? What can women's grassroots service agencies contribute to emergency response, and what will their own needs be? Panelists will draw on

their field experience and community work to identify key issues, barriers, resources, and models for change.

Q: How does gender influence the experiences of women and men providing emergency relief? How has your gender interacted with other life experiences or conditions as you have responded to various local and/or distant emergencies?

Q: Do women and men have any different disaster experiences or different needs for assistance? If so, why and what are they?

Q: How does gender influence the experiences of women and men applying for or receiving emergency relief? Are the specific needs of both women and men met? How do you know?

Q: How well does your agency meet the needs of women across cultures, in different stages of life, with different personal resources? How are women victims engaged in various aspects of relief operations?

Q: What concrete actions would make a difference, for example for responding to a battered woman in a transition house, a minority-language speaker with an elderly parent, or transient women in your area?

Q: How are victim services and other grassroots groups likely to be involved in emergency relief work and with what capacities and needs?

#### **#4: Gender Issues in Preparedness, Recovery, and Mitigation (Day 2: “Working with women toward disaster-resilient communities”)**

Facilitated by Laurie Pearce, UBC School of Community and Regional Planning. Panelists: Tracy Porteous, BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs; Janice Murray, North Vancouver school preparedness volunteer.

Taking a longer view, this workshop will examine women’s potential and existing roles before disaster and through long-term recovery and prevention. Panelists will discuss how women in their homes and neighborhood, emergency agencies, and community organisations are presently engaged in disaster preparedness and how they contribute to the long-term recovery of disaster survivors. What structures or resources currently support their work, what gaps exist, and how can women’s resources be more fully utilized? Women’s participation is essential in the effort to build disaster-resilient communities. Toward that end, the workshop will develop strategies for increased disaster readiness in women’s services and for more gender-aware disaster planning and mitigation.

Q: Which women are most at risk in your community? How does your agency assess the vulnerability of various groups of women at the local level, and how is this information utilized?

- Q: How are women in your community involved in disaster readiness, if they are? What formal or informal roles do they play in long-term recovery?
- Q: What does disaster mitigation mean? How, in your experience, does it impact the daily lives of women and men?
- Q: How are grassroots women's organizations (e.g. religious, educational, service, social, political groups) involved in disaster planning locally? Victims' services? Governmental women's bureaus? What strategies would increase their collaboration with formal responders and emergency planners?
- Q: What can women in the community contribute to better preparing households, organizations and communities for disaster? Which women and why? How does your agency engage them?

**A CALL TO ACTION:  
Meeting The Needs Of Women in Disaster**

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*To increase the visibility of women's vulnerabilities and resources in disaster and enhance effective response to their needs, we recommend:*

1. Women speaking out strongly within their own organizations to voice their views and create a climate for change;
2. Fully engaging women in proactive planning for violence-free and culturally-sensitive disaster response in every community;
3. Women participating in developing emergency plans within their agencies and reviewing, evaluating, and amending existing emergency plans, if any;
4. Community-based hazard assessment identifying the location and specific needs of vulnerable women and children, among them women living with disabilities, mental illness, or serious medical problems, senior women, new immigrant women, minority-language speakers, single mothers, poor and low-income women and others;
5. Extended and culturally-appropriate post-disaster responses, including long-term recovery outreach teams and alternative mental health models such as healing circles;
6. Developing and distributing emergency response materials in different languages and geared to different communities, including deaf and impaired-hearing women and others with special needs;
7. Funding to support Canadian research into the role of gender in the planning, response, and recovery activities of emergency responders, planners, volunteers, and the community at large;
8. Implementing a national mitigation strategy with the active participation of women, taking into account women's visions of more sustainable communities and gender issues in community planning and emergency response;
9. Facilitating women's participation in developing post-disaster recovery and reconstruction plans empowering to women, including providing child care at community meetings;
10. Integrating gender analysis into existing and new emergency management training at the provincial and national levels;
11. Distributing through traditional and new media the proceedings and

recommendations of this conference to all relevant provincial and federal agencies and to women's service organizations throughout the province.

***To integrate women's services into all aspects of emergency management at the local, provincial, and national levels, we recommend:***

1. Including women's services as full and equal partners in community-based emergency planning, contributing their knowledge and expertise to more effective emergency response;
2. Developing a workbook for women's organizations undertaking emergency planning, including specific guidelines and resources, information on individual preparedness, local emergency management resources and structures, and relevant gender and cultural issues;
3. Employing diverse media and delivery strategies to educate women's organizations that serve disaster-vulnerable groups about community-specific hazards, existing resources and response plans, and other aspects of emergency management;
4. Developing or extending existing and new organizational partnerships, for example between emergency managers, women's services, and regional health care agencies.

***To address emergency planning issues specifically impacting violence against women services, we recommend:***

1. Innovative strategies to assist antiviolence programs with in-house emergency planning, including an emergency planning workbook geared to specific issues confronting these programs in the event of a major community disaster;
2. Producing and distributing to governmental and community agencies a comprehensive report educating social and human service planners and emergency responders about the social impacts of disaster on women, including the risk of increased violence;
3. Implementing proactive agreements with provincial and federal agencies which provide post-disaster financial assistance to ensure that timely and adequate financial resources are available for antiviolence organizations responding to increased service demands in the aftermath of disaster;
4. Revising relevant provincial brochures and materials to include information on the likely social and psychological effects of disaster, including increased violence;

5. Incorporating violence issues into training materials for mental health disaster outreach teams and developing mutual aid agreements between women's services and mental health agencies;
6. Developing alternative plans for women unable to safely access existing evacuation sites;
7. Initiating agreements with BC PEP and lifeline services such as BC Tel to maintain accessible services by according priority status to crisis lines during disaster;
8. Implementing mutual aid agreements among neighbouring antiviolence services to foster timely crisis and recovery assistance to hard-hit programs and services;
9. Arranging for inspection and evaluation of the physical facilities of women's services in seismic regions;
10. Educating and preparing staff and volunteers in women's services for their personal safety and for more effective assistance to others.

***To support women in emergency management and women's service roles across organizations and agencies, we recommend:***

1. Increasing opportunities for formal and informal networking between women's services and emergency planners and responders at the local level;
2. Creating opportunities for informal mentoring, job exchange and other initiatives which will increase communication between women emergency managers and women's service providers;
3. Developing a BC PEP-hosted web-site and using existing women's service web-sites to share information and increase electronic networking between women's services and women emergency managers.

***To support and sustain women undertaking voluntary relief work, we recommend:***

1. Developing a comprehensive informational packet and video about how relief workers and their families are likely to be impacted by this work;
2. Providing public recognition and other incentives for employers who support the voluntary relief work of their employees, and informational materials for unions and business encouraging proactive policies and procedures, e.g. protecting the vacation time of employees accepting emergency relief assignments, and financial assistance with out-of-pocket expenses such as child care;
3. Increasing local support for the families of emergency response workers on

assignment, for example neighborhood family networking, meals-on-wheels assistance through local religious and non-religious organizations, and contact through the emergency assignment between the sending organization and the relief worker's family;

4. Encouraging a range of comprehensive child care options for the families of emergency response workers, to be provided by the sending organization or employer, or available on-site as appropriate;

5. Funding extended trauma teams to provide response workers with long-term, confidential mental health services as needed, to be provided through task numbers assigned by the Provincial Emergency Program under the terms of the Emergency Program Act;

6. Mandating on-site crisis counseling and critical incident stress debriefing for all relief workers, and effective orientation of incoming relief workers by those departing.