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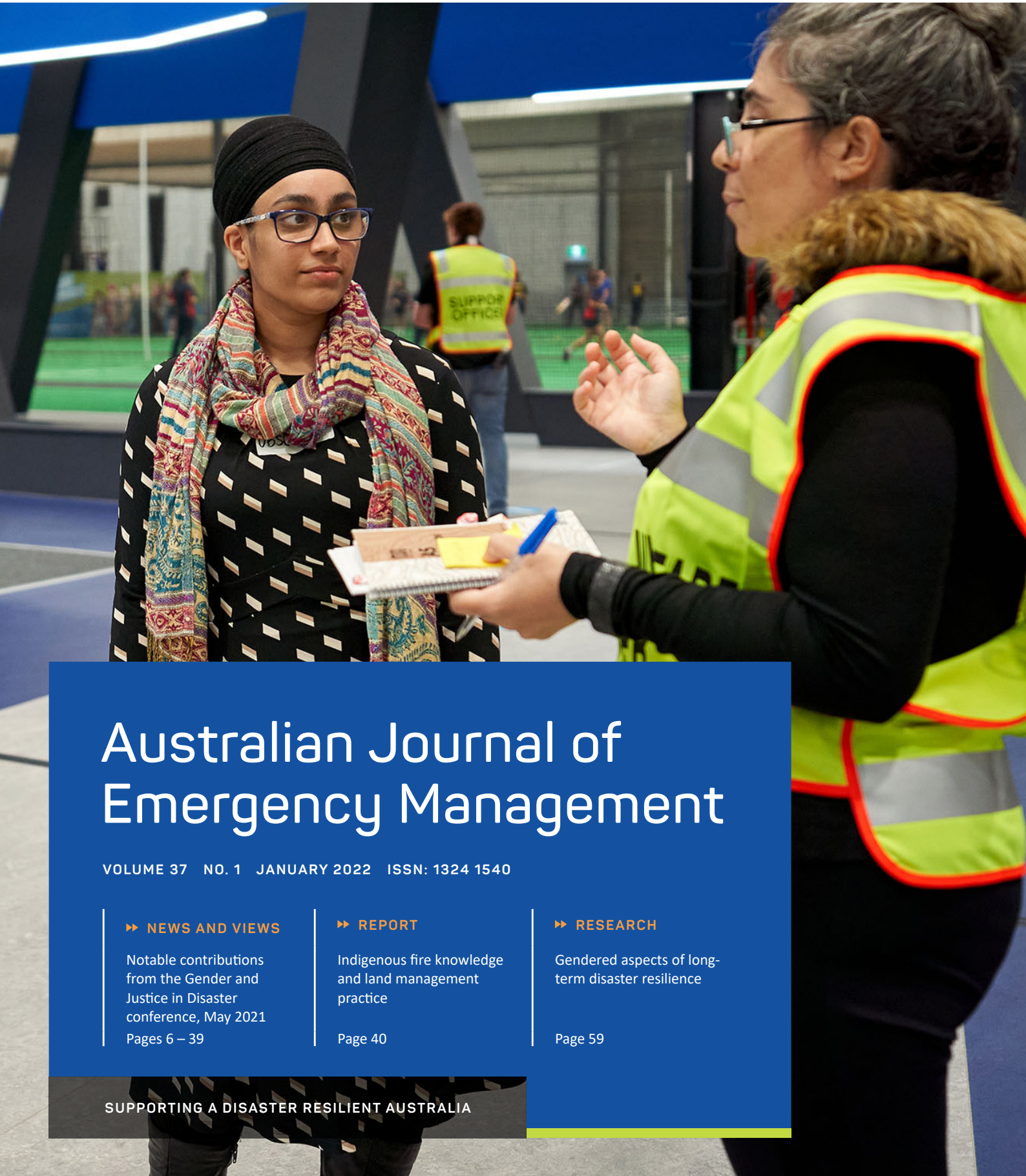

Australian Journal of Emergency Management

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NEWS AND VIEWS
Notable contributions from the Gender and Justice in Disaster conference, May 2021
Pages 6 – 39

REPORT
Indigenous fire knowledge and land management practice
Page 40

RESEARCH
Gendered aspects of long-term disaster resilience
Page 59

SUPPORTING A DISASTER RESILIENT AUSTRALIA

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The *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* is Australia's premier journal in emergency management. Its format and content are developed with reference to peak emergency management organisations and the emergency management sectors—nationally and internationally. The journal focuses on both the academic and practitioner reader. Its aim is to strengthen capabilities in the sector by documenting, growing and disseminating an emergency management body of knowledge. The journal strongly supports the role of the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience as a national centre of excellence for knowledge and skills development in the emergency management sector. Papers are published in all areas of emergency management. The journal encourages empirical reports but may include specialised theoretical, methodological, case study and review papers and opinion pieces. The views in the journal are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience or its partners.

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Contents

News and views

Foreword
Amanda Leck 5

What is gender justice in disasters?
Raewyn Connell 6

Gender justice in disaster: Outcomes Statement
Naomi Bailey 7

Government initiatives for reimagining gender in emergency management
Andrew Crisp APM 10

Diversity and inclusion: learning as we go
Celeste Young, Professor Roger Jones 11

The epistemological non-sense of disaster studies and some more sensible prospects
JC Gaillard 14

Embedding gender equality in emergency management planning
Dr Kate Farhall, Emma Gibson, Dr Niki Vincent 16

Just add trust: implementing diversity and inclusion in emergency management
Mark Duckworth 18

Intersectionality: recognising multiple drivers of violence to improve response
Beth McCann 21

Convergence of design: Aboriginal knowledge and emergency management—a new interdisciplinary paradigm?
Jaspreet Kaur, Nikhila Madabhushi 22

A shortage of women in the care sector
Mary Farrow 24

Gender, toilets and evacuation centres
Krissy Nicholson 26

Taking action to accelerate progress towards gender equality in the fire and emergency sector.
Madeleine Kelly 29

The importance of queer community resilience
Billy Tusker Haworth 31

The Only Way Is Up: a tool for evaluating diverse SOGIESC (aka LGBTIQ+) inclusion
Emily Dwyer 33

Girls Fire and Resilience Program
Bronnie Mackintosh 36

Summertime: Reflections on a vanishing future
Reviewed by Christine Eriksen 38

Reports

Indigenous fire knowledge and land management practice
Victor Steffensen, Steve O'Malley 40

Issues paper: Gender Justice in Disaster Conference 2021
Steve O'Malley, Dr Debra Parkinson, William Leonard, Jaspreet Kaur, Rachael Mackay 44

Research

Under pressure: developing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) inclusive emergency services
William Leonard, Dr Debra Parkinson, Alyssa Duncan, Emeritus Professor Frank Archer, Dr Catherine Orian Weiss 52

Gendered aspects of long-term disaster resilience in Victoria, Australia
Dr Debra Parkinson, Alyssa Duncan, Jaspreet Kaur, Emeritus Professor Frank Archer, Dr Caroline Spencer 59

Men's role in violence against women in disasters: studies in Iran and Australia
Sanaz Sohrabizadeh, Debra Parkinson 65

Understanding the experiences of women in disasters: lessons for emergency management planning
Dr Tazrina Jahan Chowdhury, Professor Paul Arbon, Dr Mayumi Kako, Dr Robert Muller, Dr Malinda Steenkamp, Professor Kristine Gebbie 72

Foreword

Amanda Leck

Executive Director
Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience

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The *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* has a unique role in the emergency management and disaster resilience landscape both within Australia and beyond our borders. As a premier publication providing thought leadership for emergency managers and those who work to support disaster resilience across a range of sectors, the journal brings into focus issues that are at the forefront of thinking.

This edition of the journal looks at the important issue of gender justice in disasters. As Professor Emerita Raewyn Connell writes, 'before an event, someone's gender is likely to shape their vulnerability and exposure'. This has implications for women, men and LGBTIQA+ people.

We know, through a growing body of post-disaster research in Australia and internationally, that responses to disaster are often shaped by hypermasculine images and terminology, with firefighter "heroes" battling the flames. These stereotypes not only exclude a segment of the workforce, they also add to the pressure for men within the sector to live up to an unhelpful and harmful cliché.

In the recovery phase of disasters, where community-led approaches are enshrined as one of the key principles of disaster recovery, those who hold power in communities are likely to make the decisions, and historically, elected officials are more likely to be men. Interrogating these hierarchies and pausing to reflect on who is not represented at the table will help create safer and inclusive preparations for future hazard and emergency events. This is particularly critical in regard to preventing increased violence against women after disasters – an issue we know is both neglected and preventable.

This edition includes the proceedings of Gender and Disaster Australia's Gender Justice in Disasters conference held in May 2021, when the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were being experienced across the world. As we head into the third year of the pandemic, and in the context of compounding natural hazards being experienced in Australian communities with heatwaves and bushfires in the west and flooding in northern Australia, considerations of gender and justice are critical as we collectively work to mitigate the impacts of disasters for communities.

Implementing gender impact assessments at the earliest stage to avoid unequal outcomes, using gender checklists in evacuation centres to ensure centres are safe and accessible for everyone, and the work being done by the Champions of Change Coalition Fire and Emergency Group to improve gender balance and create inclusive workplaces, are just some of the examples of actions underway to improve gender justice in disasters.

What is gender justice in disasters?

Raewyn Connell

Professor Emerita, University of Sydney

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To think constructively about gender in disasters, we need some clarity about gender. The most common ideas are that gender is simply a biological dichotomy between male and female; or that gender is an individual and very personal identity.

Biology and identity are certainly aspects of gender, but not the whole story. They are bound up with divisions and relationships in society as a whole. Gender is, above all, relational. It is a social structure and a major pattern in human social life.

It is helpful to recognise 4 major dimensions in gender relations. First, a pattern in economic life. Second, a pattern of power and authority. Third, a powerful presence in emotional lives. Finally, a cultural dimension, concerning attitudes, language and communication.

It's very important to recognise that gender doesn't just mean 'women'. Men and masculinities are as deeply involved in gender relations as women and femininities are. There are multiple forms of masculinity and multiple forms of femininity. There are some people who don't fall into the categories of men or women at all and there are other people whose lives move between different gender positions. This is complex territory. It's not surprising that disasters, and responses to disasters, are connected with gender relations in multiple ways.

Before an event, someone's gender is likely to shape their vulnerability and exposure. When the terrible Rana Plaza factory collapse occurred in Bangladesh, most of the people crushed to death were working-class women. It's not hard to see why. A familiar gender division of labour in the global economy means that most low-paid workers in the clothing industry were (and are) women. Gender may also shape the way an event produces toxic effects. When COVID-19 triggered lockdowns, more women in marriages and partnerships were exposed to longer periods of domestic violence.

Responses to disasters are also gendered. It's a familiar fact that many of the people responding to emergencies are in strongly masculinised occupations, such as fire and forestry services, police, army and navy. In such occupational cultures, gay men as well as women can be marginalised on the basis of social stereotypes. Even the language used about disaster response is gendered. The mainstream media constantly refer to firefighting and often use military metaphors: 'fronts', 'tactics', 'battle'. Yet the same activities could well be called 'care' (as in landcare). In our culture, 'fighting' is generally connected with a dominating form of masculinity, while 'care' is coded as feminine.

Gender relations also shape the downstream recovery from disasters. Communities in recovery have tough decisions to make; who is going to make them? Historically, mayors and councillors, local landowners and business owners have been men. This is changing in some regions, but not all. At elite levels, where the policies of governments and big corporations (including banking and insurance) are set, power is overwhelmingly in the hands of men. About 95% of the CEOs of major transnational corporations are men.[1] Senior management positions in business and politics have a strongly masculinised culture; regrettably, highly visible in the Australian Parliament during 2021.

Disaster prevention work is also gendered. When information is provided, who receives it? In many parts of the world, the proportion of women who are literate is below the rate for men, and in poorer communities it can be far below. This is a product of under-investment in education of girls and, while this is changing, large gaps still exist. Gender divisions of labour and gender inequalities of power also operate in prevention. Think of food security, family nutrition and the interplay of economics and nature in forestry, fisheries and mining.

Gender justice in disaster management, then, is a broad-spectrum and highly practical question. Gender justice is not about feel-good declarations. It is about how we do gender relations in all the arenas of practical life. It is a matter of conducting our lives and our work in ways marked by equality, inclusiveness, mutual respect and peace.

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Gender justice in disaster: Outcomes Statement

Naomi Bailey

Gender and Disaster Australia

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In May 2021, the Gender Justice in Disaster: Inspiring Action conference was delivered in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic. During the pandemic, the conversation about gender and disaster increasingly crossed into the mainstream, demonstrated by the recognition of the COVID-19 'shadow pandemic': a sharp rise globally in violence against women and increasing gender inequality.

Other significant disasters and emergencies continued to unfold during the pandemic. In 2021, the hottest July globally since records began was recorded[1] and the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change declared a 'code red'[2] for humanity due to climate change. The conference recognised climate change as driving more frequent and severe disasters and emergencies. These compounding and unfolding events set an urgent context for action.

A 'code red' for humanity has gendered ramifications, and while existing gender inequalities effect everyone, the differential effects are likely to be more pronounced for women and women who are part of other minority populations.

The conference focused on inspiring action on gender justice to secure rights and safety in a world experiencing compounding emergencies and disasters. The delegates recognised generations of activists, practitioners, leaders, workers and thinkers who worked to secure rights and safety during emergencies and disasters. Delegates recognised existing tools and resources to implement gender justice across all phases of disasters and emergencies and called on the emergency management sector to be familiar with past conference outcomes statements and conference programs.

The conference presented 24 speakers during the main event, 7 speakers in introductory sessions and 341 attendees. It was delivered via a digital platform to maintain COVID-safe practices and, in recognition of the cognitive load caused by working online during the pandemic, adjustments were made to the conference delivery style. Instead of 3 full days of presentations, the conference was scheduled in blocks of 3 and 4 hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays during May in 2021.

The delegates acknowledged and highlighted the significant effort being undertaken for gender justice at times of disaster. The evidence presented in the conference demonstrated that, in Australia and across the globe, disaster consequences are still deeply gendered.

Gender justice

The conference affirmed that privilege is reinforced during disasters and emergencies and that people who are marginalised, made vulnerable or excluded before an event are the most affected by it. Emergencies and disasters continue to be accompanied by escalating rates of gendered violence and a resurgence or reinforcement of gendered labour, gendered pay disparity, gender inequality in the workplace, gendered health effects and gendered poverty. These consequences fall disproportionately on women and women who are part of other minority groups.

Action for the prevention of and response to gendered aspects of disaster were identified as critical to securing the rights and safety of the community. While speakers presented on examples and evidence of these actions being embedded in the planning, response and recovery phases of emergency management, it was noted that they were often missing.

Conference delegates adopted the term 'gender justice' as a conceptual tool for recognising and contesting systems of power that reinforce patriarchy and privilege.

Gender justice was used to describe actions that bring patriarchy back into view. It was used to explore how patriarchy constructs gender as binary and centres and normalises human, particularly men's, privileges to rights and safety in the present at the expense of others including women, children, animals, nature and future generations. Gender justice was used to link patriarchy and colonisation as systems of oppression. It was used to unpick the ways in which patriarchy privileges individualised outcomes over group safety in decision-making at times of disaster and how it deploys violence to secure these rights and safety for a particular group of men, women and others.

Delegates recognised gender justice as multi-dimensional and paid attention to questions of how to better act in solidarity to end the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that cause the disproportionate effects of disasters. Necessary qualities of gender justice included:

- acting in solidarity
- deep listening
- building respectful and non-hierarchical relationships
- self-reflection
- empathy and embodiment
- understanding inter-reliance and inter-dependence when scoping problems and solutions in disaster and emergencies.

Gender justice was also used to describe action taken to challenge, confront and transform systems and structures in order that those systems no longer drive injustice.

Practice and research

The practice and research presented at the conference covered significant, strategic and tactical inspiration for action:

- Research into the escalating rates of gendered violence during emergencies and disasters, for example, Domestic Violence New South Wales research into violence against women in NSW during the COVID-19 pandemic, research on LGBTI experiences of the pandemic in Victoria and research into women's rights during emergencies in Iran and Iceland.
- The translation of research into existing or independent implementation tools to guide practice, for example (among many others), updating the *Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines*[3] with information about breastfeeding and the Climate and Health Alliance Strategy on Climate Health and Wellbeing.[4]
- Leadership styles in newly established authorities that challenge gendered stereotypes and idealised forms of masculinity in leadership, for example, leadership at Bushfire Recovery Victoria and the appointment of the Gender Equality Commissioner in Victoria.
- Reviews of gendered discrimination and consequent implementation plans for action in the emergency management sector, for example, in Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and the Country Fire Authority.
- Media coverage of emergencies and disasters that include the particular experiences of men, women and others.
- Independent projects that already work in ways the conference delegates recognised as challenging systems that drive gender injustice in disaster, for example, the Australian Red Cross mentors program for disaster survivors, community-led recovery programs in fire-affected communities of East Gippsland and Victor Steffensen's Indigenous land management programs.
- Research on urban disasters, and urban design and disaster. Urban contexts are sites of unfolding emergencies. These emergencies include slow-moving disasters, like the urban heat-island effect, and the urban implications of emergencies like the pandemic. Delegates would like to see more research on gender and disaster in the urban context, and gender disaster and design, particularly informed by indigenous design and architecture.
- Colonisation is a critical context for gender justice in disaster. *Changing the Picture*[5], presented at the conference, made a critical contribution to ensuring gender justice does more than only protect the rights and safety of those women and men with existing privilege. Delegates recognised the relevance of the principles for action contained in *Changing the Picture* and reconfirmed the call for the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart[6] process in Australia to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights and safety.

The conference noted that, notwithstanding this activity, the rights and safety of communities have not been secured during times of disaster. 'The community' includes the many groups identified during the 2018 Diversity and Disaster Conference.

Implementation

Implementation activities for gender equality in emergency management organisations were a focus of the conference. Emergency services agencies presented their organisational responses to findings of external reviews that identified discrimination, sexual harassment, assault and abuse. These included institutional, whole-of-organisation approaches to address harassment and assault in the workplace as well as gender inequality in recruitment, pathways to seniority, promotion to command roles and appointment to executive positions. Recognising that gender equality is a necessary but not sufficient action to secure gender justice, questions remain for emergency services agencies about what action is still needed to achieve culture change.

Delegates called for urgent action on safe workplaces in emergency services agencies. Urgent consideration should be given to implementing existing evidence-based tools and resources for securing the safety of all staff experiencing gendered violence and/or discrimination at work.

Accountability strategies to address gender injustice include legislative regimes. While the United Nations *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*[7] and the *Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*[8] provide guidance at the international level, domestic legislative regimes provide clarity. The conference noted the introduction of new accountability mechanisms since 2018. One example is Victoria's

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Gender Equality Act 2020[9], which includes the appointment of a Gender Equality Commissioner. The commission has enforcement and compliance capabilities that apply to publicly funded employers in Victoria. These accountability mechanisms sit alongside existing self-imposed quotas and existing discrimination legislation. Delegates welcomed further consideration of accountability mechanisms as effective means for change.

While these accountability mechanisms are welcome, delegates identified a lack of effective action as a major problem. Despite significant efforts over the past decade to address gender inequity in emergency management agencies, and the gendered effects of disasters, the conference findings underlined that gender disparities continue.

The conference called for direct, concentrated effort for systems change to achieve gender justice in disaster contexts. Incremental, individualised behaviour change and technical approaches to equalising the rights and safety of the community with those of men, have not yet achieved the change needed. Rather, delegates called for:

- engagement at every level of institutions involved in emergency management and recognition of existing best practice where it exists
- consideration of the privileges and bias that are evidenced in current emergency management practice
- integration of existing evidence and practice to address discrimination
- commitment to action for structural change, change that shifts people, practice and institutions.

The intergenerational consequences of the lack of action for transformative change include the resilience and continuation of systems that drive injustice.

A biannual conference was proposed that would track progress towards gender justice.

Conclusion

This Outcomes Statement summarised the call for action on gender justice in disaster. It should be read in the context of a decade of gender and disaster conferences in Australia and the documented outcomes from those conferences. The 2021 conference came at a time of global pandemic that focused attention on evidence that existing approaches have not led to safety.

The focus on gender justice clarified the ways in which systems and structures drive injustice: those systems and structures remain largely unchanged if gender equality work is decoupled from work that engages with patriarchal power. Many conference delegates placed patriarchy, as a system that privileges particular types of men, squarely back into the frame.

Many delegates also recognised other oppressive systems and structures like colonisation and racism, and that these systems are sometimes the primary form of oppression experienced by an individual or group during disaster.

Some may argue that now is not a time for an Outcomes Statement focused on conceptual tools and that what is needed are practical implementation plans. Those implementation plans exist, and the *Diversity in Disaster Outcomes Statement*, the *Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines*, the Climate and Health Alliance health accord and many other useful resources are available from the Gender and Disaster Australia website.[10]

This Outcomes Statement reflects the core problems identified during the conference: the resilience of people with power and their ability to resist, co-opt or derail change. During and in response to disaster, those with power are able to mobilise existing systems to minimise change and reinforce the structural inequalities on which their privilege depends. The 2021 conference identified that what is needed is not a set of possible technical solutions, but the conceptual tools to accurately link technical change to systemic change in order that the action inspired is effective.

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Government initiatives for reimagining gender in emergency management

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Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner

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Victoria has one of Australia's most diverse communities. By better reflecting this diversity, our workforce becomes more adept at empowering our community to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

This means we need greater gender and other diversity representation across all roles, including in leadership positions. Greater diversity in the workforce will give us access to different skills and experiences, improving capabilities across the board and to ultimately work with and keep communities safe.

Improving diversity in the workforce is a complex challenge, and there is no one single initiative or program that will bring about organisational or sector-wide culture change. For long-term change, we need a strategic approach that focuses on multiple interventions that address both cultural change and reducing the barriers to sector participation.

We need to address the recruitment barriers that impact on women, such as unconscious bias, and to ensure that inherent job requirements are evidence based. If agencies cannot agree on standard inherent job requirements for some key roles, it could indicate that these requirements may not all be actual requirements.

The focus cannot just be on recruiting more women and other diverse persons to the sector or organisations; we are also responsible for ensuring workplaces will be culturally safe.

To ensure women and other diverse community members advance in their careers, implementing flexible training models and accreditation programs that accurately reflect the modern requirements of key operational roles will be critical. In addition, support for career progression for this cohort (including formal and informal sponsorship, advocacy or mentoring) by current leaders will be vital.

The advancement of inclusion and diversity must continue to be a priority for the sector. Every initiative and program we implement helps to remove barriers to inclusion. Forums like the 2021 Gender Justice in Disaster: Inspiring Action conference help to continue the momentum, conversations and generate ideas for the future.

Diversity and inclusion: learning as we go

Celeste Young
Professor Roger Jones
Victoria University

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The project, 'Diversity and inclusion: building strength and capability'[1] (2017–2021) has provided an evidence-based framework and new insights to support practitioners effectively manage and measure diversity and inclusion.

The report's project was commissioned by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative research Centre (BNHCRC) and was carried out in 3 phases: (1) understanding the context, (2) framework development and (3) testing. Each phase was subject to annual review and the program adjusted in response to those reviews.

The project used a working-from-the-inside-out methodology, a trans-disciplinary approach used to develop workable solutions to seemingly intractable problems through collaborative research codesigned with end users. It starts with understanding user needs and context, surveys available knowledge from a wide range of sources and puts this knowledge into formats that can be used in practice, which are tested and refined with end users. The purpose is so that research is fit-for-purpose and useable.

Following the scoping phase, 3 lines of inquiry were established being organisational, economic and community-based. A mixed-methods approach incorporated case studies, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, decision-making assessments, desktop reviews of organisational documents, informal and formal literature and ongoing review and feedback. The review showed that the research literature had matured and the emphasis on diversity and inclusion has moved on from addressing diversity to understanding roles of inclusion. However, few examples of successful implementation were identified. Emergency management organisations (EMOs) were poorly represented, despite global acknowledgment of low workforce diversity.

