

# Empowering first responders: the importance of training

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Emergency services workers are the backbone of emergency response efforts. But are they adequately prepared to navigate the complexities of gender dynamics during disasters?

As an accredited trainer with Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAUS), I've observed a concerning trend; the underutilisation of lessons in disaster training by first responders, in particular male first responders. It's time to confront this and understand why this training is essential for all emergency workers including first responders.

GADAUS offers a Lessons in Disaster training package that delves deep into the profound effects of gendered expectations before, during and after disasters. Have you considered or thought about what is expected of you as a male first responder? Are you comfortable with these expectations and can you consistently meet them? The evidence suggests that rigid notions of masculinity can significantly influence the behaviour of male first responders, often to the detriment of individuals, families and communities. These behaviours include:

- emotional stoicism - suppressing emotions and appearing stoic in the face of adversity
- aggression and dominance - men should be aggressive and dominant
- avoidance of help-seeking behaviour - being discouraged from seeking help or showing vulnerability, not accessing medical or mental health services
- homophobia and transphobia - adhering to rigid masculine stereotypes that can lead to discrimination against individuals who are not perceived to fit within narrow confines, including gay and transgender men
- limited roles in parenting and caregiving - limiting men's involvement in caregiving and parenting roles.

The training unpacks how increasing gender-inequality during and after disaster effects women, men, LGBTIQ+ people and other minority groups including increased violence against women reduced mental health for men and women and reduced service access for LGBTIQ+ people. The training aims to:

- increase understanding of how gender expectations affect all aspects of disaster preparation, response and recovery
- strengthen the capacity of the emergency management sector to recognise and challenge damaging gender stereotypes
- increase awareness of the value of building a gender-responsive and disaster-aware organisation
- ensure the safety needs of women, men, LGBTIQ+ people and other minorities are met in disaster planning, response and recovery
- assist participants develop individual and organisational strategies aimed at:
  - raising awareness of gender and gender violence in emergency management
  - including family and domestic violence in emergency planning, response, and recovery

Access the GADAUS training at [https://  
genderanddisaster.com.au/training](https://genderanddisaster.com.au/training)