'Diversity is what creates the change, inclusion is how you manage it'

Three case studies were undertaken that highlighted that implementation was a process of social change and the need to focus on inclusion. Diversity and inclusion principles and programs were present but were not well-integrated into systems and processes nor connected to day-to-day decision-making and tasks. It was also primarily seen as being about men and women. The largest barrier was culture and the largest need was management. A lack of strategic vision and supportive organisational frameworks and processes were resulting in mostly shorter-term, reactive approaches to achieving diversity and inclusion.

A turning point for the project occurred as part of a workshop held in December 2018 titled, Into the future: building skills and capabilities for a diverse and inclusive workforce. Analysis of the workshop outputs showed a wide range of social, human and innovation risks that were not being formally managed or, in some cases, even recognised. If left unmanaged, these risks would likely 'impair the ability of EMOs to perform their functions effectively'.[2] The connection to risk provided the connection between day-to-day tasks and the business imperative that emergency services organisations face.

Two economic case studies highlighted the benefits that could be achieved by successful programs. The Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy program produced $20 worth of benefits for every dollar invested.[3] However, existing economic models need development before programs for different cultural cohorts can be comprehensively assessed. Appropriate data also needs to be collected from the beginning of programs to support this.

The community case studies illustrated some of the complexities in relation to the capabilities of diverse cohorts and young people, but each has its own context that needs further exploration.[4,5] Although culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities have many capabilities, there was little awareness of these, and they were often not harnessed effectively.

The final diversity and inclusion framework[6] is constructed around 4 components as shown in Figure 1:

- Strategic – transformational change
- Programmatic – continuous improvement
- Inclusive growth – bottom-up engagement
- Risk management – human, social and innovation risk associated with diversity and inclusion.

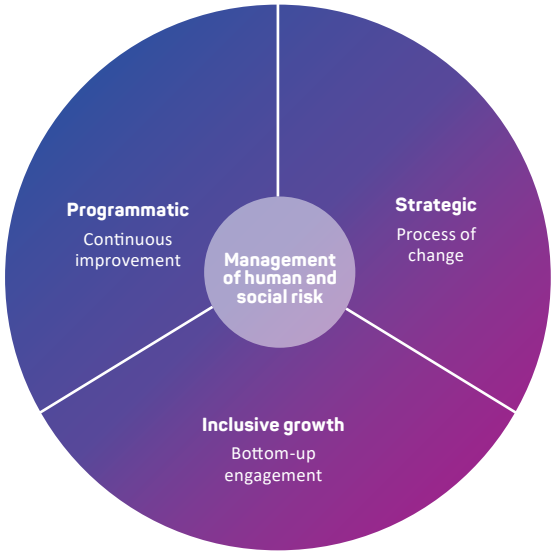

Figure 1: Diversity and inclusion framework components.
Source: Young and Jones (2020)

This is developed to be flexible and adaptable to aid decision-making in a range of different contexts. The strategic and programmatic processes are supported by guidance and question-focused considerations for practitioners.[6] It also provides implementation areas and key tasks needed across operational areas (see Figure 2).

The 'Learning as you go' support report[7] provides case studies, guidance and tools for practitioners that includes a maturity matrix to support implementation. There are also 2 practitioner manuals that offer guidance for working with CALD communities and young people.[8,9]

The study has culminated in conclusive statements:

- Effective diversity and inclusion is an imperative for all emergency services organisations if they are to mitigate and manage the human, social and innovation risk associated with the changing risk landscape occupied by organisations and communities.
- Inclusive practice provides a tangible way to build robust and resilient social infrastructure in communities and organisations.
- Social and human risks associated with diversity and inclusion have been regarded as secondary to technical and tangible risks and their value is not well recognised nor understood.
- Diversity and inclusion is not a fixed-point destination to arrive at. It is a series of transitions that organisations and communities move through as they work towards a desired, inclusive vision connected to a set of agreed outcomes that may change over time.
- Inclusion is not about being permissive. It is about understanding the formation of new boundaries and who should decide what those boundaries are. This is not one conversation, but many different voices coming together to negotiate a collaborative outcome.
- Statements of inclusion drafted by diverse groups that outline the terms of their inclusion are needed to enable negotiation from a position of empowerment. These statements support the development of respectful relationships that celebrate difference through shared understandings.
- Considerable work is still needed to develop measurement protocols, particularly those related to economic evaluation and the effectiveness of inclusion.
- Further work is needed to identify and document the specific capabilities and skills in communities. Ongoing evaluation is needed to capture benefits, lessons identified and ensure that visibility is maintained.
- Social and human risk are often poorly understood and there is a need to build risk literacy in these areas across organisations.

Common aspects found to support effective programs:

- Safe spaces where difference is welcomed and accepted, where the terms of inclusion can be negotiated and concerns can be addressed.
- Organisations have an authorising environment (structures, governance and processes) and a mandate to operate (social licence) if programs are to be effective. Upper-level advocacy, support and commitment to diversity and inclusion over the longer term is critical.
- People who are undertaking and leading activities have the appropriate skills and knowledge to manage proactively and effectively. Authentic actions are critical to building trust.
- A pragmatic approach is adopted where organisational champions and leaders are able to respond, capitalise on and leverage opportunities as they arise.
- Looking beyond the organisation and understanding where the interactions between the community, emergency services organisations and other institutions (such as government), are managed and who needs to manage them.
- Developing collaborative and individual narratives that take discussion 'beyond the numbers and quotas' to tell stories that connect people and humanise risk so that it is understood and valued.

The high level of uptake and use of research during this 3-year project was aided by the emergency sector's focus on progressing diversity and inclusion and the work of peak bodies and end user organisations to develop programs and leadership. It has contributed to the repositioning of diversity and inclusion as a risk-

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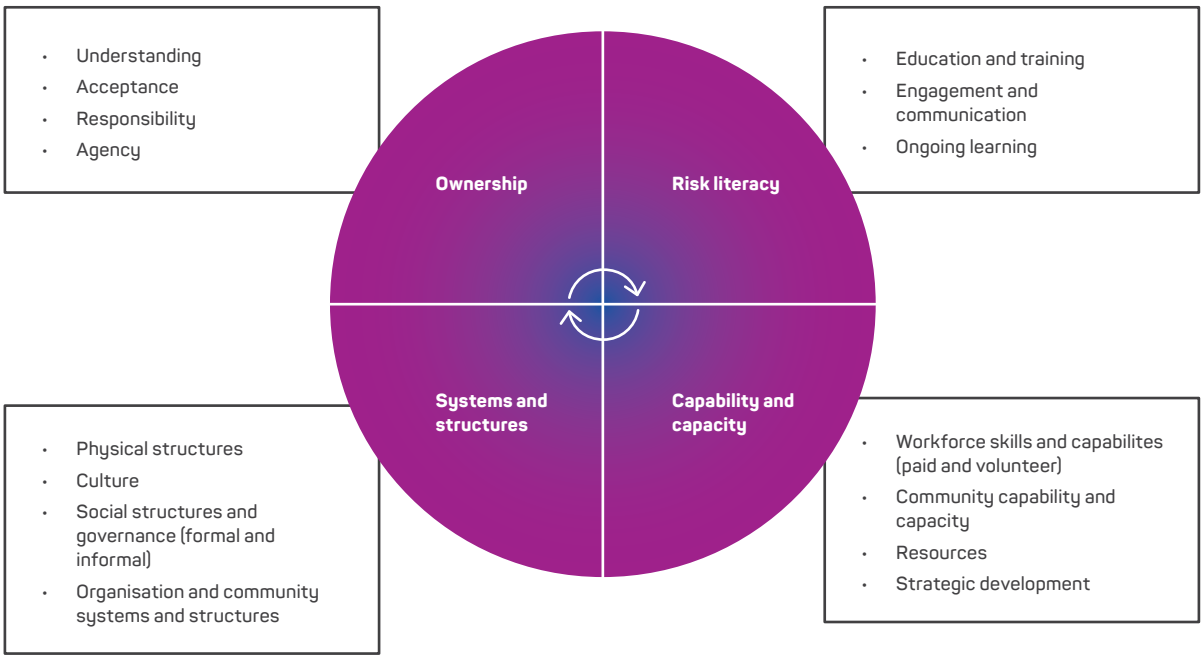

Figure 2: Activities that support embedding diversity and inclusion risk into existing systems.

Source: Young and Jones (2020)

based business imperative. Its effectiveness and impact are due to the collaboration and commitment of the end user groups that have actively participated, supported and promoted the work over the life of the project.

The collateral from this project was developed in collaboration with emergency management practitioners and captures and consolidates the considerable knowledge that already exists. This project showed the dynamic nature of implementation and how different organisations are treading the long road to inclusion. Each year has produced new insights and some organisations are leaning into the uncertainty. Some find it harder, however, all of them are learning as they go.

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The epistemological non-sense of disaster studies and some more sensible prospects

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Terms such as 'masculine' and 'feminine' are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose. J. Butler[1]

There is a puzzling paradox in disaster studies. Many, if not most of its proponents, claim that disasters are social constructs. However, we, in our vast majority, also resort to concepts, methodologies and broader epistemologies that we take for universal. For instance, we use and apply concepts such as 'disaster', 'vulnerability', 'resilience' and 'risk', which share a Latin etymology, in all sorts of contexts around the world, assuming that they help us understand how people across very diverse cultures and societies make sense of what we call 'natural hazards'. This is antithetical; an epistemological non-sense.

This tension between, on the one hand, our theoretical claims, and, on the other hand, our actual epistemological approaches reflects the hegemony of Western, Eurocentric discourses on disaster. So hegemonic that they have become common sense in Gramsci's lingo.[2] According to feminist scholar Ferguson[3]:

> *…the questions we can ask about the world are enabled, and other questions disabled, by the frame that orders the questioning. When we are busy arguing about the questions that appear within a certain frame, the frame itself becomes invisible; we become enframed within it.*

In disaster studies, this frame is a Western one and reflects a scholarly legacy that dates back to the Enlightenment ages. Contemporary disaster studies can be tracked to Europe in the 18th Century when disasters were explicitly positioned at the interface of nature and society, or hazard and vulnerability in the jargon of the field. It is then that the project of modernity made it a priority to free people from the hazards of nature so they could live a prosperous life.[4] Since then, the nature/hazard-society/vulnerability binary, celebrated in the famous mnemonic 'disaster = hazard x vulnerability' (or any iteration of this), has polarised disaster studies. This is true in the West, where the binary makes sense, but beyond, its relevance is rather dubious. Nonetheless, the binary between hazard and vulnerability and the different paradigms it sustains have been considered as the only relevant truth wherever in the world; the 'imperial truth of the West' in Eboussi-Boulaga's words.[5]

The study of gender in disasters reflects the same Western legacy. It is predominantly framed through the dialectical lens of the categories of man and woman in a binary interpretation of the world that some have brought under an overarching polarisation of nature and society/culture akin to the dominant understanding of disasters.[6,7] Furthermore, the dominant view that both gender and disasters are intertwined social constructs is at odds with the near-universal prominence given to biological dimorphism in underpinning gender identities. It becomes hard to disagree with Nigerian gender scholar Oyěwùmí[8] that:

> *…if gender is socially constructed, then gender cannot behave in the same way across time and space. (…) From a cross-cultural perspective, the significance of this observation is that one cannot assume the social organization of one culture (the dominant West included) as universal or the interpretations of the experiences of one culture as explaining another one.*

The hegemony of such Western discourses on both gender and disaster results from unequal power relationships between researchers around the world; a legacy of centuries of colonialism and imperialism on the side of Europe. Disaster studies

are dominated by scholars from the West, for whom advantageous political and material conditions make it easy to conduct fieldwork in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. This is a privilege seldom returned to scholars from these regions. It is through this colonial and imperialist agenda that Western ontologies and epistemologies have been imposed as common sense, including in the studies of gender and disaster. Indian historian Chakrabarty[9] stated that:

> *…'they' [Western historians] produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western histories, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work. This is a gesture, however, that 'we' [Indian historians] cannot return. We cannot even afford an equality or symmetry of ignorance at this level without taking the risk of appearing 'old fashioned' or 'outdated'.*

This holds true for the study of gender in disaster and for disaster scholarship in general. This needs to change so that there is enough space for non-Western perspectives to emerge. These alternative perspectives are crucial to reflect the realities of millions of people around the world, including *Fa'afafine, Hijra* and *Berdache* whose identity does not conform to the man-woman binary, and to better support their own desires and address their unique concerns. This agenda does not mean throwing Western concepts, categories, theories and methodologies out of the window. It rather means limiting their application to contexts where they make sense, which is, simply, the places where they emerged. As disaster pioneer scholar Wisner[10] argued that it is about taking 'a holiday from the research protocols, methods, tools – the bag of tricks that disasterologists carry'.

Gender is probably a very good 'place' to start in view of reconsidering broader approaches to studying disaster. Asymmetrical power relationships between men and women are obviously essential to comprehending people's experiences of natural hazards wherever these 2 categories make sense and mirror a cultural reality. Nonetheless, these categories and unequal power relations as rightly studied in the West, cannot be taken as universal. Wittig[11], Lazreg[12], Oyěwùmí[8] and Lugones[13] reveal that these categories are irrelevant in other regions of the world. Wittig suggests they are 'myths' while Lugones speaks of 'fictions' and Oyěwùmí of 'inventions'. Gender identities mirror social and cultural relationships unique to local contexts rather than the alleged universal materiality of biological differences and dimorphism. As such, gender should be considered a context-specific issue—very much as should what we call disasters.

This is exactly the path that the disaster studies manifesto Power, Prestige and Forgotten Values[14] encourages us to take. One that fosters grounded, relevant, fair and genuine research on disaster. One that requires local researchers and/or those who are deeply grounded in the places they study to initiate in framing, conducting and sharing research. One that builds on local ontologies and epistemologies and maximises local resources. One that ultimately encourages locals to think, be and act by themselves and for themselves to paraphrase Senghor[15] and Salazar[16], in an organic and indigenous search for authenticity.[5] Searching for authenticity will allow us to look forward rather than backward, to reimagine a future away from the West and its colonial legacy.

This radical turn in the way disasters are studied is not to exclude outside researchers, including those from the West. In today's research environment, Western scholars are often those who have access to resources. They can help leverage power relations with other stakeholders of disaster risk reduction. The agenda in the manifesto is therefore one of dialogue. It builds on trust and rapport. However, as Chakrabarty[9] indicates, 'a dialogue can be genuinely open only under one condition: that no party puts itself in a position where it can unilaterally decide the final outcomes of the conversation'.

Following this path suggests a long but essential journey. One that is challenging and rewarding. As Spivak[17] writes:

> *…if we want to start something, we must ignore that our starting point is shaky. If we want to get something done, we must ignore that the end will be inconclusive.*

Finally, as Delphy[18], another pioneer feminist scholar, noted, 'having the courage to confront the unknown is a precondition for imagination, and the capacity to imagine another world is an essential element in scientific progress'.

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Embedding gender equality in emergency management planning

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Disasters affect people of different genders in different ways. Yet, for too long, women have been overlooked in the design of emergency management policies, services and responses.

Research evidence and lived experience tell us that disasters are gendered. Norms of 'heroic' masculinity can often place men in harm's way, defending their homes and confronting disasters head on.[1] Social constructions of femininity and patterns of precarious work that disproportionately affect women can find them bearing the brunt of the economic fallout, post-disaster.[2] LGBTQIA+ communities may experience marginalisation and discrimination, or may fear for their safety in the context of disaster evacuation and rebuilding.[3] The stereotypes, expectations and inequalities placed on different genders can influence patterns of disadvantage experienced. These patterns are further shaped and exacerbated by other forms of discrimination including ability, age, class, indigeneity, race and other intersecting attributes.[4] Disasters are also known to exacerbate family violence, racism, homophobia, transphobia and various forms of social unrest and oppression.[5]

Despite these divergent experiences, emergency management policies, services and responses have traditionally been led by men without consideration for the diversity of experiences. Women and gender-diverse people have rarely had a seat at the table. When they have, they have often experienced overt or systemic discrimination.[6] The lack of representation of women has flow-on effects for gender equality in response and recovery, and presents challenges, such as the disproportionate impact of disasters on women's financial security.[7] At the same time, masculine stereotypes have traditionally shaped emergency management approaches to the detriment of men's physical and psychological safety.[8]

But emergency management failures predicated on gendered assumptions are preventable. To avoid unequal outcomes, planning, at its earliest stage, should include a gender-impact assessment (GIA). These assessments drive equality under the ground-breaking *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic). Under the Act, public sector entities (including universities and local councils) are required to conduct GIAs for all new and renewing policies, programs and services that directly and significantly affect the public.

A GIA entails reviewing the context and content of a program, policy or service in terms of how it may affect, or be experienced by, people of different genders, to ensure it does not reproduce or deepen inequalities. A GIA will expose gender inequality and allow for adjustments before a program is rolled out. GIAs help public sector organisations drive gender equality both within the workplace and through public-facing commitments.

Considering gender through these assessments is imperative in a sector where effective preparatory work is vital so that decisions made in pressured situations do not exacerbate inequalities. For example, it is well documented that men's violence against women—including domestic and family violence and sexual violence—as well as other forms of gender-based violence affecting women and the LGBTQIA+ community, increase in the post-disaster context. In the US, according to reporting from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, approximately 31% of incidences of sexual violence occurred in evacuation shelters; over 93% of those experiencing violence were women and over 93% of those using violence were male (with the remainder unspecified).[9]

In the chaos of a disaster, sexual violence may also be trivialised in favour of challenges deemed 'more important'. According to Thornton and Voigt (2007)[10], during Hurricane Katrina 'when a rape was reported to a first responder such as a police officer, an official statement was not taken

because of other life-threatening priorities'. These patterns have been repeated across countless events globally in the intervening years with similar reports emerging from the US Gulf Coast in September 2021 following Hurricane Ida.[11] Australia is not immune, with spikes in the rates of domestic and family violence often reported post-bushfires.[2]

An assessment of emergency response processes and services can account for and mitigate gendered risks. GIAs are a way to factor in the safety and economic security of women and gender-diverse people to immediate response efforts and long-term recovery processes to reduce gender-based violence and inequality. However, to effectively address these gendered aspects, the emergency management sector must also advance cultural change. This entails increasing women's decision-making responsibilities and challenging masculinised cultures of command and control. When diverse voices meaningfully participate in leadership, the approaches and programs that emerge better reflect the rich and varied experiences of communities and better meet community needs.

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* facilitates these changes. The Act identifies tools to integrate the experiences and needs of different genders in emergency management planning and promote gender-equal workplaces. It also requires organisations to make meaningful progress towards gender equality. This progress is assessed through the requirement under the Act that organisations evaluate progress towards gender equality through regular workplace gender audits that identify areas to improve. Audits are coupled with gender equality action plans that identify activities and measures that support positive change. The requirement to make meaningful progress guards against simple box-ticking exercises or the risk of organisations 'making noise' about gender equality initiatives without delivering substantive change. The transparency requirements of the Act facilitate the sharing of good practice and allow public, government and academic scrutiny of progress towards gender equality in public sector organisations.

Emergency management is a vital part of the public sector. The changing climate and extreme weather it causes, in conjunction with the COVID-19 pandemic, point to the importance of emergency management and also that we are more likely to require greater assistance in the future. Making emergency management organisations gender-equal, ensuring safe work environments that are free of sexual harassment and ensuring disaster preparedness and response account for the different experiences and needs of different genders are more important than ever. The Act provides the tools, structures and motivation to achieve these goals.

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Just add trust: implementing diversity and inclusion in emergency management

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Trust is just one of the themes running through emergency management diversity and inclusion and resilience policies in Australia and New Zealand. However, are diverse communities often seen as problems rather than as trusted partners with agency to design their own outcomes?

Diversity and inclusion policies have been published for almost 20 years. Resilience policies have been in place for over a decade. Emergency management agencies in Australia and New Zealand have long recognised the importance of policies on diversity and inclusion both for workforces and in how to partner better with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The work by emergency management agencies on diversity and inclusion and disaster resilience is connected by the need for communities to be involved in making decisions about issues that concern them. These policies reveal that success depends on the trust existing between agencies and communities.

It has been almost 20 years since the first edition of the *Guidelines for Emergency Managers working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities.*[1] As was pointed out by Mitchell[2]:

> *…diversity considerations need to be integrated into the corporate management processes of the service agency and organisations. Other key points include the need for a local approach and the development of ongoing relationships, and/or formal or informal partnerships involving trust, credibility, respect for diversity and a willingness to connect.*

The 2007 edition of these guidelines makes it clear that 'establishing credibility and generating trust amongst CALD community groups are essential parts of effective community engagement'[1]. This link is made in the Northern Territory's resilience strategy[3] that states, 'Collaboration with communities builds trust, leading to more resilient communities' (p.5).

The findings by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre Diversity and inclusion: building strength and capability project backs this up. A paper by Young and Jones[4] found that 'authentic actions, a diversity of people at leadership levels, long-term programs and trust were all seen as critical for effective diversity and inclusion'. In addition, Young and Jones[5] concluded that among the principles for practice is 'building trusted relationships through acknowledging, respecting and valuing different knowledge, talents and attributes'.

Similarly, the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*[6] sets out that one characteristic of a resilient community is that:

> *…people work together with local leaders using their knowledge and resources to prepare for and deal with disasters. They use personal and community strengths, and existing community networks and structures.*

It also states that empowering individuals and communities 'requires the availability and accessibility of transparent, accurate and trusted sources of information in various forms'.

Why trusting is a problem

For almost 2 decades diversity, inclusion and resilience policies have clearly identified that trust is needed to bring about desired change. However, progress has been slow because of a

lack of understanding that trust involves a reciprocal relationship between governments and communities. Trust is based on emotion, experience and evidence. It includes characteristics such as predictability, reliability and confident expectation of future action. Trust is also risky and requires those involved to open themselves up to a degree of vulnerability.

As noted by Parker and colleagues[7], trust is:

> *…ultimately a kind of gamble, a risky investment that we make every day to manage our lives in a complex and unpredictable world. It is also an emotionally charged investment, because to trust someone is to expose ourselves to the possibility of betrayal'.*

Trust can be broken when one party does not act in accordance with expectations. For emergency services organisations to establish trust with communities it requires both the agencies and communities to be willing to be vulnerable. It is not enough that emergency services organisations be trusted by communities. Trust must flow both ways. Agencies must trust communities too. It is a challenge for organisations established to work in a command-and-control environments to be willing to open up to this type of vulnerability. However, a real relationship of trust is not possible without it. This reciprocity has been called 'the alchemy of mutual give and take over time turning to a golden trust'.[8]

Grossman[9] raised that the traditional approach has the problem that:

> *…by emphasising cultural difference as vulnerability rather than as resource or asset, it fails to acknowledge the varieties of resilience capital that many culturally diverse individuals and communities may bring with them.*

A European Union project, Public Empowerment Policies for Crisis Management[10], states that 'the community approach to crisis management, citizen groups are not merely seen as targets, but instead as active co-actors in response to emergencies'. Therefore, while many communities have been building support networks, emergency management organisations have sometimes continued to regard communities primarily as receivers of services, rather than as trusted partners jointly working towards shared outcomes.

'We have trust issues'

One issue may be that government officials trust different communities in different ways. A recent study (Kennedy 2020) of trust in data indicated:

> *…what is generally missing from these debates around trust is how structural inequalities shape the extent to which people trust and what people deem to be trustworthy…. It has been found that the wealthy and well-educated have higher levels of trust than more disadvantaged groups. For example, a review of research into public attitudes to health data sharing…found that ethnic minority groups are less likely than ethnic majority groups to trust that their health data will remain secure.' Therefore 'trust can be seen as a privilege enjoyed by majority groups…. [and] distrust is logical for many disadvantaged groups.[11]*

This is particularly so in Australia where the Edelman Trust Barometer[12] identified 2 different trust realities. It stated that Australia 'again recorded the largest trust inequality anywhere the world' having a 28-point gap 'between the trusting informed public (well-informed adults in the top income and educational brackets) versus the…mass population.'

The pandemic has made this worse and over the last 2 years, governments and the private sector have expressed concern over declining trust. In August 2021, the World Economic Forum[13] concluded, 'Let's face it: We have trust issues'. It stated: 'Trust builds, distrust destroys' and set out 5 concrete steps to build trust:

> *Make a conscious decision to trust; be trustworthy; be transparent and honest; set standards through collaboration; define your values – and act upon them.*

Is 'radical transparency' the way?

Most diversity and inclusion policies already set out the approach needed to build trust between government and communities. Indeed, page one of the *Guidelines for Emergency Managers*:

> *…recognises that emergencies and disasters occur in a social context and have social consequences… It is therefore pivotal that the sector has a strong understanding of the social structures and communication processes within Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and develops sound engagement opportunities with community leaders who represent the diversity within those communities.*[14]

In Victoria, *The Emergency Management Diversity and Inclusion Framework* makes clear:

> *Cultural and religious practice needs to be understood and considered….*
>
> *Listening and learning requires a new sector-wide approach to working with the community. It also requires humility and recognition that the community may have a clear understanding of what is required and can guide the way. Listening and learning therefore also depends on a willingness to follow, as well as a readiness to lead.*[15]

The consequences of not following this approach became evident in the Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into the detention and treatment of public housing residents arising from a COVID-19 'hard lockdown' in July 2020*. Its recommendations include that agencies:

> *…work with community leaders and public housing residents to strengthen trust and engagement, and develop and implement measures to: …*
>
> *(c) establish and maintain partnerships with community leaders and residents to support timely communication with people living in public housing*
>
> *(d) increase participation of multicultural communities in policy, planning and project activities relating to public housing.*[16]

In response, the Victorian Government took strong action on issues identified with new measures and funding.[17]

The New Zealand *National Disaster Resilience Strategy* that specifically emphasises how 'diversity brings richness, innovation, knowledge and experience' takes this further by stating that organisations 'can build trust among stakeholders through a combination of 'radical transparency' and by demonstrating a set of social values that drive behaviour that demonstrates an acknowledgement of the common good.'[18]

If the necessary guidelines are already published, why they are still not being fully implemented? New Zealand has done better in developing these reciprocal relations than Australia. In part this may be because of a more civil political and media environment.[19] There are several other possible explanations for the gap between the policy and the practice:

- Is there a view that communities are not experts? How is the knowledge of communities valued compared to that of subject-matter experts?
- Are the benefits of resilient communities more difficult to measure? Investing in communities may be seen as less easy to justify than in equipment or other tangible things.
- Does this new approach challenge traditional structures? Governments tend to work as hierarchies. Does a network challenge conventional concepts of leadership?
- Is trusting communities too risky? Government officials may have problems with trusting communities because of the risks involved in letting go of control. A community may come up with an approach not consistent with the already approved government or agency plan. The media or political opponents may exploit a process that is going 'off message'.
- Is this part of the relative lack of investment in mitigation and prevention? Fully implementing diversity and inclusion policies involves taking the time to build relationships. Devoting resources, before disasters strike, to listen to and understand how communities work and what they have to offer can be resource intensive. This also requires investing in capability development. Sometimes these investments have been made, but compared to physical infrastructure and equipment, the resources have been limited.

These questions require further research and analysis. This is why the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (a consortium of 8 academic, community and industry partners including the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation and the Australian Multicultural Foundation) is investigating trust flows between governments and communities. This is not about criticising governments or their agencies. Rather, among the many issues it explores are:

- how best to achieve the objectives set out in strategies for diversity, inclusion and resilience
- how the resilience capital in Australia's diverse communities can be better valued
- how fully realising these depends on trust relationships between governments and communities being based on reciprocity.

Australia and New Zealand have a robust set of emergency management diversity, inclusion and resilience policies. Many of these policies set out the benefits of harnessing the knowledge, talents, structures, and networks existing in diverse communities and identify trust as central to successful implementation. Benefits flow to both service providers and communities when diverse communities are trusted partners in designing the solutions to their own issues. There have been some successful partnerships between agencies and communities, but the change is not yet systemic. Some people may see reciprocal relationships based on trusting communities as too risky. However, the risk in not doing so means ignoring one of our greatest assets.

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Intersectionality: recognising multiple drivers of violence to improve response

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It is time to expand our frameworks and understanding about domestic and family violence and who it impacts on, particularly during disasters.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a dramatic and lasting effect on people's lives. The pandemic has magnified existing inequalities within society, highlighting gaps and unequal access to resources, services and uneven responses by government. For many, the pandemic has also led to an escalation or onset of domestic and family violence. Yet, while we look for ways to prevent and respond to domestic and family violence within this environment, it is important to interrogate existing frameworks and understandings of violence to explore whether they are relevant and how they apply within this disaster context.

Gender inequality is often regarded as the key driving factor of domestic and family violence. While it is a driver in violence against women, it is not the key driver of all forms of domestic and family violence. It does not explain, for example, why domestic and family violence occurs in LGBTIQ+ relationships as well as in heterosexual relationships, against older or ageing sectors of the population and at much higher rates against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women with disabilities. However, the domestic and family violence sector and government continue to highlight that gender inequality is the key, and in many cases, only driver of violence. While it is a critical part of the story and highlights why women are disproportionately affected by domestic and family violence, it fails to paint the whole picture.

Society is built on patriarchal systems, practices and beliefs that generate and rely on unequal power relations. It is these structural inequalities and power imbalances that reproduce different types of systemic discrimination and violence including sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism, ableism and ageism. These multiple forms of discrimination do not exist in isolation. Where they intersect, we understand this as 'intersectionality'. Intersectional frameworks include systems, structures and social norms within a patriarchal social ecology that create positional and relational power dynamics between people, or groups of people, based on their identities.

While intersectionality has become a policy buzzword in recent years, we are yet to truly embrace intersectional frameworks that enable better understanding and response to domestic and family violence in all its forms. Instead, intersectionality is often included as an 'add on' to existing frameworks. Rather than making practice truly intersectional, we continue to 'other' those for whom these frameworks would be most beneficial by only using intersectionality in situations where the primary framework does not apply. In the process, we minimise the complex power inequalities within society that drive violence in all its forms.

As we look ahead to recovery from the pandemic, questioning who our frameworks are designed to support will be critical. Rather than magnifying existing inequalities, there is genuine opportunity to address domestic and family violence by deeply questioning and addressing the existing complex and intertwined power structures at play within society.

Convergence of design: Aboriginal knowledge and emergency management—a new interdisciplinary paradigm?

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Gender and Disaster Australia

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Design is often perceived as a purely creative field that has little to offer the emergency management sector. So how can design-led thinking help to develop mechanisms that improve emergency management approaches that value product over process?

The 2021 conference, Gender Justice in Disaster: Inspiring Action included a session on Sociology, Design and Disasters. The session highlighted that while the disciplines of emergency management and design are technically different, their potential to complement and fortify one another is immense. And just as the emergency management sector is rethinking historically patriarchal practices, design and architecture is acknowledging a heightened need for a paradigm shift that values process as much as edifice.

However, how do we develop mechanisms to move away from emergency management approaches that value product over process with the help of design-led thinking, when design itself needs to be rethought? In the conference panel discussion, Jaspreet Kaur, Daniel Miller, Christy Bryar, Jefa Greenaway and Nikhila Madabhushi agreed that the first step undoubtedly starts with deep listening and a deconstruction of the expert-beneficiary relationship.

Jefa Greenaway, a Wailwan/Kamilaroi architect, saw the process of design as being informed by his strong Aboriginal identity and this was a form of empowerment:

> *When we engage with Indigenous design thinking, we need to start with listening deeply. We will invariably engage with history and memory of place and Country, and ideally we will provide opportunities to skill up and…empower community…to facilitate meaningful agency and voice.*[1]

Through their diverse and overlapping perspectives, the panellists discussed parallels between the emergency management and design disciplines and the linear modus operandi. Both fields have historically left little room for dialogue between the 'expert' and the client or the affected population. This is often attributed to inherent output-oriented values of both disciplines rather than a measure of success of a response or intervention being, for instance, positive social impact.[2] Furthermore, evidence suggests that a lack of diversity at the frontline and at the drawing board will lead to detrimental social outcomes for local people during the recovery phase.[3]

In recognition of this, as well as the myriad lessons after the 2009 bushfires, response and recovery approaches by governments after the bushfires in 2020–21 shifted to centre communities as the leaders in their own recovery.[4] This leaves many questions unanswered as to how disciplines can adequately assist community-led recovery when many, like design, are inherently untrained to engage in trauma-informed contexts.

Given the complex and fraught nature of (re) construction, how might the role of architects and built environment professionals evolve to better converge with emergency management in a recalibrated common goal to fortify, 'people, purpose and place'?[1]

Architect Christy Bryar lived through the 2020–21 Australian summer bushfires and she suffered the tragic loss of her home in Gipsy Point in Far East

Co-creation workshop for the Wangun Amphitheatre with Gurnaikurnai Traditional Owners in East Gippsland.
Images: Nikhila Madabhushi

Gippsland. She talked of the critical role of psychosocial recovery before all else:

> *I think more importantly, social and psychological recovery needs to happen first and I think this is…a space that architects are really well placed to operate in…the architect is not necessarily designing these buildings but actually the process, enabling people to express what it is, their place in the world and what and how they want to live…and we do that all the time in sort of conventional commissions, but can we also do this without an actual (built) outcome…I think we definitely can.*[5]

Jefa Greenaway added:

> *We tend to have this idea that somehow…the architect or the engineer… is sort of the hero in the story. What we encourage particularly when we engage with Indigenous knowledge systems is that…the architect or the designer needs to park the ego at the door…We're very much reliant upon Indigenous knowledge holders… to be generous in their capacity to share knowledge, and so often we are…the least knowledgeable person in the room. It's not until we go on this journey will we even be able to…consider this notion of placemaking and design [in order to] acknowledge the contribution of Indigenous voice in this journey…Ideally what we seek to do is to move beyond a transactional model to a relational model…This is where we start to build and strengthen relationships [to] create a meaningful legacy over time.*[1]

Christy and Jefa's perspectives put forward powerful reminders of the delicacy and significance of people's topophilia around natural and built environments. While architecture and design is often charged with capturing people's love of place, disaster severely compromises this sensibility. In turn, emergency management operates at the opposite end of the spectrum where solastalgia or deep sorrow of environmental change often dominates people's experiences.

Given the diametrically opposed yet intrinsically connected purposes of both disciplines, the insights from the panel discussion raised whether there is a role for designers to walk alongside people and their support networks during multifaceted recovery experiences. How might Aboriginal values around place and Country decentre and revise archaic recovery systems? Are there opportunities for architects and designers to actively involve local people through understanding their solastalgic and topophilic sensibilities before, during and after disasters? Could this way of working illuminate the psychosocial links between built and natural environments and trauma after disaster events?

The panellists suggested that design has significant potential to be equitably framed to broaden its scope to better service response and recovery. But how can emergency management shift its own practices to integrate the creative, tactile and non-linear tools offered by design thinking methods? Can an interdisciplinary approach offer affected people the time and space required to heal during the drastic changes to built and natural environments after disaster through to (re)construction? The response to disasters will require innovative practices that challenge the status quo, as the effects of climate change become more visible and the severity of disasters increases. The incorporation of design thinking may be one way we can start to move towards this paradigm shift.

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A shortage of women in the care sector

Mary Farrow

Emerald Community House Inc

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Women are on the front line as carers in our society with 75% of the health and social care services being provided by women globally.[1] They are often lower paid, experience harsher working conditions and suffer from health issues due to their work. They also represent the largest most diverse demographic that is negatively affected when disasters strike, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent climate and health disasters are excellent examples of how people in Australia and New Zealand have pulled together in the face of adversity and trauma. It is a part of our social culture to look after mates and extend a hand to those who are less fortunate or in need of assistance. It is also countercultural to speak up and vocalise about positive contributions that should be acknowledged and supported equally.

In Australia, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety exposed major operational gaps which contributed to the loss of life for those in care.[2] The health and wellbeing of the staff providing the care was also undervalued, underpaid and neglected. But we didn't need a royal commission to tell us this. Women over 50 are likely informal caregivers, whether they are employed elsewhere or not. In doing this, it is no surprise that women over 55 are the fastest growing group to experience homelessness. At the very least, this is the loss of a most valued, irreplaceable resource.

Low-paid childcare workers, predominantly women, are on the front line as undervalued essential service providers, caring for children of other essential services workers such as health care providers. This was highlighted throughout the pandemic restrictions and lockdowns, long before there was a vaccine.

In July 2020, the childcare sector was the first to be targeted by being 'weaned' off JobKeeper payments by the Australian Government. The government decided that childcare workers, who were mostly women, were no longer eligible to receive JobKeeper payments due to number-crunching rationalisation in subsidies that supposedly looked after their employment and commitment to service. For many, that eventually meant the end of their employment with the closure of childcare centres that were unable to function or meet the requirements of legislated ratios.

Community-based not-for-profit childcare providers suffered the most as their other fundraising activities were ceased as part of the response to the pandemic. Today, there is a shortage of childcare educators, either unwilling to return to the demanding low-paid work or not being vaccinated. This affects other working women who need childcare, and the waiting lists are growing.

Table 1 shows that today, up to 25% of working couple families have children under 4 years old. Over 70% of couples with children under 15 have mothers who are employed. And up to 80% of one parent families are headed up by mothers.[3]

How do these statistics impact on women who were working from home during the school closures? Ad hoc reports from the community sector indicate that women were not only trying to continue with their usual home duties pre-pandemic, they were also in charge of conducting the home schooling of their children, sometimes with multiple children, while trying to keep up with their working-from-home obligations at the same time.

In many cases, partners were reported as not necessarily contributing equally to this effort. Traditionally considered as 'women's work', the roles of women were regarded as having less

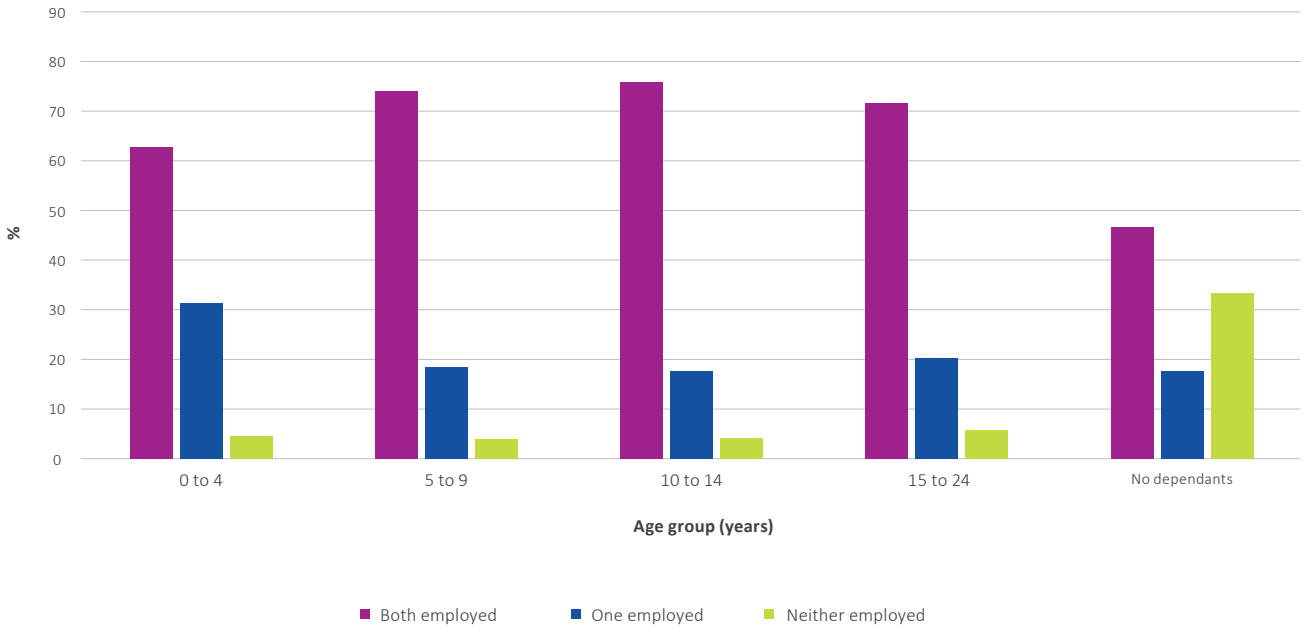

Figure 1: Couple families by number employed and age of youngest dependant as at June 2021.
Image: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Status of Families, June 2021[3]

economic benefit and could be sacrificed in some manner. But what was also sacrificed was the mental health of women to some extent. Women expressed feeling guilty about failing to meet all of their work obligations, home schooling demands, supporting their partner and keeping the home together.

When women, who perform the majority of care work, are negatively affected mentally and physically by disasters and health events, who will be available to provide the necessary care required to recover from these calamities? Society, employers and government leaders must value the work and health of women if cultures are to advance with the necessary skills and workforce required to meet the challenges of climate extremes and pandemics. We have been given a taster with the concurrent knockout punches of bushfires, floods, droughts and a pandemic over the last 2 years. If not now, then when?

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Gender, toilets and evacuation centres

Krissy Nicholson

City of Casey, Victoria

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The increase in violence against women and the gendered effects of disaster are crucial to consider in emergency management planning, response and recovery, particularly in the provision of safe, accessible evacuation centres. The City of Casey partnered with Gender and Disaster Australia to develop a checklist and training to assist emergency management professionals incorporate aspects of gender into their work.

It all started with a question about a toilet. The emergency management team at the City of Casey wanted to know how to label toilets so as to be inclusive of all people in evacuation centres. Knowing the evidence of increased gender-based violence and inequalities during and post disasters, the toilet question was just the beginning. I am sure the team were not expecting my extensive questioning that was to follow. Questions like: Have you thought about women and girls who have their periods? What about bottle-fed babies; breastfeeding mothers? Have you considered the needs of transgender people and the LGBTQI+ community? What are you going to do if a woman has an intervention order and the perpetrator turns up to the same centre?

Resulting conversations revealed the gap between emergency management practices and how local councils incorporate gender into planning evacuation centres. Applying a gender lens ensures the different needs, strengths and vulnerabilities of women, men and gender-diverse people are considered, however, it is something that is often not prioritised.

I didn't know the answer to the inclusive-toilet question and wanted to find resources to support the team in its planning. Instead of calling the local plumber, I contacted Gender and Disaster Australia and Research and Training Coordinator, Jaspreet Kaur, directed me to information about emergency relief centres (and toilets) in the *Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines*.[1] However, a partnership with the City of Casey offered the opportunity to develop a comprehensive checklist specifically for evacuation centres. With Victoria's new *Gender Equality Act 2020*[2] in place, this would be a perfect chance to apply a gender-impact assessment to meet legislation requirements.

Developing the gender checklist

Led by Gender and Disaster Australia, we formed a working group and conducted a desktop review. We built on the existing guidelines to create a specific checklist for ease of use by managers of evacuation centres. The checklist was developed into 3 sections after consultation and a peer-review process involving over 40 professionals from emergency management, the council, academia and community organisations. The checklist sections:

- **Facility design** includes questions about safety for women experiencing family violence and considerations of comfortable spaces for babies and new mothers.
- **Services and support** includes questions related to referral services for mental health and family violence and supports for LGBTQI+ people.
- **Emergency birth** was considered so that resources and support would be available in case of an unexpected labour.

Piloting the gender checklist

The City of Casey's team piloted the checklist starting with a 2-hour training session to present the evidence of why a gendered lens is crucial for

effective emergency management. The training addressed the increased prevalence and severity of violence against women in disasters and why communities excuse violence: 'he was under such stress…he is such a hero…he was really pushed to the edge'. We discussed the return to hyper-traditional gender stereotypes to understand the 'hero-myth' that promotes unrealistic versions of masculinity and 'male' forms of heroism that means men are less likely to seek help. We also considered the perpetuation of outdated stereotypes of women being 'weak' and falling into nurturing roles who are rarely in decision-making positions.

It was the real-life stories from research into the Black Saturday fires in 2009[3,4] that were the most powerful:

> One woman's counsellor said, *'You're pretty well off. I know some couples that are so badly damaged there's no hope for them, and their kids are damaged and everything's a total mess. So you and James are comparatively easy.* (Christina[4])

The 'comparatively easy' situation was one where Christina's partner choked her, only dropping her when she was gasping for breath, and breaking her kneecap on the tiled floor.

Another story was of a man, Rod, who opened up by saying:

> *Every man thinks there are expectations on men to stand up and be brave….instead, I think a lot of people were absolutely shit scared and didn't realise that that was a perfectly natural and normal feeling. I'm sure a lot of those who were, feel it was a weakness.*

The training certainly got the team engaged and motivated.

The City of Casey's team piloted the checklist starting with a 2-hour training session.

Image: City of Casey

A few months after the training, the emergency team was put through its paces in an intensive simulation exercise to put theory into practice. They were confronted with a range of scenarios such as how to ensure the woman with the screaming baby stays safe as she discloses that she is scared of her husband 'exploding'. Or having to call upon interpreters to understand the Punjabi woman with limited English or making sure rainbow badges are shown and there are specific services to ensure our LGBTQI+ community members feel welcome. The scenarios certainly tested our trainers' acting skills as we played out roles representing tricky situations that can present at an evacuation centre.

During the simulation, a first responder speaks to a woman who is disclosing family violence while at an evacuation centre.

Image: City of Casey

An interpreter was organised to translate to a local Punjabi-speaking Sikh woman during the simulation.

Image: City of Casey

Actions and outcomes

The Gender and Disaster Australia training included the development of action plans and the City of Casey team made changes into existing systems and processes. Among those actions was the application of a gender-impact assessment to its Emergency Management Handbook. The team also developed a new role specifically for emergency gender and inclusion that will be available to respond in the set-up of an evacuation centre. New partnerships were also identified that will include LGBTQI+ and family violence response organisations.

The emergencies team and trainers after an intense emergency simulation exercise at a local evacuation centre.

Image: City of Casey

One of the unexpected outcomes was that the team has promoted the training and checklist with the Municipal Emergency Management Enhancement Group that includes local government emergency management staff from Melbourne's South East Metropolitan area. As a result, they will be undertaking more training and incorporating gender into their induction programs.

Moving forward

Reflecting on the pilot, I am acutely aware of the potential barriers in the implementation of gender-transformative practice in real-life scenarios. Managing resistance in what is usually a male-dominated sector is likely to be a continual issue as we challenge gender stereotypes and traditional ways of working. Putting policy into practice is always more complex than it seems. However, with the development of a nationally available checklist accompanying the existing *Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines*, we have easily accessible resources to guide us. There really is no excuse anymore. If we want to abide by principles of 'inclusion', 'do no harm' and 'leave no one behind', then gender must be on the agenda across the emergency management sector.

For those who are still wondering what to label an inclusive toilet, the best practice at the moment is to have toilets for people with disabilities, 'Male', 'Female' and 'All Genders'.

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Taking action to accelerate progress towards gender equality in the fire and emergency sector

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It has long been recognised that the persistent low levels of gender diversity and inclusion within some AFAC member workforces requires action. The evidence is clear that increasing gender diversity improves individual, team and organisational performance.[1]

The fire and emergency sector operates in an increasingly challenging and complex environment and it needs to take advantage of the full spectrum of talent including women and others to ensure a future-ready workforce. Increasing gender diversity also addresses risk factors for the sector including health and safety, mental wellbeing, reputational risk and community engagement.[2]

Established in 2010 by Elizabeth Broderick AO, the Champions of Change Coalition is a globally recognised strategy for achieving gender equality and building respectful and inclusive workplaces. AFAC members joined the Champions of Change Coalition in 2017, founding the Fire and Emergency Group, understanding that direct leadership involvement and a collective commitment to change was required to progress gender equality in the sector.

The Fire and Emergency Group is convened by the former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner Kristen Hilton and includes chief executives, commissioners and chief fire officers from the agencies responsible for fire, emergency and land management services from Australia and New Zealand. Members share resources and learn from each other about challenges and successes when implementing actions to progress the strategy to improve gender balance and create inclusive workplaces.

While increasing the number of women in the sector is key to improving gender balance, it is also vital that agencies are creating workplace cultures where women can thrive and move up into senior leadership roles. The process of creating an inclusive workplace culture requires change at the organisation and individual levels as it takes time to overcome resistance to new ideas and to reach the critical mass where the new state become the status quo.[3]

While some agencies are along the path to achieving gender balance, across the sector as a whole, gender and diversity gains have been difficult to achieve and the pace of change is slow. Recognising the need to achieve buy-in and enable members to clearly articulate the case for change, the group developed *Going Beyond It's the Right Thing To Do: Gender balance in Fire and Emergency Services* in 2020.[2] The report used evidence-based research to explain the benefits and rationale for improving gender and other diversity in the fire and emergency sector. It also provided answers to common questions about why gender balance and diversity is an issue that requires action and the need for the Champions of Change strategy.

Key to the Champions of Change strategy is implementing rigorous and transparent reporting to track progress. Each year, members are asked to submit data for metrics that are published in a publicly available impact report. In 2021, overall representation of women in the sector was 22%, a decrease from previous years and down from 25% in 2020. However, women's promotions achieved across the group had only a slight increase to 23% compared to 19% in 2020. Women's representation in key management personnel roles in frontline service delivery has increased to 24%, an increase on previous years and a large increase from 10% in 2018, the first year of reporting.[4] Frontline service-delivery roles include anyone whose primary role

Carlene York was the first SES Commissioner and first woman to be appointed president of the AFAC Board.

Image: AFAC

Kathy Gosby, Forest Fire Management Victoria, is the first woman in Victoria's emergency services to become a Level 3 Incident Controller in 2020.

Image: Forest Fire Management Victoria

is to directly engage with the community to deliver a service that assists in the prevention, preparedness, response or recovery of incidents.

What the reporting shows is that addressing the lack of gender balance in the sector is a complex problem that requires long-term commitment and perseverance. In 2021, the Fire and Emergency Group focused on the prevention of sexual harassment, recruitment, achieving buy-in, gender pay equity and intersectionality. By reviewing and implementing appropriate policies, identifying and removing systemic barriers, organisations continue to build the foundations to consolidate progress towards gender equality.

Improving gender balance and increasing diversity will enable the sector to better support and engage with the diverse communities we serve. As a sector we need to continue to address backlash, build buy-in and push for action to accelerate change to create workplaces and work cultures that are truly inclusive.

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The importance of queer community resilience

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A few years ago, I was asked to write a blog post about what I saw as key challenges for disaster management research, policy and practice. Since then, I have learnt that LGBTQIA+ inclusion requires supporting resilience capacities as much as it does addressing disaster vulnerabilities.

In that post, one area I wrote about was the need to widen the scope of 'diversity' in disaster management, especially relating to inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other minority gender and sexual identities (LGBTQIA+).[1] I reflected on my experiences as a PhD student attending 'diversity' sessions at prominent emergency management conferences, only to see that diversity appeared to mean gender as a male-female binary and narrowly focused on things like quotas for women in emergency organisations. Moreover, it appeared diversity didn't include other intersectional diversity factors such as sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, indigeneity, disability, age and more.

I have been encouraged more recently by the increasing visibility and recognition of the diverse needs, inequalities and disaster vulnerabilities experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities, including studies by world-leading researchers in Australia[2] and other articles in this issue. These works highlight the marginalisation and oppressions of queer people in societies exposed during, and exacerbated by, disasters. This has been vitally important, even if challenges of translating research into disaster policy and practice persist.[3] But LGBTQIA+ inclusion also requires better understanding and support of the coping capacities and resilience qualities of LGBTQIA+ people and groups. I describe some of the ways queer communities supported each other during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and offer some potential ways forward to value, support and grow LGBTQIA+ disaster resilience.

Queer community resilience during COVID-19

During the pandemic, I led a project exploring the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in the United Kingdom (UK)[4] and in Brazil[5], particularly during what is generally understood as the 'first wave' in 2020. While significant challenges were experienced by LGBTQIA+ people in both contexts, such as mental health decline, isolation from supportive people and identity-affirming spaces, discrimination and disruption to transgender health care, to name a few, our research also uncovered stories of resilience. People were drawing on their existing coping capacities and collective resources to help others. LGBTQIA+ community organisations and peer-support groups were vital during the pandemic.

Community groups filled critical gaps in providing mental health support and reducing isolation through mutual aid and the creation of safe and identity-affirming (online) spaces. One UK study interviewee, whom I will call 'Omar', worked for an organisation supporting LGBTQIA+ Muslims. Omar described how the need for support increased during the pandemic with many community members suddenly stuck at home in lockdowns with unsupportive or trans/homophobic family members. Omar's organisation quickly adapted to delivering virtual and online support rather than their usual in-person activities. They started reaching out to people further afield. Omar said:

> *We had a Pride event and we reached out to countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, where being homosexual is against the law and you*

would be imprisoned or even worse, sentenced to death. So, we had people sitting in their bedroom saying 'wait a minute, I'm in Saudi Arabia. It's 3am, I'm listening to your event and I'm actually at a Pride!'. So, our reach was huge! It was amazing.

Omar's and other stories from our research into LGBTQIA+ experiences of the pandemic are presented in a recent animation video titled, LGBT+ and Covid-19: stories from the UK and Brazil, and the need for more inclusive crisis responses.[6]

In another example, 'Ken' and a group of friends started a community group (prior to the pandemic) to provide a safe space for queer people to express their identities, share food, socialise and network. The group identified a need for a community space that was more welcoming and inclusive than both the dominant cisgender-heteronormative spaces of society and the often gay-male-dominated nightlife culture (recognising that marginalisation also exists *within* LGBTQIA+ populations).

The group performed several important coping functions. Like Omar, they set up online events and spaces, such as virtual queer cabaret nights and weekly social catchups via Zoom. Some transgender members of the group started a trans mutual aid initiative, cooking and delivering food and care packages to isolated and vulnerable transgender people (e.g., people recently returned home from surgeries). Ken described how being part of the community group and running the activities was what was keeping them going during the pandemic, not just being able to express themselves safely with peers but the feeling of helping others.

In Brazil, under an ultra-conservative government delivering an inadequate pandemic response that has received national and international criticism and where LGBTQIA+ people, especially trans and non-binary people, live in an increasingly hostile environment[7], we heard similar stories of queer people helping each other in the absence of adequate formal government support.

'Laura' described how racism in Brazil[8] compounds the marginalisation and inequality of black queer people, especially trans women of colour. In this context, community peer support was essential for helping many people survive during the pandemic. Laura witnessed groups of black lesbian and bisexual women coming together to assist with loneliness, wellbeing and financial stress by fundraising and providing social, health and income support for poorer black LGBTQIA+ people.

Supporting LGBTQIA+ disaster resilience

Resilience and coping capacities for crises, like vulnerability, are developed through everyday experiences of societal marginality in 'normal' times.[9] For instance, the roles played by LGBTQIA+ community groups during the pandemic echo pre-pandemic needs and activities. Such groups already operated in 'normal' times due to existing gaps in services and exclusion from mainstream society, with queer people developing their own supportive and safe spaces. What we saw in the pandemic was, in principle, the same groups doing what they have always done to support each other in the absence of adequate LGBTQIA+ inclusion in society and public policies, albeit perhaps using some different approaches and more online tools.

In seeking to support LGBTQIA+ disaster resilience, we must look beyond short-term needs during crises like COVID-19 and focus on long-term risk reduction. We must address the political, economic and social structures that constitute root causes of vulnerabilities, as disaster studies have long informed. But alongside this should be a closer and more active assessment of the existing resilience capacities of LGBTQIA+ people (and other diverse/minority groups). Comprehending how people cope during crises will aid better understanding of the everyday marginality contributing to the need for such coping capacities. This, in turn, assists in future risk reduction and the development of tailored strategies to support and grow resilience.

As a start, existing LGBTQIA+ community groups and organisations should be supported through funding and resources to maintain and improve work they are already doing. Disaster and emergency organisations should build strategic partnerships with queer people as well as the groups and organisations that represent them to facilitate knowledge sharing and targeting of support to where and who it will be most effective. As the stories presented demonstrate, LGBTQIA+ people have the best wisdom about LGBTQIA+ lives and communities, especially at local levels.

Finally, care should be taken with the language of vulnerability. Placing too much emphasis on indicators of vulnerability (such as gender) can fail to adequately account for the complexity of lived experiences, including of marginalisation. Labelling people as 'vulnerable' can be disenfranchising, overlooking other aspects of their personhood, such as the strength, coping capacities and important resilience qualities of queer people highlighted during the pandemic.

Endnotes

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The Only Way Is Up: a tool for evaluating diverse SOGIESC (aka LGBTIQ+) inclusion

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Edge Effect

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Once emergency services organisations decide that LGBTIQ+ inclusion is important, what resources exist to support changes in organisational culture and program planning? Edge Effect's, *The Only Way Is Up*, report and evaluation tool was designed for international humanitarian responses but could be easily used by domestic emergency organisations.

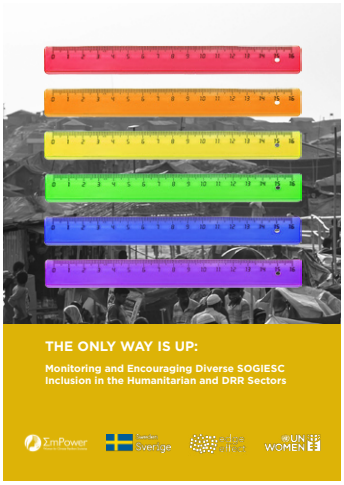
Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Harold reached Vanuatu on 5 April 2020. Almost 160,000 people were affected, primarily on Vanuatu's northern islands including Espiritu Santo, Malo and Pentecost. The damage from wind and flooding was severe and multisectoral, affecting communications and destroying approximately 21,000 homes along with schools and health facilities as well as devastating agriculture and fishing fleets. One person experienced the immediate aftermath in this way:

> *I made sure that parents, niece, her mother and brother hopped in the transports to the evacuation centre. My mother begged me to go but I refuse to go. That fear from facing people and their comments is not something that I am ready to face.*[1]

As recounted in *The Only Way Is Up*, dilemmas such as this are too common for people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC, aka LGBTIQ+ people). Research has demonstrated that LGBTIQ+ people in Australia face their own challenges in surviving and recovering from disasters.[2] For that reason, work in the regional sphere could have significant benefits for domestic emergency management organisations.

The Only Way Is Up draws on 5 years of work exploring LGBTIQ+ inclusion in rapid-onset disaster and conflict displacement across Asia and the Pacific. This includes *Down By The River*[3] (research into experiences of LGBTIQ+ people after Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016) and *Pride in the Humanitarian System*[4] (a 2018 regional gathering of SOGIESC civil society organisations and humanitarian response organisations).

Working through national civil society organisations, *The Only Way Is Up* includes experiences of people with diverse SOGIESC living in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. These people have been displaced by conflict or earthquakes on the Philippines island of Mindanao and lived through Tropical Cyclone Harold. These interviews reinforced that discrimination, violence and exclusion experienced prior to crises shapes experiences during relief and recovery phases including harassment from other survivors, being blamed for



The Only Way Is Up report and evaluation tool is published by Edge Effect.

Image: Edge Effect

causing disasters and self-exclusion from relief centres and services to avoid unsafe situations. A parallel study of humanitarian sector assessments, program designs and funding in the same crises revealed a troubling lack of recognition of these issues.

How does change happen – or not happen?

A growing number of reports over the last decade highlight similar problems. *The Only Way Is Up* goes beyond re-stating the problem to analyse why the international humanitarian and disaster risk reduction systems seem slow to recognise the rights, needs and strengths of people with diverse SOGIESC. The international human rights principle that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'[5], the humanitarian system principle that 'human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found'[6], the Sendai Framework call for an 'all-of-society'[7] approach and the Sustainable Development Goals promise that 'no one will be left behind' all provide plenty of authority to do more. But even when the United Nations and other international organisations make a commitment to diverse SOGIESC inclusion, it often doesn't go much further than adding the acronym 'LGBTIQ+' to a long list of potentially marginalised groups.

The inertia in addressing inclusion issues also occurs in Australia. Edge Effect joined a session panel at the 2021 Emergency Services Foundation International Women's Day event, Let's Choose to Challenge. At the session, an audience member (speaking with evident frustration) pointed out that 'we have many reports that have surfaced experiences of discrimination, so what is the reason that organisations are not actually changing?' (paraphrased).

The apparent resistance to change in the international humanitarian sector has led organisations such as Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance and the CHS Alliance to analyse the sector as a complex and adaptive system. Such systems have many actors that influence and interact in ways that are not always predictable. Actors within the system (organisations, groups or individuals) tend to have established ways of working, which may be influenced by funding, competition, ideas, constraints and other factors. The 'messiness' of such systems means that top-down policy pronouncements and isolated interventions such as research reports or training workshops are fairly easily absorbed by the system, which then carries on pretty much as it did before.

Research for *The Only Way Is Up* included interviews with participants from Pride in the Humanitarian System. Participants were asked what factors helped or hindered their attempts to implement LGBTIQ+-inclusive ideas when they returned to their organisation. The hindering factors were clearly dominant with issues including lack of resources for dedicated projects, lack of LGBTIQ+ program skills among humanitarian and emergency services organisations and other priorities that always seemed to be more important.

Is change possible? Yes.

That picture seems a little bleak. Except that we know, despite all the odds, that change can happen.

In 1978, protestors at the first Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras were arrested and their personal details were splashed across homophobic news reporting of the event. Forty years later, those people, now known as the '78ers', rode in a double-decker bus that cruised up Oxford Street to the cheers of a roadside and broadcast audience in the hundreds of thousands. Change does happen, though it is often easier to see how it happens in retrospect.

Complex and adaptive systems theory is sometimes said to be better at describing the problem than finding the solution. But it does offer hints. It may help to think more about incentive structures that hinder change and how they could be reconfigured. Change may come faster if we apply pressure to the system in more ways, or if the range of actors within the system becomes more diverse. So, as well as high-level announcements, research reports and workshops, more effort could go into diversity within the paid and volunteer workforces. Effective grievance procedures could also be established so that good people don't leave organisations out of frustration. Inclusive public communications could be used to tell diverse stories and stronger partnerships could be formed with specialist LGBTIQ+ and other organisations.

Monitoring change

Alongside such initiatives, a complex and adaptive systems approach needs monitoring to discern what is or is not working and to change tactics accordingly. The evaluation tool within *The Only Way Is Up* provides a way to benchmark existing emergency response programs for SOGIESC inclusion and for exploring options for improvement.

The tool is currently designed for international humanitarian responses and assesses diverse SOGIESC inclusion across 4 areas: i) organisation and program background, ii) gender analysis and needs assessments, iii) inclusion, participation and leadership and iv) safety and protection for marginalised groups and 2 optional thematic areas of v) shelter/housing and vi) livelihoods support. These are assessed through a combination of organisational and program documentation, interviews with key staff and consultation with people with diverse SOGIESC who are or would be beneficiaries. The result of this overall process is a score on the Edge Effect Diverse SOGIESC Continuum, from 0 (hostile) to 100 (transformative).

The participation of people with diverse SOGIESC is an essential step. It is accomplished through partnership with an LGBTIQ+ civil society organisation to achieve 2 objectives. The first objective is to ensure that the engagement with people with diverse SOGIESC occurs safely and that a good range of people are involved. This is more likely to occur through partnership with an LGBTIQ+ civil society organisation or network that has deep reach into their community. The second objective is accountability, ensuring that the process is robust and that people with diverse SOGIESC are part of discussions after the scoring. These facilitated discussions explore what the score means and what kinds of steps could improve future scores.

Edge Effect provides training and organisational development support that helps organisations to improve inclusion and

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DIVERSE SOGIESC CONTINUUM — PROGRAM FOCUS

	HOSTILE	UNAWARE	INACTIVE	INCLUSIVE	TRANSFORMATIVE
IMPACT	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC is exacerbated.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC may be reinforced.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC may be reinforced.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC may be ameliorated.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC is ameliorated and challenged.
CAUSE	The organisation is aware of likely negative impact on people with diverse SOGIESC but goes ahead anyway because either it chooses not to address diverse SOGISC issues or actively discriminates against people with diverse SOGIESC.	The organisation has no awareness of marginalisation or exclusion experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC in humanitarian or developed contexts, or how its ways of working may reinforce marginalisation or exclusion.	The organisation has some awareness of the marginalisation and exclusion experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC, but for various reasons has not developed neither the will or competencies to act on this awareness, or allocated resources to address these issues.	The organisation is aware that norms-based discrimination excludes people with diverse SOGIESC. It addresses this through specific initiatives that target people with diverse SOGIESC but does not redesign its mainstream programs or substantively revise its ways of working.	The organisation has developed competency to challenge norms-based discrimination that excludes people with diverse SOGIESC. It has revised its ways of working and has programs and partnerships that positively include people with diverse SOGIESC in mainstream programs while offering targeted alternative programs where safety requires.
EXAMPLE(S)	A faith-based organisation is contracted to deliver relief, however its theology commitments or those of its in-country partners cast people with diverse SOGIESC as sinners; OR a secular organisation puts aside SOGIESC concerns because they prefer to use the funds elsewhere or do not want to deal with the complexities of this work.	A schools education program is designed and implemented without any consideration of whether people with diverse SOGIESC are supported by their families to attend, weather they experience bullying, whether they achieve all they could and are well-placed to build a life, or whether they leave school with psycho-social health issues.	Gender advice for a Shelter program includes people with diverse SOGIESC in the long-list of potentially marginalised groups that should be consulted. No advice is provided on how to engage safely and effectively, or what to do with the information received, and no consideration is given to the lack of diverse SOGIESC training, guidance, policy or genuine CSO partnerships.	A post-disaster psychological health program trains community members to provide peer support. Community stigma means that people with diverse SOGIESC may be at risk, the organisation conducts a separate training for diverse SOGIESC community members.	A cash-based social protection program designed in partnership with diverse SOGIESC CSOs and accounts for the impact of diverse SOGIESC marginalisation on family and community relationships. The program provides holistic support that addresses longer-term livelihood challenges and counters community stigma.

The Rapid Assessment Tool assesses diverse SOGIESC inclusion at the levels of programs and projects.

Image: Edge Effect

transformation. The tool was piloted with United Nations Women programs in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps in partnership with Bandhu Social Welfare Society. While some adaptation would be required for evaluating Australian domestic emergency response programs, this is certainly possible. Ideally, organisations would undertake the assessment at regular intervals, for example every 2 years, to track change over time and to make changes.

The Rapid Assessment Tool facilitates assessment of diverse SOGIESC inclusion at the detailed levels of programs and projects implemented by humanitarian organisations.

Be part of the journey

Despite the many stories of exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC and the often systemic nature of the problem, there are causes for optimism including:

- the existence of LGBTIQ+ civil society organisations that can work with the emergency management sector
- the deepening understanding of how and why people with diverse SOGIESC are excluded in crises
- steps that staff are taking within emergency management organisations to increase diverse SOGIESC inclusion.

Too often this is still the work of isolated individuals or small groups, passionate about diverse SOGIESC inclusion, but at risk of burn-out. The hope is that *The Only Way Is Up* report and evaluation tool encourages more organisations to accelerate their journeys towards inclusion for all.

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Girls Fire and Resilience Program

Bronnie Mackintosh

Girls on Fire

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Girls on Fire is an Australian incorporated association that provides firefighting and resilience programs for girls and young women. It expanded its fire programs format to encompass the need for greater community resilience.

These broad-objective programs come in response to Australia's 2019–20 fire season, the pandemic and demand for more knowledge and awareness of how to prevent and prepare for emergencies.

The Girls Fire Camp program was first piloted in 2018 as a recommendation by AFAC to contribute to the long-term recruitment of women to the firefighting sector. All 21 fire services agencies were participating in the Champions of Change program and were looking for ways to add diversity to frontline operational roles.

The original program was modelled on successful North American girls fire camps and was delivered via a collaborative governance structure led by Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) and included NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the NSW State Emergency Service. Firefighters Mutual Bank also threw their support behind the initiative, sponsoring the camp to enable 20 teenage girls to participate. The program was held at YMCA Camp Yarramundi with follow-up reporting to AFAC Workforce Management and Diversity and Inclusion collaboration groups. The 6-day program included 3 days of operations led by each agency, adventure activities coordinated by YMCA Camp Yarramundi and many self- and team-development activities.

This pilot program laid the foundation for the virtual and condensed formats that now exist and provided an evidence base for efficacy. This evidence base was supported by research conducted by Monash University.[1] Researchers collected and analysed qualitative and ethnographic data to measure the impacts on both participants and volunteers.

The objectives from the pilot were to provide an experiential learning program to teenage girls that gave insight into the role of first responders and encouragement to join in a volunteer or paid role. The second objective was to provide leadership development to agency representatives who volunteer on the program, providing them greater skills and confidence.

As bushfires and COVID-19 emergencies triggered responses by industry and education service providers, Girls on Fire delivered 'Virtually Possible' – a hybrid program of online learning followed by a 1-day hands-on training session (HOTS). New partnerships were formed with National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Corporation, which meant the program design could include land-management activities. This was vital to provide a whole-emergency-management context and meant even more activities for the girls. Girls on Fire delivered 5 programs during 2020 instead of one, taking the experience to more students in regional areas in NSW of Dubbo, Newcastle, Mogo and 2 in the Hawkesbury. In total, 150 girls experienced fire operations during this time and 50 firefighters from the participating agencies received valuable experience and joined a network championing diversity in the sector.

In 2021, the program schedule was affected by the pandemic, but one significant program made it through the gap during COVID-19 break-outs. Girls on Fire was invited to the northwest outback town of Brewarrina by a true champion of the fire

Girls on Fire delivered its Virtual Program to nearly 300 young women in years 10–12 in NSW in 2020.

Image: Girls on Fire

and emergency services, Burra McHughes. Burra is a passionate firefighter for FRNSW and NSW RFS and a proud Ngemba man who leads and coordinates continual engagements and opportunities for his community. Acknowledging the lack of opportunities for young girls in the area, particularly Aboriginal teenagers, Burra invited Girls on Fire to run a program at the former Aboriginal shearing school, Merriman.

We gladly accepted the invitation to visit during Reconciliation Week and walk the talk of the theme 'More Than Words'. This 4-day cultural inclusion and community engagement program took the term 'collaboration' to a new level. Personnel within urban and rural fire services, land management agencies and the State Emergency Service came together for a program with broadened objectives that included building cultural competence, community safety in vulnerable communities, fire education and interoperability. The resilience aspect, for individuals and the community, was revealed and embedded.

A new partnership was formed with TAFE NSW for this program to ensure the cultural competence content was consistent with existing frameworks for education in Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander contexts. FRNSW Firefighter, Peter (PJ) Jensen, was the lead facilitator and, it's fair to say, adult and student participants were mesmerised by his yarning; sharing lived and learnt experiences and his rich connection with culture and history. Activities included boomerang and spear throwing, making fire by traditional techniques, fire-pit cooking and yarning and painting using the Indigenous traditional ochre-spitting technique. As a graduate of FRNSW's IFARES program[2], PJ is a huge advocate for creating opportunities for young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and making connections between history, community risk and building trust to teach safety.

This program was unique because the NSW RFS provided 2 basecamp deployment tents for the 32 participants, while the 20 mentors stayed in the old shearing quarters or their swags. The stars and the stories were equally incredible and taking this great program to the rural northwest has shaped the direction of future programs. The recruitment and leadership objectives were still met, but we experienced such meaningful connections to Country, to the complexity of challenges in regional communities and the need for fire safety education delivered practically and interactively.

The diversity of the program design was aimed at helping communities to take active roles in fire preparedness and prevention. On the last day of the program, Burra organised a multi-agency activity in which the camp participants performed a simulated emergency display. Families of the participants, teachers from the schools and other community members attended to watch and talk to the firefighters and mentors who had inspired their young people. We took this opportunity to provide community safety information, meet local frontline responders and practice our interagency cooperation—words that sound so much easier than the practice that is often inhibited by cultures.

What was conspicuous was how the program improved the overall visibility of emergency services in a positive and proactive way, especially in Indigenous and marginalised communities. Working with other volunteers and paid staff led to greater understandings of different processes and inspired us to continue connecting with and advocating for diverse communities within our organisations.

Girls on Fire has been helped by really positive media and promotion of the programs. Girls on Fire has featured on television lifestyle shows, as well as targeted marketing through social media channels. This exposure led to more support, demand for more programs, sponsorship and a generous community grant from the National Australia Bank (NAB) Foundation. To facilitate this growth, a new governance structure and legal framework were created and Girls on Fire became an incorporated association and registered charity in 2021. This provides a clear delineation between Girls on Fire as a service provider and the other participating partners. The coordination of partners and programs will be directed by a steering committee with representatives from participating agencies.

One of the new partnerships is with Regional Industry and Education Partnership (RIEP) that provide information on vocational pathways to schools in NSW. As a taster to next year's face-to-face delivery, Girls on Fire delivered its Virtual Program to nearly 300 young women in years 10–12. The 2-part webinar provided an overview of emergency management and the emergency services organisations that participate in the Girls on Fire collaboration. The program includes the importance of resilience and how they—and members in their communities—can contribute to the prevention of and preparedness for emergencies. In the second session, representatives from each of the fire and emergency services organisations shared their roles and experiences, answered questions and encouraged the girls to join the sector. The firefighters who volunteered for the session loved the opportunity and said they, too, felt inspired to hear the experiences of other women.

Girls on Fire has a full program schedule for 2022. As well as the schools' programs through RIEP, there are 5 programs planned through the NAB Foundation grant for NSW regions of Mogo, Tathra, Lismore, mid-north coast and Tamworth during Reconciliation Week. In addition, Girls on Fire Inc will also offer virtual information sessions and 1-day HOTS programs in NSW.

The flagship program, Firefighters Mutual Bank Girls Fire and Emergency Services Program, is on hold for 2022 pending pandemic restrictions and commitment from sponsors and agencies. YMCA Camp Yarramundi is definitely ready for us to return and fingers crossed we can get back out there by July.

For more information, email info@girlsonfire.com.au and watch for updates on www.girlsonfire.com.au.

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Summertime: Reflections on a vanishing future

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As unlikely as it may sound, the protagonists of this absorbing read are 2 pigs: one burnt to death in Australia's summer bushfires of 2019–20, another alive and grieving. Their harrowing story provides a narrative arc to this book's thoughtful exploration of the climate crisis that is upon us. By drawing on the multi-species entanglement of life on Earth, Danielle Celermajer dissects her own experiences of the bushfires with an emotional intelligence that is both compassionate and confronting.

The book follows the events as the bushfire-threat encroached and retreated repeatedly on the valley in New South Wales that Celermajer calls home. Each of the book's 4 sections—titled before, during, after, world—tangle with the specificities of world-making and risk engagement, as well as the larger existential questions that either guide or mislead our moral judgements as individuals and as a society.

What Celermajer achieves in this book is monumental. She dares to stay with the trouble; to think through what others too easily relegate to the too-hard basket. She puts words to the unthinkable: that humans have altered Earth systems and the liveability of this planet to such an extent that we might be causing our own extinction. The book thereby speaks to a global audience despite its localised setting. Its felt and theoretical insights span diverse contexts—from everyday living and land stewardship to policy making and emergency management practices.

The book is eloquently stitched together to make the impossible visible. I would reread paragraphs just for their sheer elegance. Then I would reread them because they put words to a particular kind of torment. The crux of this torment concerns the ethical dilemma of knowing: 'whether to know or shield oneself from knowing' (p.81). This is a core focus of the book: how we approach death and unfolding catastrophe, and what this 'knowing' does to us.

I come to this book after 15 years as a social scientist researching how bushfires shape, change and destroy lives and livelihoods. The stories shared with me and the lessons learnt have left an indelible mark. They fuel a sense of dread from knowing what is to come with climate change, both in traditionally fire-prone regions like Australia and North America and in fire-known but less fire-prone regions like Europe where I now live.

Barely had I settled down here before catastrophic fires rage across mediterranean Europe in the summer of 2021. Scientific research predicts this will be the norm in many parts of Europe in the not too distant future. It will bring the same chronic flame and smoke conditions that plague Australia and North America with a regularity that dispels with established knowledge of fire regimes and fire behaviour. As Celermajer masterly narrates in *Summertime*, safety, stability and predictability are among the many casualties of our time, of the climate catastrophe. This knowing is both heartbreaking and an intellectual call to arms.

There is, at times, an uneasy tension between Celermajer's felt entanglements with the more-than-human and her anthropomorphic descriptions of these multi-species dependencies. She readily admits to the confines of her own white, heteronormative, privileged culture that lacks a language to express ecological grief and the relational knowing of Indigenous peoples. However, the humility, depth and sense of responsibility with which she reflects on the meaning of value and the role humans play in the creation of conditions where fire begets fire is a masterly response to the call to arms.

There are ways of knowing and coping and then there is the barefaced knowing that this is just the beginning; that we must act in so many urgent ways to stop what increasingly feels like relentless triage of unchecked bushfires. In noticing the changing rhythms, Celermajer reminds us that the bushfires are more of a condition than an event. It is time to act sustainably and ethically while we still have options to do so.

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Indigenous fire knowledge and land management practice

A summary of sustainable ways of life and innovative approaches to climate change and catastrophic bushfire as presented at the Gender Justice conference in 2021.

Victor Steffensen is an Indigenous writer, filmmaker, musician and consultant. He was interviewed by **Steve O'Malley**, a firefighter of over 30 years.

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'You can't tell our children that all the emus will be gone ...'

In Australia, Indigenous land management is based on prevention and working with the land and the elements. In contrast, so much human response to extreme weather events and disasters worldwide is based on man (literally) attempting to prevail over nature. Victor Steffensen speaks of 'young' knowledge systems that don't respect nor understand old knowledge systems and the protocols around them. Instead, young knowledge systems need to advance Indigenous knowledge and allow it to demonstrate its value. He said:

> *There's beautiful roses on both sides of the fence. Western science has a wealth of advanced technology that can help, and Aboriginal knowledge has a wealth of knowledge of the landscape from thousands of years' experience and if only they could work together and respect each other in the right way, we could move mountains.*

Steve

In this conference, we're talking about gender justice and we're talking about equity. This conversation with you, Victor, is really important. Among other things, you're a trainer of trainers, and people are going to go out there and do traditional burning. That's a huge load on your shoulders. But it must also be a relief knowing that emergency organisations are listening. Is that a fair assumption?

Victor

Yeah, it's a slow, slow process. There are different agencies that want to get these things going and others that don't want to listen. They just want to do their own thing. We have a whole society, a mixed bag of perceptions of what they think is fire management. There's also what people think they get out of putting out fires in this country. We need to really be humble about looking after our land. And we need to do it in a way that we connect with each other, and we share with each other. We aim for a baseline of knowledge that we can all draw from.

Steve

The Indigenous approach to fire that you use doesn't seem to be about domination or having total control.

Victor

That's right and I learnt that from the Elders. They considered the rights of everybody, and they made sure that everyone was included. There's this old saying, 'Help him out, give him a hand'. People need to be inclusive because they're on this country now. We've got to be able to involve everybody. Our past, the history of what's happened to Elders and people and Country, has been traumatic for all Aboriginal people - and we can't forget that - but at the end of the day, we need to move forward in a way that is positive and gives opportunities.

I've just learnt over the years that being aggressive doesn't work. So, you need to be softer. We need to be inclusive and make sure that people are learning and listening. It's not about trying to make people change through force or through argument. It's about exposing them to what's reality and what is actually the truth. People might get upset but it's not about them, it's about future generations.

Education is the key. We need to be teaching our children. The very first thing we did with all people back when I was only 18 years of age was go straight down to the schoolhouse and start to teach the kids. We'd take them walking in the bush and teach them how to make fire with 2 sticks and sing songs. The Elders' highest priority was the children, to teach the young people and make sure that they learn the language and the knowledge. Getting access to the landscape is really important so they can be connected to Country, because that's what will heal and save us all from the

madness, understanding what society can actually disrupt for us. It really is a holistic thing. Fire has been big, but it's not just about fire, it's more than that. It's about the wellbeing of the environment, wellbeing of communities. There's so many more benefits that float above the fire.

Steve

Before we started chatting, you said you were talking to bureaucrats today in Council and with a few landowners and you're relaying to them what you're learning from the land.

Victor

I'm telling them what they need to hear. For just about everyone, I get them out on Country and that's the classroom. It's not me talking, it's me interpreting. I'm reading the signs of the landscape so that people can see what the land is saying and what's happening. When they see those indicators, and then they see the behaviour of the fire, and they see where it stops – and it does everything that we say the fire does. You can't get any more proof than that.

When we look at all the meetings I had with agencies, governments, Council, whatever, you get nowhere. When we sit in a meeting room over all the years, all the years of trying to get this through and banging your head against the wall, you realise that there's one vital being missing and that is the Country. Country is a living thing and it's never heard. People have got their own decisions and their own perceptions. But when the Country steps in, then you can't argue with that. And that's why it's really crucial that I take them out on the land and interpret the land to them and show them - in their own backyard - what's going on. When they actually get that, they understand.

When I finish talking, they're all quiet and you can hear their mind going. They're thinking about the knowledge and trying to make sense of what we just said to them. Not only that, they're actually thinking about themselves as well. Like, 'Ah, we should be doing this, we should be doing that'. At today's meeting, in one day, the Council came on board to look at ways of funding the rangers and trying to get fire practitioners in the regions.

For some people it takes just a couple of hours of being on Country and they leave all excited to do something. But the challenge is trying to keep that going. They might get to work the next day and they go, 'Oh, this is what we should be doing' but then there's someone at a higher rank that goes, 'No, we're not going to do that'. We have paramilitary structures within all these agencies as well, and governments that have so many people in charge. You'll win over everyone else, but it just takes one person to say no, from a higher level, and then it doesn't go ahead. And 100% of the time, the reasons have nothing to do with the landscape.

Steve

I've seen that when people leave those positions of power in regimented, hierarchical organisations, they actually get a free voice because they're not hamstrung by bureaucracy or chain of command. Given that response-orientated organisations like fire services are generally dominated by men, what role do women play in the work you do?

Victor

It's a huge movement in terms of women's involvement. In Aboriginal culture, women always had involvement. They had woman's story places and it's embedded inside the land. It goes back to the old stories, like, my uncle would tell the story of the Seven Sisters. And that story goes across many Aboriginal clan groups around Australia. We have women's workshops in Tasmania where only women are allowed to go. Even in the landscapes, where the ecosystems are more connected to women's roles, women can burn those ecosystems because it's more connected to them and the men burn other ecosystems that are more connected to them.

When you burn Country, it's really gentle. We're not freaking out and running around putting fires out. It's a whole other thing. The women and children are there. We get to look after the country in a way that is so gentle that everyone's involved and included, because that's where we shape our culture. That's how we shape it on the collective level. And you lose the fear of the fire as well.

I can really proudly say that most of the breakthroughs with getting the councils on board and getting national parks involved in the training programs have been from women. It's been the women who have made that happen, nurturing the change. And, let's face it, Western society haven't learnt that yet, either. It's a gentlemen's club always running the show and we never see change. We never see anything for Aboriginal people or the environment and we never see anything for women. We're all saying, 'Hey, we need to chime in to do this', and it's so frustrating.

Right now, we are a whole planet going through a transition. It will bubble up and fester, but I think at the end of it, we're all going to find better balance. And that's the same with fire. We're getting the balance back in the landscape again and making it healthier and more prosperous and for society as well.

Steve

You're going out there training people and you have devoted much of your life to this. Are they actually giving you some brass to make this sustainable? Is the main barrier the fiscal side of it? Or is it the fact that you get lip service?

Victor

Only just 2 weeks ago, I went out and I did a tour for next to nothing. It's the communities that have kept us alive. It's all been done on a small level normally. You think about your values and you have to help. I haven't had the privilege of having superannuation and all that because I was never employed by an agency that will support me. And so I think about what I'm going to do now, when I get older. But that's what you throw your life at. I've always believed it's not about money, it's about connection to people, it's about the honesty, the truth of looking after the land. It's about how you make people feel.

The government hasn't done anything in terms of supporting much. They've put some money out there, which is chickenfeed really, to what we need to be doing. And when we look at the direction of that money, it's not the right direction, or what we should be doing either. We should be getting employment going, getting the agencies working together and getting the training happening. Let's get on with this now.

The most supportive funding since those wildfires has been philanthropy. We never heard anything from the government. Before those wildfires, and back in 2019, it's been the communities, Aboriginal communities and Indigenous communities that afford a plane fare to get me down, to afford to get some sausage sizzle happening and to get people out on Country.

And still today, I'm sitting here, coming down here to help people for pennies and just hope that one day soon that the government will wake up and go: 'Look, we're wasting so much money, billions and billions of dollars going down the drain all the time. Why can't we put a fraction of that to start doing things differently and start investing in the health of our environment, investing in our community, investing in our knowledge, investing in the future?'

We can't be playing their game either, in the sense of blaming people who caused climate change. We've got to get on with fixing it. No matter who has caused the problem, we've got to clean up the mess together. We can't do it any other way because we need to evolve our culture and we need to evolve together. I think 'All right, you've done the wrong thing. Get up now, dust yourself down, let's work together and get this sorted out'. That's how we need to see the way forward.

Steve

By virtue of being a white dude, in the uniform, I carry some entitlement and privilege that other people don't. I'm happy to say that I should be doing whatever I can in my sphere of influence to change what the status quo is. There's an absolute urgency for us to be actively trying to assist people like you in your work. We use the word 'custodians', you've got a way of thinking that is passive, successful and sustainable given the right resources and tools and funds. But at the other end of the scale is at the reactive end where it's aggression. It's like, 'This is a wildfire. Let's aggressively approach it now, because we didn't do what we should have done back in the investment days'.

Victor

That's exactly right. The turning point has to be now. Once we start, we will start to see just how prosperous it would be, like green jobs in the future. The answers are really in the health of our landscapes. There's just so much good that can come out of it. And at the end of the day, I just want people to get on with it, I get the training done, let's get trainees happening. Get them over there managing the land so that we can move on to the next bits, to the knowledge map. Because we have the water, we have the plants, we have the ceremony, we have the food, we have other parts of the whole knowledge map.

If we can start to demonstrate all of that, and activate that, and then pass it on to the next generations to improve, including in our technology. Now we're talking on another level of science and knowledge and economy and education. There's so much that comes from thousands of years of experience. But yeah, people just look at it and go, 'Well, rub 2 sticks together, what technology?' Stupid, things like that, when they fail to realise the greatest intelligence is the ability to stay on Country for days and years without stuffing it up. So fire is the first thing to sort out.

We need to get the job done, to demonstrate Aboriginal fire management so people can see the benefits and the outcome. That's what Indigenous teaching methods are. It's based on practical learning and teaching.

There are still places that haven't even started yet. Sometimes I get another community, like where I am now, and they haven't even started to do their first burns. If you can't make it work here, then you make it work somewhere else, and that influences all the other places that have been negative about it. You find that it gets easier as we go along.

Steve

That's the kicker, they need to be able to see an end result and know that it's proven and it's successful. It's a great illustration that sort of sums up your personality to a point, if I dare say, where you say, 'It's easy', and I think to myself, 'How do you go about it?' How easy can it be carrying the can for 70,000 plus years of cultural practice. It's a hell of a gig you've got! It's enviable to anyone who is in land management and in fire science. I would imagine that there's any amount of learnings they could take from your land practice. Do the scientists reach out to you much at all?

Victor

Yeah, I think not as much as I would like. Scientists have been a funny one. Researchers and business people come and listen to us talking and run off with information most of the time. And then it's about 'their' program and how they want to run it. We want to see science support our work. We want the science to help promote our knowledge and demonstrate our knowledge in a way where we deliver that to the world. They can help us to collect our own information. We want science to not pick from traditional knowledge and then call it something else. We want science to respect all knowledge systems and to help old knowledge systems to grow and to stay alive, to flourish into the modern world and to be respected. And if that's done, then we'll see a lot more opportunity and we'll see a lot more advancement and knowledge.

Rather than them saying, 'OK, well, they're doing that, we'll take it and we'll work it out. Maybe we'll dissect it and do it over here, or we'll call it 'Burning for biodiversity' or we'll run a research project, and we'll put our name on it and be the authors', and they're not respecting that knowledge properly in the way that it should be by actually keeping it alive and allowing it to demonstrate its values. So we have to create our own sort of 'Science Division' now and it shouldn't be like that. It should be,

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'We'll give you a hand, what do you need?' but we don't get that. It's always take, take, take. If they're going to give us a hand, it's about their own agenda.

You've got to remember, it's a young knowledge system. They don't understand the values of knowledge in a traditional sense and the respect and protocol around knowledge in a traditional sense. It couldn't be quite easily changed and that's something that we want to see through the monitoring of all the fire that we're doing. Not only our work, the training program was looking at training fire practitioners but also the scientists and the monitors who go out and collect that data, and do their Masters and become the next scientists, Indigenous scientists and involving non-Indigenous science. But at the end of the day, we're putting our shoulder behind an old knowledge system and not picking its brains and turning it into something else. That's like losing identity of Aboriginal people in a way. So it's really important, that question and that discussion. Through the training program, that's the window for us to really get a good handle on science and start to use science in a way that advances Indigenous knowledge into the future and keeps it alive and well and respectful. And that Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge of our environment.

Steve

You've used the word respect there are a couple of times. That sort of mutual cultural respect seems to be lacking quite often nowadays.

Victor

It goes both ways. It's not just a one-way thing. There are beautiful roses on both sides of the fence. I learned that from travelling around so many places and meeting so many people. Western science has a wealth of advanced technology that can help, and Aboriginal knowledge has a wealth of knowledge of the landscape from thousands of years of experience. If only they were to work together and respect each other in the right way, we can move mountains.

I've stepped on the toes of researchers, like when they've come and done the wrong thing in the past when I've been more hot-headed and, even now, I don't agree with researchers just coming in and just taking stuff. I sometimes put them in their place. But at the end of the day, it's about us working together. I'm still waiting for the day when they come and approach us and actually say, 'How do we do this the right way?' instead of trying to get around you and trying to get a hold of that knowledge. It's all about the sitting down, coming together and working it out. You got to be open minded and you will be able to share the benefits. But it's got to be done with respect of people and place. That's really crucial. There's a time when you have to raise your voice. But it shouldn't be all the time.

Steve

I know a lot of people who have a lot of empathy for where our First Nations people are today. For instance, we're still talking treaties, we're still talking reconciliation, action plans and inclusion plans. That should be a done deal ages ago. It's 2021.

Victor

We just did a burn here 2 years ago and came back to that site yesterday to have a look. What was there before was lantana and dead grass and it was just a mess. You could hardly walk through the country and now there are heaps of native grasses, food, berries, even saw emu footprints, everything. That is the response from Country. That's what allows me to say it's possible. I'm there burning a lot of places and seeing the return and seeing that the weeds disappear and the natives come back. And if it didn't, I'd be talking about, 'Oh, man, we're in trouble, because we can't seem to bring back the natives, we can't control the fire, and then you should be worried'.

The positivity that I'm telling, that I shine with, is not something that just comes from me. It comes from the landscape and it comes from seeing the country improve and I've seen people improve. Young people have hope and their eyes light up to a whole wealth of information. And when they see the land respond the right way, they are so excited. All that work on Country that's been done over the years and all that response has built my attitude – a positive attitude that it can be done.

When I first started doing this, there was negativity everywhere. The mountains that we had to climb to get rid of that negativity! And every now and again, there would be a different slogans like, 'It's too expensive to do cultural fire management', 'Oh, it's climate change, we can't stop the fire', 'Oh, you can't learn from North Queensland and bring into Victoria'. All of these things that they'd say, over the years, and I wouldn't respond to them on this, but instead say, 'OK, let's make it work' and then show them and so you don't hear people saying certain things anymore. That's because they're starting to learn in different ways.

We can't tell the children that all the emus are going to be gone, they're never going to see one, or the koalas. We can't tell them that we can't do anything about climate change and the world. That's just ridiculous. If the land wasn't responding the right way, then I would be actually saying to you, truthfully, we're in trouble. And we are in trouble. But not as deep trouble as you think. We can bounce back. It's possible because Mother Nature is an amazing thing. And the planet is a living being, it's a one being, and it has an immune system. And we need to tap into that, give her a hand and help ourselves.

Steve

That's a great way to do it. I know you've got a lot of fans here. It's really, really important in the scheme of emergency management. Thanks so much, Victor.

Victor

It's been a real pleasure to be able to contribute to this and I guess I'll close off by going back to the fire. The fact is we're always going to be needing the firefighters and we're going to continue to fight fire. We need land managers too. We need a lot more people on board and more employment. And that's where the training needs to happen. Let's get the process of looking after the land to lessen the threats of fires and to make it safer for everyone – and safer for the firefighters.

Issues paper: Gender Justice in Disaster Conference 2021

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Preface

This paper is an overview of perspectives given by presenters at the Gender Justice in Disaster: Inspiring Action conference in 2021. It offers a snapshot of contemporary critical issues in disaster and emergency management. The paper draws on the key points from selected lead-in and conference presentations and provides a summary of the issues facing the emergency management sector as raised at this conference. Potential problems are identified and current or potential solutions are considered. Further reading is indicated on the disparate topics, linked by their relevance to gender in the context of disaster.

Introduction

The Gender Justice in Disaster conference in 2021 challenged the notion of a 'one size fits all' response to emergencies and disasters. The emergency management sector takes an 'interoperability' approach with mantras like, 'We work as one'. However, issues raised at the conference leave little doubt that it is by paying attention to diverse groups and multiple oppressions that the sector, in partnership with communities, can effectively prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from hazard events.

Emergency situations exacerbate existing inequalities as evidenced by increased violence against women and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people and other minority populations. Although disasters differ around the globe, human suffering remains a constant. Disaster frequency and intensity has increased as a result of changes in climate and, according to Australian Red Cross (2017), one in 3 people living in Australia are involved in disaster. Many learn of disasters from media coverage (Diversity in Disaster 2018). While essential, such reporting is an ethical minefield on what is often 'the worst day' of many people's lives, frequently followed by a troubled aftermath. Traditional media reporting is fraught with deadlines and high stakes, and gender analysis in disaster reporting remains as rare as it is in disaster research and emergency management. Yet, the evidence base of significant gendered experiences in disasters is growing (see Parkinson in press, 2019). This issues paper, and the conference it draws from, alerts us to some of this evidence and highlights the centrality of gender to the consideration of disasters and emergency management.

The gendered aspects of disasters

The effects of emergencies and disasters are immediate and long-term and yet the long haul is rarely recognised or featured in media stories (Lead-in sessions 2 and 11 2021, Parkinson *et al.*

2020). The trauma created is felt at societal, community and personal levels. In disasters, differences can dissolve (at least in the short-term) as people face life-threatening situations together. However, recovery typically has different phases, including social fusion and cleavage (Gordon 2004, Lead-in session 10 2021). For example, stereotypical gender norms promote division and undermine our common humanity. Men, in particular, are discouraged from showing emotion and as a consequence have difficulty processing their experiences and feelings. The loss of privacy that accompanies disasters can mean a loss of intimacy and relationships may falter. More broadly, physical infrastructure is emphasised at the expense of social infrastructure. The success of recovery is how life is 5 years on: the qualities of life and the meaning and value of activities, routines and relationships within families and communities.

The imperative post-disaster is to 'build back better' for people as well as infrastructure. Yet, after the worst recorded fires in Australia in 2019–20, funding has not resulted for timely interventions of evaluated and well-regarded support for those affected, including first responders.[1] It was critical that men understood 'heroic masculinity' was an unrealistic expectation in such fires and that they had not failed to be 'the man they thought they were'. It was important in early 2020 to disrupt the documented trajectory of suffering men and increased violence against women. It was equally important for women, men, recovery workers and communities to understand the ways women are co-opted into tolerating violence from their partner after disasters and to, instead, know that disaster is no excuse for family violence. Yet in a repeat of post-Black Saturday in 2009, increased suffering of men and women through unrealistic gendered expectations went unaddressed (Lead-in session 1 2021).

Women

There were other ways gender factored into the response to the 2019–20 bushfires. A lack of planning for the needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women and of infants and young children meant that guidance in evacuation kits for babies was absent (Gribble, Peterson & Brown 2019). Such lack on information meant that mothers and babies were the last to be evacuated from the heavily smoked township of Mallacoota in Victoria and baby bottles were being washed in sinks in toilet areas. This gap was filled to some extent by academics publishing advice (Gribble & Chad 2019). Similarly, when COVID-19 arrived, governments were slow to provide information. Many parents were concerned that panic buying of groceries might make infant formula unavailable and lockdowns left maternal and child health services compromised (Lever 2020). Border closures and hospital policies that did not reflect the unique connection of mothers and infants resulted in newborns and mothers being separated. When the Victorian Government locked down residential towers in Melbourne for 2 weeks in 2020, there was little consideration given to the needs of women and children (Session 1A 2021). An immediate need for infant formula and nappies was left to charities to fill via donations (Session 1A 2021, Sardyga 2020, Session 1B 2021). Most concerningly, hotel quarantine placed the physical safety of infants and young children at risk. Safety risks included high-rise windows and balcony doors that cannot be locked, balconies with gaps large enough for children to fall through, long blind cords that pose a strangling risk and very distressed mothers (Tuohy 2021).

The economic effects of disasters are well documented and are disproportionately felt by women. These include magnification of the gendered division of labour during recovery, and the gendered division of assets and income. Underinsurance and the economic downturn experienced following disaster events increases the pressure on communities. The intersection between access to money and mental health was noted. Women often manage the wellbeing of their partner, their family, their community and, lastly, themselves. In communities, childcare workers (predominantly female) were the first to lose JobKeeper benefits during the pandemic. With reduced numbers of children in care, childcare providers lost jobs, were forced to take paid or unpaid annual leave and did not accrue leave for the rest of the year.

'Macho' culture excludes women and LGBTIQ+ people

Emergency and disaster response is traditionally a very masculine space and the stakes are high for those who challenge men who fight fires and are in respected positions. In Australia, anyone suggesting there could be problems within the cultures of firefighting risks vilification (Bolt 2019, Lathouris 2019). Yet, such privilege comes at a cost to men who attempt to live up to the 'hero' tag. This operates in a markedly different way to 'heroism'. As more women and care workers were included as 'heroes' and the PPC (personal protective clothing) changed to COVID PPE, the use of the 'hero' tag by politicians and the media diminished. In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fault lines of systemic gender inequality (Leonard, Parkinson & Weiss 2020). Seldom do we see historic markers for heroic efforts applied to women or historic significance given to womens' achievements (Waters 2021, Wright 2020).

During the response phase, women's perspectives and needs are typically backgrounded, if not ignored. The over-representation of men in senior decision-making roles results in economic, social and organisational interventions that retain existing structures and reinforce existing gender inequalities (Session 6A 2021). The valorisation of hyper-masculinity in disaster relies on men ramping-up the 'masculine' traits of control, responsibility and heroism (Session 6B 2021). Hyper-masculinity is both gendered and sexualised and a demonstration of heterosexuality in the service of saving wives or female partners, children and communities. It relies on the polarisation of gender roles at the expense of non-heterosexual identities. 'Real heroes' are seen to be macho and exclusively 'straight' and can display none of the traits associated with women and LGBTIQ+ people (Session 6B 2021).

There is a growing body of research addressing the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people and how emergency services organisations must meet their needs during recovery. LGBTIQ+ people's sense

1. For example, Gender and Disaster Australia's Lessons in Disaster training, at www.genderanddisaster.com.au.

of vulnerability and fear of violence and discrimination are heightened in disasters and this can reduce their access to and use of essential services. Studies show that 'treating everybody the same' is often understood to constitute good professional practice under the guise of equality (Parkinson *et al.* 2021). However, this ignores an individual's unique identity, their relationships and experiences of institutional discrimination, and in particular those of LGBTIQ+ people including trans and gender-diverse people.

Domestic violence

There is an extensive body of research that documents increases in domestic violence in disasters. These increases are often ignored or dismissed, including victim blaming and attitudes that excuse violence as an 'understandable reaction' to stress. Response to violence defaults to crisis lines such as, in Australia, the 1800 RESPECT hotline. Following disasters, women and men who rail against, or cave in under the weight of, unrealistic gendered expectations are pathologised and medicalised. This relates to a narrow and limiting gender 'binary' (a focus on binary male-female sex characteristics rather than a spectrum of masculinities and femininities) that is socially constructed and policed.

Violence against women stems from entrenched gender stereotypes for men and women that is upheld by social institutions and systems. To change, the passive language such as 'domestic violence' or 'women being sexually assaulted' must be challenged as it masks the reality that the majority of violence is by men against their female partners and other women. A better description is 'an increase in men's violence against women', acknowledging male agency and responsibility for changing behaviours (Session 1A 2021).

Women's Saftey NSW (2020) conducted a survey of workers who provided support to 53,500 women who had experienced violence during the first month of the pandemic. Half of the respondents reported an increase in clients over this time and 75% an increase in complexity. There was initially a 'silent drop' – a decrease in numbers of women trying to access support services (see also Parkinson & Zara 2011). Courts were closed and services not accessible. Women shifted their focus to supporting family and community and there were safety concerns in seeking help. As pandemic restrictions eased, women came forward and exposed the escalation of abuse experienced during lockdown. The burden was significant for specialist workers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who dealt with increased numbers of clients as well as the temporary closure of other services.

'Not even a pandemic can stop colonisation doing what it does'[2]

Changing the Picture (Our Watch 2018) understands racism, sexism and colonisation as the drivers of higher rates of violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Being Indigenous and being a woman need to be understood together. This is termed an 'intersectional approach' (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Australians still experience ingrained racist attitudes and discriminatory practices emanating from authority systems. In recent years, there has been an increase in incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, partly due to the women being considered perpetrators. This is reflected in health, education and the child-protection systems that can work together to the detriment and silencing of women. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, their experiences of violence are exacerbated by the intersection of racism and sexism with the ongoing impacts of colonisation (Our Watch 2020, Session 5A 2021, Lugones 2010).

Women's Safety NSW (2020) indicates there was no emergency response actions for family and domestic violence. The organisation questioned why family and domestic violence is not part of emergency management planning and integrated into local services especially when so much evidence exists, and when clear recommendations were in place before the pandemic (Parkinson 2019, Parkinson & Zara 2013, Session 5A 2021).

Caring for Country

Indigenous land management is about prevention and working with land and the elements. In contrast, the response to extreme weather events and disasters is based on man (literally) attempting to prevail over nature. Science is a 'young' knowledge system that has a history of exploiting and rebadging cultural practices (Steffensen 2021 (this issue), Lead-in session 4 2021). This does not respect or understand old knowledge systems and the protocols around them and rarely works with Indigenous communities. Emergency services organisations and governments have generally neglected traditional Indigenous land management. Barriers to progress include:

- invisibility and neglect of the land
- people of influence do not understand the problem
- emergency services organisations still use a paramilitary style
- one person of authority can derail or stop great initiatives
- lack of funding to Indigenous people working in traditional land management.

Designing for disasters

Listening and hearing Indigenous communities and acknowledging Country in which a project is located strengthens and heals and reveals the memory of a place. Indigenous design is a concept that acknowledges that 'if nothing of your culture, history language or art is visible in the streets, parks and buildings where you live, how can you ever feel welcome?' (Greenaway 2020, Session 5A 2021).

The design sector itself is critical to disaster experience, yet, like emergency management, design practice tends to privilege white, male, middle-class perspectives, excluding non-Western contributions. Design has not moved beyond the current anthropocentric focus to benefit the environment, flora and fauna. It has not demonstrated the courage to embed truth-

2. Karla McGrady, Gender Justice in Disaster: Inspiring Action conference 2021

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telling or Indigenous agency, nor to engage with Indigenous knowledge-keepers.

When disaster has destroyed buildings, local cultural knowledge has not been leveraged sufficiently, and little attention has been paid to social and psychological recovery by design practitioners. Built environment practitioners and bureaucratic egos have prevailed over reconstruction that engages and deeply listens to the community. Communities would benefit from promoting an understanding of what is valuable to them during reconstruction, to enable resilience from loss (Madabhushi, Bryar & Miller 2021, Session 5B 2021).

Climate in the 21st Century

The Western understanding of our place in the world has tended to separate 'man' from nature. This approach has 'justified' the destruction of the 'natural' environment. The word 'anthropocentric' implies all humans have shaped the planet but ignores the contribution of particular groups of humans. It ignores colonisation, capitalism and patriarchy (Davis & Todd 2017). The environmental movement reflects a dichotomy where the vulnerable and distressed are more likely to take action, while those contributing most to climate change are the least likely to take action. The poverty/privilege divide is exacerbated in disasters, including climate change. This is reflected in personal relationships where links between environmental violence and violence against women have been identified (Pease 2019).

There are also links between gender and causes of climate change, for example, carbon-based industries (predominantly male dominated) and individual performance of masculinity through high-fuel consumption activities (Verlie & CCR15 2020, Verlie 2022). The burden of mitigation and adaptation falls overwhelmingly on women, creating relationship disruption (Session 1B 2021, Lead-in session 3 2021).

Climate change has been blamed for forced migration in Australia for example the residents of Coonabaraban moving to other towns after various disasters including floods and bushfires (Harris-Rimmer 2020, 2021; Lead-in session 3, 2021). Populations across the world are dealing with climate change predictions becoming real (IPCC 2021). Implications for the insurance industry are profound, with consequences for vulnerable areas and householders. Uninsurable homes have led to lower property values, dwindling populations and poverty. Gender is central to this examination of risk (Harris-Rimmer 2021, Lead-in session 3 2021). Despite this, people working with local, vulnerable and high-risk groups have been largely excluded from municipal planning. Consequently, expertise in emergency planning – especially women's over-representation in caring roles – is lacking. Different perspectives are vital to avoid repeating mistakes (Emerald Messenger 2018, Farrow 2019, Session 2 2021). Although new legislation (Emergency Management Victoria 2020) requires community member representation on planning committees, it is unclear whether women will be included.

Eco-feminism[3] is an important approach to activism, emphasising human encounters and emotion over theory to energise and prompt action. This gendered climate change action has been ignored, mocked, undermined and denied (Session 3B 2021). Climate justice isn't just the domain of seasoned activists and debate-weary academics. Instead, young people have protested about the lack of action after bushfires and large budget allocations to fossil fuels. Climate activism is part of a larger movement for justice, for example, #metoo, Black Lives Matter and Gender Equality. These movements oppose the systemic roots of capitalism and patriarchy. Currently, activism, as a tool for awareness-raising, protest and change has taken centre stage as the pandemic dominates news cycles (Session 3B 2021).

From the mouths of the leaders

Australia is a signatory to the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (UNDRR), with the Australian Government adopting the *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* (Commonwealth of Australia 2018). This provides a top-down approach to complement the grass roots, bottom-up approach: both of which are urged by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. It was the intent of the Gender Justice in Disaster Conference to open and close with comments from leaders in gender justice. Decision makers and policy authors were asked to speak on their experiences of gender justice. This can inspire action.

It is recognised that, within the emergency management sector, gender concerns have, largely, been dismissed. The sector has been slow to accommodate family and caring commitments and there has been unspoken resistance to female leadership and 'just a joke' teasing. This contributes to gender violence (Bradshaw & Fordham 2013, Session 7B 2021). However, some countries have implemented policies and programs that address gender inequality, including a joint parental leave program in Iceland introduced 20 years ago and that has been evaluated very highly (Arnalds, Byork-Eydal & Gislason 2013; Byork-Eydal & Gislason 2014; Session 1B 2021).

In some of Australia's industry peak emergency organisations, including the Australian Red Cross and the Country Fire Authority (CFA), gender blindness has played out differently. Nonetheless, long histories of volunteer inclusion may reflect many of the gender biases and inequalities that continue to influence the culture of the emergency management sector. Almost 70% of Australian Red Cross volunteers identify as female and they provide psychosocial support and build community resilience. This work is vital but often seen as 'feminine' work, secondary to the 'masculine' work of disaster relief and reconstruction.

Systems in emergency services organisations rarely promote gender equity and diversity at every level. Fire and emergency services are still highly conservative, male-dominated environments, valuing a particular contribution that frequently stifles the contributions of women and other diverse employees (Lead-in session 7 2021; Parkinson, Duncan & Archer 2019). The language that preserves a masculine environment is invisible yet exists everywhere within the emergency management sector. Men have, broadly, not taken on the role to undo gender inequality and, with it, male violence against women. Emergency

3. A branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature.

frontline responders are well-respected role models and therefore must reject co-option into discriminatory workplaces.

During the conference, the decades' old claim that emergency services organisations are actively considering gender when they recruit was challenged. Three senior leaders in Victoria's emergency management sector joined the state's first Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector in a discussion fuelled by 'real life' scenarios interrogated by 4 provocateurs (Session 7b 2021). Ambulance Victoria has experienced a rapid transformation in inclusion of women from zero in 1986 to 51% in 2021. Although a leader among emergency services organisations with this overall figure, operational leadership is still male dominated. Only 38% of leadership roles are filled by women, falling to zero at operational executive levels. This has recently changed with the appointment of a woman as Chief Operations Officer. In 2020, women told their accounts of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. To their credit, Ambulance Victoria enlisted the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to examine these issues and assist to develop a safe, equal and inclusive work environment (VEOHRC 2020).

The CFA[4] aims to reflect the diversity of the community it serves, including women, all genders and people from multicultural backgrounds. At the conference, CFA representatives exposed myths of firefighting equating with masculinity, pointing to current work practices that discourage working alone. Best practice is for firefighters to work in teams, assisted by new technology and equipment. Smarter and better than 2 decades ago, 'There is not a job in the fire service that women can't perform' (Session 2 2021). It is important to acknowledge history and consider the notion that, 'organisational cultures are not genderless' (Gherardi & Poggio 2001, p.257). While gender roles are dynamic and can change over time, these social constructs have traditionally been connected to hierarchical power dynamics of male domination.

The Victoria Police Gender Equality and Inclusion Command was set up in 2020 following the completion of a 5-year partnership with VEOHRC. Commissioned by then Chief Commissioner Ken Lay, VEOHRC reviewed the nature, prevalence and effects of predatory behaviour, gender inequality and discrimination on LGBTIQ+ employees. While there has been extensive progress to central systems to support gender-equal outcomes, only 35% of Victoria Police's workforce are women. This is despite the fact that policing skills are not gender-specific. A problem is that most men don't understand their privilege or biases. Consequently, a key strategy is to change the definition of 'merit' and what is valued by selection panels. In policing, the biggest threat to community safety is domestic violence – predominantly violence by men against women. Police must be trusted to perform their role to protect people and, as emergency services personnel can be exposed to instances of violence, they must be given added ways to assist in such situations.

4. There was also a VEOHRC review conducted on the CFA, however this was not made public due to a Court suppression order (Emergency Management Victoria 2018, Marozzi 2018).

Victoria is leading the nation with the *Gender Equality Act 2020* and a new role of Victorian Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. From transparency comes accountability and the Commissioner's work with 300+ public sector organisations that employ 11% of the Victorian workforce will help create cultural change. This work progresses gender equality where slow organic change has not worked. Inequality is not treated in binary categories but is formally recognised as multi-dimensional and complex. As Einstein said, 'We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them'. This same sentiment is expressed in feminist terms by Audre Lorde, 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde 1984).

To fundamentally change an organisation, external eyes are needed and that is the value of reviews such as those conducted by VEOHRC. Unless emergency services organisations modernise, people will be reluctant to be part of services designed a century ago by men for men. There must be a redesign as they do not serve men well, nor anyone else. These are entrenched, patriarchal cultures and tinkering won't achieve the change demanded. Emotional intelligence and simple humanity are key characteristics in recruitment of emergency management staff. Yet, misguidedly, we continue to expect women (and men who are courageous enough to express emotion) to shape themselves to fit into organisations, rather than recognising organisations need to change for the benefit of all. It is imperative for diverse communities to be involved in that change.

Conclusion

Professor Maureen Fordham, Director Centre for Gender and Disaster, University College of London, noted the uniqueness of the depth of attention to gender in this disaster conference (Session 7B 2021). She called for a 'biennial reckoning'. The Conference Outcomes Statement (in this Journal issue) enumerates initial challenges against which progress can be measured. Professor Fordham's challenge for Australia regarding Gender Justice in Disaster echoes the sentiments of her 2018 Diversity in Disaster keynote speech:

- If we know so much about gender concerns in disasters (and we do!) why don't we see the changes we expect?
- Given the scale of gender-based violence in both disasters and the everyday and given the historic gender-skewed staffing levels in emergency management, why no public inquiries or official investigations with expectations for widespread political and behavioural change?
- Can this conference be the place for a biennial reckoning of concrete changes from government and across the sector?

The next 2 years must see emergency services organisations build awareness of the gendered nature of disasters through workforce changes such as equal participation and retention. In all aspects of emergency management, emergency services organisations must collect gender disaggregated data, change their exclusionary language, enhance gender and emergency training, operationalise and embed practices and evaluate (from a gendered perspective) the services they provide. The

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willingness of emergency services organisations to be involved in a '2023 Biennial Reckoning of Gender Justice in Disasters' will be evidence of progress.

Acknowledgment

This issues paper is only about the issues facing the sector regarding gender justice. View the session recordings to hear how these issues are being addressed now and into the future, at www.genderanddisaster.com.au/info-hub/conferences-events/gender-justice-in-disaster.

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Abstract

This article presents results from a survey exploring the understanding by emergency services personnel of the specific needs of LGBTI people before, during and after emergencies. The survey is part of a larger project assisting the emergency management sector to develop LGBTI-inclusive practices and is the first study of its kind in Australia. The survey found that participants felt that LGBTI people were at greater risk of discrimination than did other people both during and following an emergency event. Specific areas identified included reduced access to services, lack of recognition of LGBTI couples and relationships, over-reliance on informal LGBTI networks and trust in mainstem emergency services. The survey also identified negative attitudes towards LGBTI people held by respondents. This article argues that developing LGBTI-inclusive emergency services depends on combining research on LGBTI people's experiences of emergencies with research on emergency management and personnel's knowledge and attitudes toward LGBTI people and their particular needs.

Under pressure: developing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) inclusive emergency services

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Introduction

A small but growing body of research documents LGBTI people's experiences of emergencies and disaster situations (Pincha & Krishna 2008; D'Ooge 2008; Richards 2010; McSherry *et al.* 2015; Yamashita, Gomez & Dombroski 2017). This research acknowledges significant variations in LGBTI people's experiences according to geographic location, race, class and other social variables (D'Ooge 2008; Pincha & Krishna 2008; Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray & McKinnon 2014; Yamashita, Gomez & Dombroski 2017). However, its major focus is on what is common in people's experiences and how heteronormative assumptions influence those experiences including access to emergency services (Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2016; Gorman-Murray, McKinnon & Dominey-Howes 2016). These assumptions maintain an invisibility of LGBTI people, masking their specific needs and reinforcing heterosexist and discriminatory practices. This can increase their social isolation and risk of discrimination during and after events and can impede their access to services and supports (Balgos 2012, Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2016, Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2017, Yamashita *et al.* 2017).

The majority of this growing body of research has focused on LGBTI people as consumers of emergency services and their experiences of disasters (Balgos 2012; Cianfarani 2013; Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray & McKinnon 2014, 2018; Gorman-Murray, McKinnon & Dominey-Howes 2014, 2016, McSherry *et al.* 2015; Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2017, Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2018; McKinnon, Gorman-Murray & Dominey-Howes 2016, 2017). While there have been calls for research to understand the attitudes held by emergency personnel related to LGBTI people (Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2016, Larkin 2019), this literature review shows that, to date, no such research has been undertaken.

This paper presents the results of a project to address this research gap (Parkinson *et al.* 2018). The project relies on qualitative and quantitative data from emergency services organisations in Victoria. The aim is to assist the emergency

management sector develop LGBTI- and diversity-inclusive practices and models of service delivery.

Recommendations are consistent with the findings of a review of the current literature on LGBTI people's experiences of disaster events that criticised the lack of polices and frameworks incorporating 'sex and gender minorities' (Larkin 2019). However, this paper argues that developing an LGBTI-inclusive emergency sector requires research on the attitudes of emergency management and service personnel as well as their knowledge and approaches to LGBTI clients and staff.

Methods

An expert advisory group was convened consisting of senior emergency management personnel in Victoria, Australian LGBTI disaster researchers, LGBTI community representatives and staff from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC). The advisory group met 3 times during the project and provided comment and advice on recruitment, survey questions and preliminary findings and draft recommendations.

The project involved 2 Victoria-wide, online surveys: a client survey asking LGBTI people about their experiences of living through a disaster and accessing services, and an industry survey asking emergency services personnel about their knowledge of LGBTI people, the discrimination they face and the capacity of emergency services organisations to meet the specific needs of LGBTI people.[1] The quantitative data was collected using Survey Monkey and Excel. Qualitative data provided in responses to open questions or comments was coded into thematic domains and subcategories using NVivo Qualitative Analysis Software.[2] Analysis was conducted by at least 2 researchers and discussed by the research team to improve rigour.

Recruitment for survey participants for the industry survey was via DPC email lists. The industry survey was sent to 7 Victorian Government departments, 14 agencies or authorities and 3 non-government organisations. It was also promoted by emergency sector leaders, including the Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner, via their work-related Facebook and Twitter accounts, on ABC 774 (national radio) and in *The Australian* (a national newspaper). Ethics approval was through Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 0466).

Results

The results were categorised into 3 areas:

- industry survey respondent data
- respondent knowledge of LGBTI people's experiences of disaster
- how LGBTI-inclusive respondent's thought emergency services organisations are.

1. See Parkinson *et al.* 2018 for information about the client survey data.

2. NVivo is a software program used for qualitative and mixed-methods research.

Industry survey respondent data

In total, 157 emergency services personnel successfully completed the survey. Of these, 86 identified as male (55%), 63 as female (40%), 6 did not say (4%) and 2 (1%) gave inappropriate responses. Ages ranged between 26 and over 65 years. The majority (94%) of respondents were born in Australia, New Zealand or England and 2% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. The survey was targeted to emergency services with a primary responsibility to respond to emergencies. Figure 1 shows the emergency services organisations represented in the survey.

The majority of survey respondents came from the State Emergency Service, Emergency Management Victoria and the Country Fire Authority. Fewer respondents came from government departments, local government, health-related organisations, Victoria Police, Red Cross and Ambulance Victoria. Length of employment at current workplaces varied from one to over 45 years. Sixty per cent were from metropolitan locations, 26% from regional areas and 14% from rural areas. More than half (53%) had front-line emergency roles.

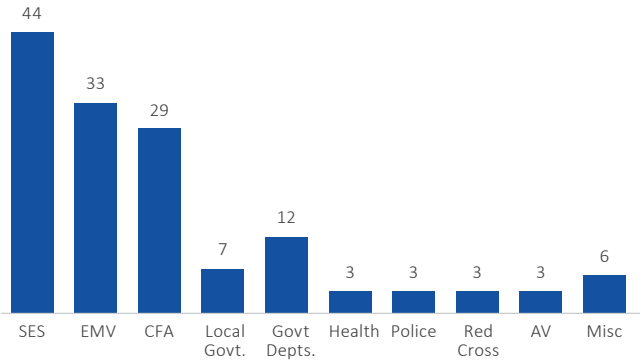

Figure 1: Organisations in which respondents worked (n=143, 14 missing data).

Knowledge of LGBTI people's experiences in emergencies

Respondents' attitudes towards LGBTI people were assigned to 4 categories. More than a third (36%) of respondents did not express an attitude towards LGBTI issues and their responses were categorised as unclear. This included respondents who answered only some of the relevant questions. Almost a third (29%) expressed positive attitudes (statements expressing support or willingness to acknowledge LGBTI experiences and needs), 10% expressed negative attitudes (statements against or resistant to acknowledging LGBTI experiences and needs) and 25% expressed neutral attitudes (statements indicating respondents were unaware of emergency issues specific to LGBTI people).

Positive attitudes included comments related to inclusive organisational cultures and, in particular, support for LGBTI inclusion by senior leaders. One response was, 'Our organisation… would not tolerate any form of homophobic attitudes'. Another was, '[H]aving senior leaders from these organisations [a number

of key state emergency services organisations] at last year's pride march was very positive'.

Negative attitudes ranged from hostility to the perception that LGBTI people are 'special' and claims that focusing on LGBTI people diverted time and resources from core business. For example, 'The organisation is too busy dealing with real problems to discriminate against LGTBI individuals'. One response indicated that attention to LGBTI people was at the expense of others:

> *The only discrimination/comments/remarks I have seen… have been largely against white Australian males and Christians…being inclusive is important but I am seeing Comms and literature at least every week or two about the LGBTIQ community. What about different cultures… the elderly…people with disabilities?*

Other responses included overt hostility:

> *The sooner you lot drop it and stop trying to make yourselves out as victims or different the sooner your perceived problems will disappear. We don't care if you are queer and stop telling us. Get over it.*

It was notable that negative attitudes to LGBTI people and issues decreased with age, from 12% of those under 36 years, to 8% of those 56 years and above. Nearly twice as many respondents aged 56 years and above expressed positive attitudes (39%) compared with respondents under 36 years (21%).

Discrimination in service provision

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (from 'not at all' to 'the fullest extent') with 3 statements about discrimination against LGBTI people in emergency services provision. Figure 2 presents the percentage of respondents agreeing with each, aggregating respondents who answered 'moderate', 'great' or 'fullest' extent. Respondents occupied a range of roles and positions, including front-line and office-based workers.

One in 5 respondents indicated awareness of discrimination against LGBTI people in emergency services provision. Nearly a third (31%) had observed colleagues making unwelcome remarks, emails or jokes about LGBTI people and 23% indicated that colleagues had shown homophobic or transphobic attitudes. One response was, 'I know a young man in the CFA who is gay. He pleaded with me not to tell anyone in the brigade, and I haven't'.

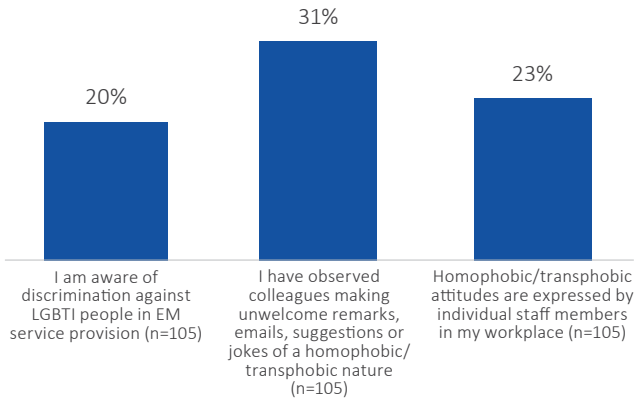

Figure 2: Agreement with statements about discrimination.

Half (49%) of respondents indicated they did not believe that colleagues in *other* emergency services organisations have a good understanding of the needs or circumstances of LGBTI people in emergencies, while 60% indicated they did not believe that colleagues in their *own* organisation had a good understanding.

Discrimination in services provision to LGBTI people before, during and after an emergency

Figures 3 and 4 show responses to 6 statements about perceptions of LGBTI people's experiences of discrimination and abuse *during* an emergency. Half (52%) of respondents agreed to the statement that LGBTI people are at greater risk of harassment and abuse during an emergency than others, 28% agreed to the statement that that LGBTI people are at greater risk of violence in evacuation and relief centres and 28% agreed to the statement that LGBTI people are stigmatised during an emergency.

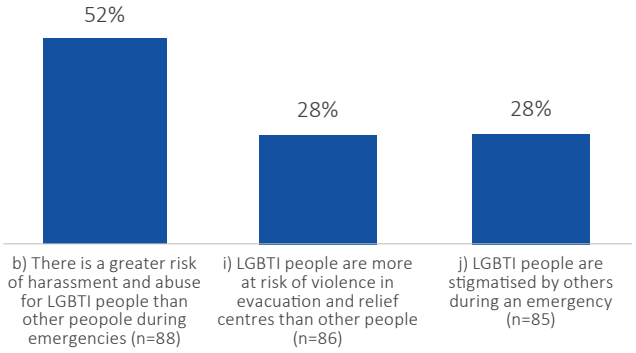

Figure 3: Agreement with statements about LGBTI experiences of discrimination and abuse during an emergency.

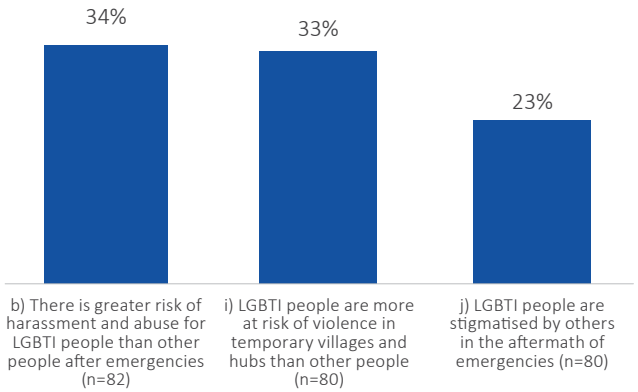

Figure 4: Agreement with statements about LGBTI experiences after an emergency.

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One in 3 (34%) agreed with the statement that the risk of harassment and abuse is greater for LGBTI people than for others *after* an emergency. A third agreed with the statement that LGBTI people are at greater risk of violence in temporary villages and hubs and almost a quarter (23%) agreed with the statement that LGBTI people are stigmatised after emergencies.

Knowledge of LGBTI people's specific needs in emergencies

Figure 5 shows respondent agreement with statements about needs during an emergency. Over 90% of respondents indicated that LGBTI people have 'the same needs' as others during an emergency. Only 33% indicated that LGBTI people's needs are considered by workers during an emergency.

While 27 respondents had attended an emergency where individuals had identified as LGBTI, only 6 expressed awareness of 'emergency' issues specific to LGBTI people. Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated there are matters particular to LGBTI people that must be addressed in emergency services delivery, for example, family and relationships, help-seeking behaviour, lack of trust, barriers to accessing services and needs of trans and gender-diverse people.

Several respondents did not believe that LGBTI people had any specific emergency needs. For example:

> *Stop wasting money and time on these bullshit studies because all you are doing is promoting a misconception that LGBTI people are different. [N]ot only is that wrong, but it is the source of the very problem you hypocritically claim to be trying to solve.*

Others believed that their particular job did not require an understanding of LGBTI people's emergency needs: 'not relevant to my job description'.

Nearly a third (31%) of respondents agreed that LGBTI people face more barriers accessing support and resources *during* an emergency than do other people, and 27% *after*. Nearly a third (31%) did not agree that the needs of LGBTI couples are considered equally to those of heterosexual and cisgender couples. One in 5 respondents felt it was difficult for LGBTI people to care for their families during an emergency. Over a quarter felt that LGBTI people tend to look after themselves rather than to seek or accept help during an emergency.

A number of respondents raised trust as an issue in the provision of emergency services to LGBTI people. One response was:

> *[O]ften people who identify as LGBTI have been mistreated or betrayed by individuals or the community in general. Strategies to build trust need to be identified so that the LGBTI community feels it is safe to either seek assistance or information as part of their preparation for or response to an emergency.*

Only 16% of respondents agreed there was recognition of the needs of transgender people, including those who may be undergoing gender affirmation.

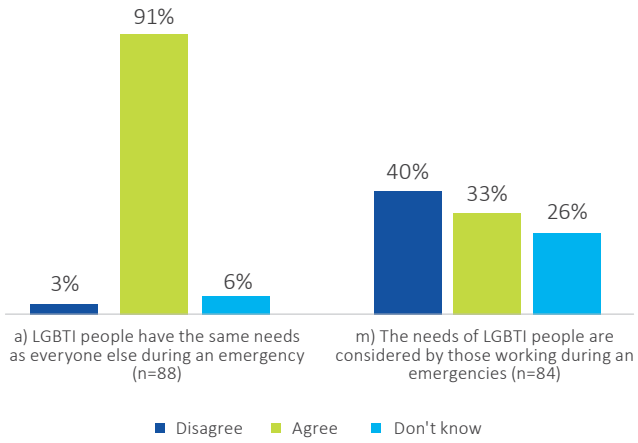

Figure 5: Agreement with statements about LGBTI needs during emergencies.

LGBTI-inclusive emergency services

Nearly half (47%) of respondents indicated that their organisation did not address the needs of LGBTI people. Half (51%) did not agree that their working environment encouraged LGBTI-appropriate emergency service provision to LGBTI people. One response was, 'some [LGBTI]…needs are addressed but I don't know if all the needs are even understood, let alone addressed'.

Three-quarters (74%) of respondents were unaware of organisational policies, procedures or training addressing specific needs of LGBTI people:[3]

> *At present our plans do not specifically include action which address LGBTI needs. There is mention of being aware of specific needs of some groups but not targeted at LGBTI individuals.*

'We treat everybody the same'

Some respondents indicated that during an emergency people had similar needs regardless of identity or group affiliation. Good professional practice, they suggested, involved treating everybody the same:

> *There are no specific policies or procedures, nor should there be. When a person is on fire or trapped in a crumpled car their preferred gender/sexuality is as irrelevant as their skin colour or religion.*

Another response was, 'Just treat all as we would like to be treated or have our loved ones treated'.

The attitude that 'we treat everyone the same' was repeated in other comments related to jokes in the workplace:

> *Jokes and banter involving LGBTI slurs do not constitute Homo/Transphobia as there is no intention to hurt or oppress. Gay jokes should be treated no differently to short jokes, fat jokes, jokes about age. People need to be less precious.*

3. 99 respondents out of 157 answered this question.

Other responses suggested that casual comments sending up particular groups are free speech and LGBTI people should just get over it, 'Freedom of speech in this country is what wars were fought for. People need to harden up'.

Developing LGBTI-inclusive emergency services

Reasons for not supporting improvement in services provision to LGBTI people ranged from 'not required as everybody's needs are the same' to 'Stupid question…Why we have to pedestal these groups is beyond normal comprehension'. Nonetheless, 49 respondents suggested ways emergency services organisations could improve services to LGBTI people. Nearly all indicated that emergency service personnel should be better informed about LGBTI-specific issues. Nearly all responded positively to efforts to reduce discrimination and stigma against LGBTI people in service delivery including organisational leadership and cultural change, developing LGBTI-inclusive policy and procedures and training and professional development.

Responses showed the importance of leadership in organisational change and LGBTI quality service provision:

> *Where leadership has been supportive, my experience has been positive…where leadership is lacking it's allowed negative comments.*

Responses also highlighted the importance of public support:

> *Our involvement in the LGBTI parade/march is a positive step to break down negative opinions and open dialogue and our acceptance of diversity.*

Policies and procedures

Respondents provided options for including LGBTI people in existing policies and procedures. Responses included a review of charters, policy reminders and statements of management commitment to improve LGBTI-inclusiveness. Others advocated for non-discriminatory recruitment practices reflective of community diversity, assistance with career advancement for LGBTI staff, promotion of LGBTI champions and support for bystander interventions. One response indicated that it was important for staff to call out discriminatory behaviour. Another suggested ways organisational champions can promote higher standards of behaviour and practice:

> *Ask questions and don't assume; use different pronouns; have examples on posters of diversity; really mean it when you say you support PRIDE march; challenge homophobia at work; have materials available that speak to LGBTIQ people.*

Responses included specific recommendations including LGBTI people's involvement in all stages of developing LGBTI-inclusive policies, procedures and practice; inclusion of options beyond male and female in data collection; attention to LGBTI needs in relief centres and privacy issues for LGBTI people.

Training and professional development

Comments were evenly divided between training and professional development as being essential and those who saw it as an imposition. Those who supported LGBTI-training expressed frustration at the lack of options in the emergency sector, 'there is no material… that educates the service to the specific needs of this group of people'. Another only became aware of the need for information when a colleague identified as transgender:

> *I have had supervisory roles with a transgender staff member and to support her I chose to seek out information regarding health and welfare support that may be required while in transition which assisted me greatly. Our policies are more generic.*

Some responses indicated that training, including for frontline personnel, would improve the quality of emergency services provision:

> *Many emergency services are unaware of the different impact of emergencies on women let alone members of the LGBTI community and other minority groups… If emergency services are serious about improving the services for these minority groups, then they would provide appropriate funding [for] awareness training for those at the front-line.*

There was also concern that if LGBTI-specific training was not mandated, only staff familiar with the issues and supportive of LGBTI people would attend. An example of the feelings of those opposed to LGBTI-training:

> *I have not known of these courses taking place, and if they do please don't make it compulsory, my time is too valuable…spend the money on something more important that will benefit all members.*

Discussion

This is the first study in Australia to investigate the degree to which the specific needs of sexual and gender-diverse minorities are addressed in the emergency management sector. The study revealed the varied and sometimes contradictory views held by emergency services personnel towards LGBTI people and staff and the development of LGBTI-inclusive practice.

The attitudes of respondents towards LGBTI people during emergencies varied from supportive to open hostility. Nearly 10% of respondents used hostile or discriminatory expressions. This negativity confirms the assertions of LGBTI respondents in other studies (Richards 2010; Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray & McKinnon 2014; Parkinson *et al.* 2021). However, the majority of respondents were either unclear or expressed neutral attitudes towards LGBTI people (61%). At one level, respondent ignorance or indifference to the needs of LGBTI people contributes to and is an effect of heteronormative assumptions that maintain an invisibility of LGBTI people, their relationships and families (see Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray & McKinnon 2018 for more

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discussion). On another level, this is an opportunity to inform personnel about the importance of recognising and addressing the specific needs of the different population groups that make up the community as a whole.

Over a quarter (29%) of respondents expressed positive attitudes toward LGBTI people and a significant minority (25%) felt they have specific needs. Over half (52%) agreed with statements that LGBTI people are at greater risk of harassment and abuse than others *during* an emergency and over a third (34%) *after* an emergency. Respondents who indicated that LGBTI people have specific needs in emergencies listed issues including reduced access to emergency services, a lack of recognition of LGBTI relationships, help-seeking behaviours (i.e. relying on informal LGBTI rather than professional networks), lack of trust and pressures unique to transgender people.

A significant minority of respondents indicated concern that LGBTI people and their needs are not acknowledged in organisational policies, procedures and staff training. Some responses showed that while an organisation's policies, procedures and training included diversity and inclusive practice, and sometimes named marginal groups, LGBTI people were rarely included. This deficit gives tacit support to the attitudes and practices of personnel who believe that LGBTI people have no specific requirements or that good professional practice involves 'treating everyone the same'. The ideology that 'we treat everybody the same' renders LGBTI people and other minority groups invisible. It is also contrary to the terms and recommendations of the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (UNDRR 2015). The framework establishes that people and communities are not the same and that emergency services organisations and practices must recognise and respond to the different emergency needs of a diverse population. While there is increasing local and international recognition of the needs of marginal groups in emergency planning, response and recovery, LGBTI people continue to be overlooked, demonstrating how engrained heterosexist privilege and discrimination are.

The findings of this preliminary study demonstrated a lack of awareness of the specific needs of LGBTI people among emergency services personnel. At the same time, there is support from within the emergency services sector for the development of LGBTI-inclusive policies, procedures, practices and training. A detailed list of recommendations arising from this research include actions that governments and emergency services organisations could undertake to bring about culture change (Leonard *et al.* 2018). This, combined with attention by emergency services organisations, for example by implementing the *Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines*, could bring culture change. There is a pressing need for more qualitative and quantitative research on emergency services personnel understandings of the needs of LGBTI people and communities in their planning, response and recovery. There is also a need for detailed research on the experiences of LGBTI staff and volunteers (Parkinson *et al.* 2021). In the Australian context, there is an opportunity for an LGBTI-inclusive audit of government and emergency services organisations disaster and relief policies and planning to establish a baseline against which ongoing improvements in LGBTI inclusion can be measured.

Conclusion

Focusing on LGBTI people's disaster experiences is vital to 'queering…research and policy in relation to natural disasters' (Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2016). This research makes LGBTI people and their needs visible and challenges the heteronormative assumptions that inform emergency research and policy. However, promoting the development of LGBTI-inclusive emergency services and sector-wide organisational systems and work cultures depends on promoting inclusion of LGBTI issues in disaster research and policy. It also requires research on the attitudes of personnel and the degree to which their organisations address LGBTI people's needs. Combining these strands can create an emergency management sector where LGBTI people's needs are addressed in advance as part of diverse, inclusive professional practice. This is a model of service provision where LGBTI people can be confident that their needs and identities are acknowledged, supported and affirmed.

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Gendered aspects of long-term disaster resilience in Victoria, Australia

Abstract

Research conducted in 2018 documented the disaster experiences of 56 women and men in Australia aged between 18 and 93 years. This paper draws out the gendered factors that affected their resilience, and in so doing, begins to address the dearth of research related to gendered aspects of long-term disaster resilience. It is unique in capturing the voices of survivors who spoke of events 9 years after the 2009 Black Saturday fires and of earlier fires and floods in Victoria more than 50 years ago, including the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. Over decades, gendered expectations of men and women significantly hindered resilience. Men spoke of the long-term cost to them of demands to 'be strong' in the worst of disasters and reasons they were reluctant to seek help afterwards. Women spoke of their contributions holding a lesser value and of discrimination. Discussions of violence against women and children after disaster, and suicide ideation in anticipation of future disasters offered critical insights. Protective factors identified by informants were not wholly intrinsic to their character but were also physical, such as essential resources provided in the immediate aftermath, and psychological and community support offered in the long-term. Factors that helped resilience departed from the 'masculine' model of coping post-disaster by moving away from a refusal to admit trauma and suffering, to community-wide resilience bolstered by widespread emotional, social and psychological support. Genuine community planning for disasters before they strike builds trust and offers insights for emergency management planners.

Peer Reviewed

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Introduction

Long-term resilience is influenced by a multitude of factors associated with emergencies and disasters and the long and pressured aftermath. Previous traumatic life events and mental and physical ill-health contribute. While class, race, sexuality and ability all affect capacity for resilience, this paper focuses on gender. Of the 56 people interviewed in this study, 30 identified as women and 26 as men, with none indicating gender/sexual diversity. The findings centre on traditional gendered expectations of men and women, noting their salience particularly in times of disaster, so gendered analysis based on 'women' and 'men' is used.[1] This paper draws on the gendered aspects of qualitative research conducted in 2018 (Parkinson, Duncan & Kaur 2018) and contributes to an identified dearth of long-term disaster resilience research (Spencer, Majeed & McArdle 2018). The 56 study participants remembered disasters from the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires to the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and even earlier fires and floods in Victoria back to the 1943 Tarrawingee fire. To a person, they remembered the day of the disaster as if it was yesterday. Unexpectedly, critical issues that are often identified as important to survivors in the first few years following a disaster—such as drug and alcohol abuse, temporary housing and frustration with the bureaucracy associated with rebuilding—were only briefly mentioned, if at all, by participants. In the long-term, what stayed with survivors were the effects of the experience on themselves, their family and community. Their reflections and insights shaped by gendered expectations, over a decade or over half a century, informs the understanding of resilience and what helps and hinders it. Researchers, policymakers and responders alike can benefit from these insights to improve all stages of emergency and disaster management.

1. The focus of much of the Gender and Disaster Pod's research is on people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). See for example Parkinson & Duncan 2018, Parkinson *et al.* 2018.

Literature review

This long-term resilience research confirms other research findings (conducted soon after events) that gendered expectations are significant to the disaster experience (Parkinson & Zara 2012, Zara & Parkinson 2013, Enarson & Pease 2016). However, little is known about the role of gender in long-term recovery.

A literature review accompanied this research and aimed to identify protective factors using a gender lens (Spencer *et al.* 2018). The conclusion reads (in part):

> *The MUDRI review team conducted a comprehensive, systematised literature search of peer reviewed, grey and secondary literature. The result was a dearth of relevant literature, and particularly a notable lack of gender focused literature.* (p.40)

While a growing body of gender and disaster research on both slow- and rapid-onset disasters has existed since the 1980s (e.g. Harms & Alston 2018, Enarson & Pease 2016, Eriksen 2010, Fordham 2011, Pacholok 2013) it is exceedingly rare for the research reports to have a long-term focus. Consequently, most were excluded. Only 7 papers were included that had both a long-term and gendered focus (Spencer *et al.* 2018).

Methodology

Ethics approval was granted through the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee, #10486, and an Advisory Group was established. The research question underpinning the broader research from which this paper is drawn was: 'What factors increase or hinder long-term individual and community disaster resilience?'

Specific aims included documenting the insights and experiences of men, women and children of resilience in the aftermath of disaster events. The sample of 56 comprised 30 women and 26 men aged between 18 and 93 years. Fifteen were children at the time of the disaster. One in 4 were emergency services volunteers. The 56 informants were consulted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (32), 3 couple interviews and 3 small focus groups. Ten of the interviews were by telephone. Disaster experiences included fires and floods from 1943 to 2011 in rural, remote and urban areas. Seven informants had experiences of more than one disaster. The time since experiencing the disaster ranged from 8 to over 70 years. A unique feature of this research was the development of a Resilience Scale, which asked informants to rate their resilience on a scale of 1 to 10. Its value lay in drawing forth reflections on each time period from the day of the disaster until 30 years after. Modified Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) guided analysis and NVivo 12 assisted coding. Validity was enhanced by 2 researchers coding and developing nodes and by participant checks on their transcripts.

Concept and definition of resilience

The ambiguous nature of the term 'resilience' was a challenge throughout this project. The concept of resilience is highly contested because it can suggest that the responsibility for resilience lies with survivors, justifying reduced services to them (Derickson 2016, p.162). Additionally, no agreed definition of resilience exists (Ostadtaghizadeh *et al.* 2015). Consequently, this research was guided by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) definition:

> *The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.* (UNISDR 2009)

Findings

Men

> *I internalised that I could handle this, that I was the head of the family and therefore I had to remain strong, and I couldn't show any weakness. So all emotion went inside.* (Mike)[2]

In this research, several men indicated they shared this feeling, specifically stating they were expected to be the protector and to fulfil this role unstintingly. Their destiny on the day was to protect the family or the family home as if this was proof of their manhood. Eric referred to Black Saturday as 'the greatest test anybody could ever have'. Often, the dimensions of the disaster were beyond human capacity and survival frequently came down to a change in conditions, such as a wind change. The endurance of those caught up in the 2009 fires is astounding. Alex saved his son and grandson, and his own life, in a place and in circumstances where others died. When the steel shed where they were sheltering in melted around them, they lay on the road and survived against the odds. They survived because of Alex's knowledge and skill. Alex reflected on the long-lasting impact on him.

> *My second eldest son was with me, and grandson … They don't talk about the fire. I often think, why didn't it affect them as it has affected me. I come back to the family unit where I was the father figure and they had me to lean on, or felt I was their protector. So they didn't have the fear that I had … I was at the apex, and I was the one … at the forefront.* (Alex)

The expectation that men don't cry is perhaps stronger for emergency services personnel. In the aftermath, some men spoke of not being asked how they were going. Our society seems to assume men are self-sufficient. One middle-aged informant was surprised to be asked about himself by community counsellors after bushfire affected his farm.

> *It was the first time in my life I'd ever had anyone ask me actually, 'How are you going'? I've never had that before.* (Peter)

2. Pseudonyms used throughout.

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Traditional masculine values mean it is less likely that men will access health services because they feel uncomfortable discussing problems or feelings and do not want to be considered weak. Men's reluctance to seek help was affirmed in this research and the reason interviewees gave was linked to workplace consequences. It appeared that organisations assumed men who asked for psychological help were less capable at work than others. Warren observed the reaction from workplace supervisors, 'If there's a perceived weakness, bang, go for it. Get rid of them'. The assumption was that men *not* expressing emotion were stable. As Luke put it, 'I was not shouting—but inside I was'. The world, as described by informants, is one where men are judged as not resilient, not man enough and incapable of doing their job if they ask for psychological help or express emotion (apart from anger).

In relationships, too, men withdraw and relationships wither. Men struggled to maintain the stoicism they felt was demanded of them in intimate relationships and within the home. Their silence and absence, so as not to cry, meant that partners or adult children frequently stepped in to persuade men to seek help. Asking for help became impossible for one man:

> *I often think, you know how you've got those deep-sea fish that are so many fathoms underwater with all that pressure? You take them out of the water and they explode because they've got nothing to hold them together. I sometimes feel like I'm like that.* (Murray)

Like Murray, many men throw themselves into long hours of physical or stressful work. Murray was reluctant to take up the informal support available to him through colleagues at the local brigade:

> *If I tell someone in the brigade that I'm feeling a certain way, they might likely take me off the rescue. So it's like, that holds me back.* (Murray)

Not wanting to risk his volunteer roles, he tried calling an online support service on one occasion. He said he won't do it again, as his confidentiality was breached when they acted on 'duty of care' responsibilities, calling in emergency services to check that he was not going to harm himself. Like Murray, Mike also felt alone with his suffering:

> *Absolutely bottle it up … it's just lack of communication, there's no conversation, there's no description … [The Vietnam War] was my learned experience and so that's how I handled Ash Wednesday.* (Mike)

A strong theme was of men 'keeping busy' to keep emotions at bay. Yet Mike went on to say, 'Probably my proudest achievement is recognising who I had been and doing something about it … Understanding why I was angry'. Aaron reiterated this, reinterpreting strength as being able to recognise fragility and defy society's expectations: 'I knew I was in a bad place, and I had to get help. Some people aren't strong enough to admit it'.

Women

While women and girls can cry without the career penalties or social censure men face, they are expected not to be angry.

> *In Grade 4 … the teacher told mum that he thought I was an angry girl. So I got to go off to some counsellor to assess whether I was angry … There was a massive divide in the boys in our school and the boys could be loud, they could be obnoxious, they could do whatever.* (Hannah)

In comparison to men, women were responsible for the emotional health of the family in the aftermath, sometimes at great cost to their own autonomy, health and wellbeing. Their contributions were often invisible. One male respondent summed up the masculine and feminine roles he observed:

> *I know this is stereotyping. 'Men are protectors' kind of thing. It's what we get brought up to be … 'The provider, the protector'. So we go rushing out, brains switched off, just go rushing out. Where women are more the nurturer, they're looking after the kids.* (Murray)

Women experienced further discrimination in the lower valuing of their contribution and lack of regard for the emotional support they offered to family, friends and communities. A disparaging comment from one male participant after devastating floods exemplified this: 'We're solving problems and you're just worrying about your girlfriend or whatever'. Yet, this emotional work supported the resilience of the family. Women felt discrimination against them in other ways. Josie owned her property and cattle before meeting her partner, yet when assessors came, their discussions were solely with her male partner.

> *They separated [us] and they spoke to him … A woman dragged me over there and then they took [my partner] aside and they said, 'What are going to feed [the cattle], how are you going to get water for them, what are you going to do with them?'.* (Josie)
> Interviewer: *How much involvement did he have with the cattle?*
> Josie: *None.*

Within emergency management job roles, gender discrimination was equally apparent. Some discrimination related to social conditioning and people's belief in a gender schema where women provide the majority of unpaid care and are therefore less employable.

> *The CFA average member is a 57-year-old white male so they've got quite a lot that they've got to do there in encouraging more recruits. It is a very responsible job to be a captain or lieutenant, so you need to be on call 24/7 and a lot of women may carry the majority of caring responsibilities in their family … therefore the vast majority of captains and lieutenants are male.* (Ruth)

Career limitations for women are considered acceptable due to the generalisation–often unfounded–that they are looked after by a partner who has an uninterrupted career. This gender schema is outdated where women have no partner, no children, are single, where divorce runs at one in 2 marriages and when couples share unpaid work. It is critical to every woman, and particularly relevant to long-term disaster resilience, that women do not face this gender discrimination, especially as government policy increasingly leans towards self-funding in ever longer retirements (Parkinson *et al.* 2013).

Domestic violence

Domestic violence was not a focus of this research, but it emerged in participant narratives. Men's violence against women and children added immensely to the stress of the post-disaster period. Four informants spoke of violence against them or their children. One woman was on the cusp of leaving her husband 10 years after their disaster experience. She unequivocally linked the marriage breakdown to the disaster, reflecting that she couldn't keep on trying. Other informants knew of domestic violence in their communities linked to the disaster experience through their observations or professional roles. Informants spoke about violence against their children that had not been present before the fires. There were longstanding consequences in the form of family rifts from witnessing or being the brunt of a father's abuse.

Dying as a preferred option

A particularly gendered aspect of some informant narratives was that of men regarding what amounts to suicide as the logical option in a future disaster. Interpretations of this were checked with the research participants. Self-assessments of resilience were sometimes premised on their ability to either avoid or deal with another disaster. Some spoke of not wanting to survive if it happened again. It was too much to think of going through the experience a decade or more later in their lives, or of having to replace belongings, homes and farms or indeed, not being able to replace things of great significance to them.

Balancing quality of life against simply surviving had both women and men questioning the wisdom of doing it all again. At what point does resilience become living without sufficient resources while tormented by memories of the disaster or the physical and mental consequences of it? When is it resilience without purpose? Yet, it was only men who spoke directly about choosing to die in a future fire as a feasible option. The responsibility of society is to ensure the cause is not a lack of caring and the role of government is to provide sufficient information and resources for planning and recovery. Beyond this, individual choice remains a value held strongly in society.

While hard work and persistence was evident in people demonstrating resilience, it was equally evident in others who could not 'bounce back'. In addition, a person's resilience (as judged by others) can be a reason to condemn or blame them for their situation. For some, enough is enough. Without a viable and enjoyable future, it can be a rational decision to choose the possibility of death.

> *I'm 75 now and I'm going to stay again if a fire comes … They can hold a gun to my head. I'm not going … If it's going to take me 5 years to recover and that will make me 80, I'd rather go now. I don't want 5 years of recovery.* (Luke)

This dilemma is central to disaster prevention and recovery planning. With individual choice a value in society, a person's decision to stay in the face of imminent disaster threat must be respected. The caveat is that others must not be implicated, for example, by putting themselves in danger to try to 'rescue' someone who has made an informed decision to stay in a life-threatening situation.

Discussion

What helps long-term disaster resilience?

It is clear from the accounts for participants in this research that stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in response to disaster remain persistent, defying progress in gender equality. Men are understood as protectors and women as nurturers. Men are frequently unable to admit to experiencing trauma or a sense of failure. They are reluctant to seek help, instead suffering alone, while the responsibility for holding families together is accepted by (or imposed on) women.

> *Going through my catalogue of my observations of men and my observations of women, their roles are very, very different, post disaster.* (Kate)

Moving away from this outdated model, factors identified by informants as helping resilience related to effective emotional, social and psychological support in a community-wide setting. This has the potential to reduce the stigma felt by men in seeking help and to reduce the imperative of caring felt by women.

Emotional, social and psychological support

The importance of appropriate emotional support in the recovery process was acknowledged by many informants as key to resilience. This support would include services through a medical model (e.g. prescriptions of antidepressants) and psychological model (e.g. therapy) and would extend to workplace counselling, professional guidance, group support, community-based support and self-help. Others found helping others assisted in their own feelings of resilience.

> *The safety of being in a group of people who have experienced the same set of circumstances leads to a freedom of speaking that may not necessarily be there if you're a one-out, talking about something that's happened to you that no one else has got any concept of.* (Mike)

> *There are times when you try to talk about it and then you actually get into a group, express your feelings and literally be… a sounding board for others.* (Graeme)

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One informant drew on her professional life to advise it is not helpful to pathologise behaviours and instead 'acknowledging that trauma as part of who you are'. The techniques that people used to alleviate stress or help resilience were diverse, emphasising the individuality of those interviewed. For example, people were helped by breathing exercises, yoga, reiki, tai chi, neurolinguistics, compartmentalising, focusing and meditation. They benefited from therapies including music, gardening and dog or horse therapy. They used their hands to make mandalas. They healed through making art, writing and poetry.

Another informant pointed out that the context, post-disaster, for individuals trying to achieve psychological wellbeing is, in fact, community-wide struggling. Encouragingly, there were some examples of professionals in the mental health field supporting social interventions and community-strengthening initiatives to prevent and address mental health difficulties. This recognises the effects of disasters on entire communities and regions. For many, anniversaries allowed community-wide remembrance of shared experiences, grieving for loss and finding some solace in individual and community resilience.

Protective factors identified by informants were not wholly intrinsic to their character, but were also physical, such as essential resources provided in the immediate aftermath and psychological and community support offered in the long-term. Informants identified that genuine community engagement and documented community planning before an event relieves pressure in a community in the aftermath. Such planning can prevent community factions and reduce the tendency to blame community leaders in the aftermath when stages of cohesion and fracture are known to follow disasters. Trust was built by authentically involving significant numbers of the community. This model could be widely adopted and adapted.[3] The impact on individuals' relationships with institutions in disaster response recovery and reconstruction, characterised here as institutional trust, is central to these findings and a key insight for emergency management policy and practice.

Limitations

Although a broad sample was sought, this study does not include people who stated they have diverse gender and sexual identities, nor Indigenous people or culturally and linguistically diverse people. This is largely due to the demographics of the communities affected by the mostly rural disasters (except Canberra).

Future research

As guilt and resentment both inhibit resilience, 2 Australia-wide discussions are needed: (1) on the imperative for those choosing to stay in disaster zones to do so only without implicating others, and (2) on safeguarding children in disasters – given the high rates of child deaths in bushfires and in light of Australia's support of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Resilience Scale offers a valuable tool for the endeavours of future researchers to hear informant reflections on how well they self-assessed their resilience at various time points from 'during a disaster' to '30 years plus'.

3. This model is detailed in the original report (Parkinson, Duncan & Kaur 2018).

Conclusion

This long-term resilience research confirms that gendered expectations are significant to disaster experience and resilience. The informant narratives indicated no consistent path to resilience, no pattern in how survivors experienced their recovery, and no common self-assessment of how resilient they were as time passed. Other publications from this research discussed the damage we do in asking disaster survivors, 'Aren't you over it yet?' Frequently, people demand 'resilience' in the aftermath of disaster events, erroneously seeing it as a marker of character. Protective factors identified by informants were not wholly intrinsic to their character but relied on the human and material resources they had before the event and the speed of government to re-establish essential services in the immediate aftermath. In the longer term, psychological and community support was important. It is equally important to understand the harm that emerges from expectations of men to be protectors and providers and women to be selfless.

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Men's role in violence against women in disasters: studies in Iran and Australia

Abstract

Sexual violence is largely absent from studies on violence against women in disasters. The role of men in perpetrating violence against women is overlooked or excused and women are usually blamed in both countries. A review of 2 studies of men's violence against women after floods and earthquakes in Iran and bushfires in Australia show remarkable similarities. Although cultural contexts and the way gender inequality is established and demonstrated are different, these studies reveal unexpected parallels. The context of disaster lays it bare. Participants of both studies were disaster-affected people in Iran and Australia who revealed the taboos that prevent women speaking of violence that is exacerbated in a disaster context. Men play important roles in preventing and responding to violence against women as the result of their responsibilities and positions at the household and community levels. The objective of this paper was to compare the findings from these studies and consider the difficulties faced in conducting studies related to the roles of men and women roles during and after disaster events.

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Introduction

Two studies of men's violence against women after floods and earthquakes in Iran (Sohrabizadeh 2016) and bushfires in Australia (Parkinson 2015) show remarkable similarities. This article details author observations and compares the findings and the complexities faced by the researchers in conducting these studies. The common standpoint of both research projects was that violence against women is a violation of human rights and a barrier to gender equality. Violence against women is defined as: 'Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (United Nations General Assembly 1993). Violence against women and girls is exacerbated after disasters and endangers their health and security (International Recovery Platform 2005). According to Parkinson (in press), there were at least 50 journal articles during the period 1993 to 2020 on increased violence against women in disasters in 14 different countries, in addition to 16 multi-country studies. The disasters were as diverse as the Mt. Pinatubo eruption in the Philippines in 1991 (IASC 2005), Hurricane Katrina in the US in 2005 (e.g. Enarson 2012, Schumacher *et al.* 2010), the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 (Chan & Zhang 2011), climate change in flood-prone Sindh in Pakistan (Memon 2020) and COVID-19 in many countries during 2020 (UN Women 2020). It appears that the type of disaster and the relative wealth of countries has little to do with the increase in violence against women that accompanies disasters (Lee 2018). Comparing cases of violence against women in different contexts and sharing the experiences provides lessons for preventing violence during future events. This paper contributes by comparing 2 very different countries. While both studies (Parkinson 2015, Sohrabizadeh 2016) had research objectives, the objective of this paper is to compare the findings of these research papers and outline the difficulties faced in conducting these studies in these countries.

Methodology

Design

The methodologies used in the 2 studies were almost identical. Both studies were conducted using a qualitative research approach. A qualitative content analysis was taken in Iran (Graneheim & Lundman 2004) and Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) in Australia. This study was approved by the ethics committee of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (#IR.SBMU.PHNS.REC.1400.095) and Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (# CF10/0448–2010000209).

Setting and participants

The Iranian study included field observations in 3 affected regions of East Azerbaijan, Bushehr and Mazandaran. Affected women, as well as key informants (experienced scholars and experts), were interviewed in Iran using a purposive sampling method. While field observations were not formally noted in the Australian methodology, it nevertheless formed part of data gathering as interviews with women were preceded by visits to the bushfire-affected communities of Kinglake, Marysville and Flowerdale, and interviews and focus groups were conducted with 47 recovery workers. Data saturation was obtained after 15 interviews in the Iranian study and 30 interviews in the Australian study. Data were gathered through face-to-face, in-depth interviews in Iran and in-depth, semi-structured interviews in Australia. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and confirmed by the participants.

Data analysis

Data collection and data analysis were conducted simultaneously in both settings. A qualitative content analysis using the Graneheim approach was applied for analysing data in the Iranian study. In Australia, data analysis was conducted based on Grounded Theory and assisted by NVivo software. Both analytic techniques focus strongly on data coding and an inductive approach to enhance the rigour of the findings and to allow the findings and conclusions to emerge from the women's accounts.

Study limitations and resistance to research

Researchers in both countries faced significant barriers. In Australia, people involved in the post-Black Saturday recovery expressed concerns about the research. Some recovery workers suggested removing the word 'violence' from the research recruitment flyer and others warned that women might not respond. A year earlier, ethics approval was sought to interview police and, after a lengthy process, advice was given that the research could only been done if it was not about women and not about violence. Some recovery workers vehemently rejected the notion that men's violence in the home after Black Saturday was a problem, and one worker after another spoke of the heightened sensitivities of post-disaster circumstances. Many warned against adding to the burden on vulnerable communities. The attempt was to shut the research down–to silence the researchers as well as the women. In both countries, some women who participated were anxious about potential ramifications, as complete confidentiality could not be guaranteed. In small towns in Australia, for example, many people knew of experiences of others. Venues for interviews and addresses for transcript checks had to be carefully considered. Some women withdrew their accounts or large parts of their transcripts because of this unavoidable risk.

This resistance to accepting the research findings of increased violence against women in disasters extended to disseminating the research. The first public presentations of the Australian findings in forums and conferences faced objections from police and from community members 'defending' and 'standing up for' men in their communities.

In Iran, the research subject is also a culturally sensitive issue. This made the process of data collection and analysis very difficult. Receiving ethics approval was equally problematic. Talking about experiences of violence is not desirable in Iranian communities, especially after disaster events.

Findings

The ways gender inequality is established and demonstrated

Gender inequality is premised on men's violence against women, on a persistent pay gap that sees women paid less than men and on a predominance of men in all levels of government as well as executive levels in the private sector. The senior roles that men fulfil is evident in the clothes they wear; a suit and tie denote authority as do emergency services uniforms. The predominance–and expectation–of women holding unpaid caring roles has a life-long impact on financial assets held by women (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013). Poverty for women, as single parents or in retirement, far outstrips that of men. As a country, Australia seems unwilling to address this. Australia's ranking on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021) continues to fall, currently sitting at 50 of 156 countries. Gender inequality in Iran is worse and it is ranked at 150 out of 156 countries. The gender gap is reported in political, economic and education aspects (World Economic Forum 2021). Given that Iran is a highly disaster-prone country, gender inequality can be exacerbated after disasters, and this put women and girls in danger of being violated by men.

Parallels in violence against women for both countries

These studies were the first research projects to focus on violence against women in disasters in both countries. A critical finding was that violence against women increased after earthquakes and floods in Iran, and bushfires in Australia. Prior to publication of Sohrabizadeh's research (2016) and Parkinson & Zara's research (2011), there were no published investigations indicating the lack of attention to violence against women in emergency management and planning. In Iran, 2 themes were extracted of domestic violence and violence within communities.

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The first theme included 3 categories: physical, psychological and sexual violence. Psychological violence and sexual harassment were 2 categories of violence within the community concept. The Australian research echoed these themes.

Parkinson & Zara (2011) described occasions of community violence at events such as community recovery meetings and community dining, as well as in local streets. Physical violence by men against women was described in both research reports. In Iran, some women suffered from physical abuse and violence carried out by their partners, fathers and sons. These aggressive behaviours affected the health and coping capacities of women during the recovery phase. Participants stated that the mental distress of men caused by the disaster event triggered changed behaviours and reactions and played out as forms of physical violence against women and girls (Sohrabizadeh 2016a). In Australia, the women interviewed linked their partner's new or increased levels of violence to the men's experiences in the 2009 bushfires. Several spoke compassionately about their partner despite his violence because of what he had been through.

Psychological violence was purposely not foregrounded in the Australian research. Instead, researchers alerted authorities and the emergency management sector to the criminality of men's (physical) domestic violence as described by the respondents. Nevertheless, the narratives of the participants indicated that psychological violence was also used by men after Black Saturday in 2009. It was apparent in men blaming women and seeking to control their activities as well as 'gaslighting'[1] women about what had happened during the disaster. In Iran, post-disaster psychological violence occurred in forms of controlling and insulting women, denying women's rights to be independent and through men threatening to divorce the wife or leave the home. In addition, verbal violence was reported by women and girls. Unlike Australia, in Iran, forced marriages of girls was an important barrier to leaving marriages for teenage girls who were prevented from continuing their education in high schools (Sohrabizadeh 2016b). One Iranian participant stated:

> *I am really eager to go to a high school for getting my diploma and continue my academic education in a college. Unfortunately, my parents cannot afford the costs of high school after the earthquake and I have to get married or stay at home.* (p.10)

Sohrabizadeh (2016b) noted that sexual violence against women is largely absent from disaster studies. This also applies in Australia as none of the women spoke of sexual violence, which is not to say that they were not experiencing it. The taboo that prevents women speaking of violence is exacerbated in a disaster context. In Iran, affected women who lost their children or relatives were blamed for intimate partner violence. Women were shocked and depressed when losing a loved one and thus, they did not intend to have sexual relationships with their husbands. Some men ignored their partner's unwillingness and perpetrated acts of sexual violence against their spouses after disasters.

Australian research into partner rape (Parkinson 2017) concluded that men's sense of entitlement to sex with women is deeply entrenched and it follows that is rare for women to report intimate partner sexual violence because of shame and fear of retaliation (McOrmond-Plummer, Easteal & Levy-Peck 2014; Parkinson 2009, 2010; Sohrabizadeh 2016a; Sohrabizadeh 2014). However, when participants are specifically recruited to speak about sexual violence, they do. This confirms the absolute necessity to 'name the problem' and not use euphemisms. In retrospect, the Australian study could have included a question in semi-structured interviews about sexual violence to allow women to speak about this aspect of violence against them. There is deep shame attached to sexual violence and this is evident in the cultural contexts for both Australia and Iran. Both cultures attach blame to women who experience men's sexual violence. This is another reason why women don't report it.

Women are blamed

Women are blamed for men's physical violence against them. The Australian research (Parkinson 2017) draws on women's accounts where they were accused of not being a good enough wife, not supporting their husband or partner, not giving him enough time. The expectation that women put their own needs last, even to the point of tolerating violence from the man in their home, was conveyed clearly to women by family members, health professionals and police. Women had limited to no options to turn for help in the aftermath of the 2009 bushfires. Since that time, the lack of data confirms that there is still resistance to hearing of men's violence in a bushfire context. While media and grey literature focus on anticipated spikes (e.g. Gleeson 2020), to date, there is no qualitative or quantitative published research on domestic violence after the summer bushfires in 2019–20 in Australia, nor after earthquakes and floods in Iran.

The privileging of men

Men, in general, are privileged in patriarchal societies. The level of privilege enjoyed differs depending on class, age, race and ethnicity and different groups of men enjoy different levels of the 'patriarchal dividend' (Pease 2010). This offers insight for why violence against women is largely overlooked in emergency management planning. In Australia, firefighters are iconic. They have community gratitude and admiration and, in 2021, ranked fourth among the most respected of occupations in surveys, including by Reader's Digest.[2] Iran is a male-dominant country focusing on men's abilities and skills in disaster management. Women have been perceived as passive and helpless victims waiting for relief by capable men in disaster-affected regions. This can explain why women's needs and challenges, especially violence against women, have not been adequately considered in previous disasters. In Iran, some men prefer to believe that women's involvement in emergency and disaster management

1. In *See what you made me do*, Jess Hill describes 'gaslighting' as when an abuser knowingly denies, fabricates and manipulates situations to make a partner doubt their memory or perception' (p.26).
2. The most trusted professions in Australia. At: www.readersdigest.com.au/true-stories-lifestyle/work/the-most-trusted-professions-in-australia.

would be a barrier to meeting their goals and this is why women should stay home and take care of family members (Sohrabizadeh 2014). A woman who was economically affected by earthquake stated:

> *There are only a few employment opportunities for women in the disaster-stricken regions. There are not any equal job opportunities for women. Men don't imagine that women need to have jobs and only mentioned the availability of economic support at the relief foundations.* (p.12)

Perpetrating violence is overlooked or excused

In 2020 in Australia, discrimination and sexual harassment and assault in the workplace reached media saturation and finally seemed to have received the attention of governments. Historically, there has been reluctance to address men's violence against women, particularly if they held high occupational status. Politicians and men in powerful positions are unlikely to face censure for violence against women as attested by the litany of reports in recent years (e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, VEOHRC 2020). The respected status of firefighters leads to even greater reticence to hear from women about the violence they experience post-bushfires. 'Nobody wants to hear that men who embody the spirit of resilient and heroic Australia are violent towards their families' (Parkinson 2015, p.142). Equally, there was reluctance to implicate men of standing within the community, wealthy men, policemen as well as suffering men. Men who were traumatised or now unemployed as a result of their disaster experience.

The pandemic during 2020 was a period in Australia when women's experience of violence in the home was recognised as a 'shadow epidemic' and a reason for national soul-searching and funding. This willingness to call out increased domestic violence in lockdowns is in stark contrast to the bushfire context. It clarifies the nationwide reluctance to implicate career and volunteer firefighters and community 'heroes'. What is it about the Australian culture that excuses men and tolerates violence against women at the rate of one in 3 women experiencing violence in their lifetime, and one women killed every week by her intimate partner (Cullen *et al.* 2019)?

The role of men in perpetrating violence against women has similarly been overlooked in Iran. Cases of violence against women are not regularly reported by organisations and the public are not formally informed about pre-and post-disaster status of violence against women in Iran. Excusing men's roles in violence against women is rooted in Iranian patriarchal culture and in the way girls grow up. Women do not have enough information about types of violence and consider men's violating behaviours as a routine part of their lives (Sohrabizadeh 2016a, Sohrabizadeh 2014).

The findings by Sohrabizadeh (2014) echo those of Parkinson & Zara (2011) in attributing the excusing of men's violence against women to patriarchal cultures. It is only in recent decades that authorities in Australia have begun to question men's privilege. In 2021, education to girls and boys about 'consent' was introduced, along with ensuring accountability of people and systems (such as police and employers) to respond to and prevent physical and sexual violence against women.

Ways disaster exposes or increases violence against women

During disaster response and in the aftermath, there is pressure on women to stay silent about their partner's violence. However, at the same time, the chaos of disaster, loss of privacy and increased sharing of circumstances can increase the potential for, and can expose, violence in the home. Around the world, emergency and disaster researchers report that men's violence against women after disasters is linked to stress, grief and loss, trauma, homelessness, unemployment, disruption to support networks, financial problems and bureaucratic hurdles (e.g. Enarson, Fothergill & Peek 2017). Disasters are a catalyst for change and contribute to the evolution of social systems (Quarantelli 1994). That change can be progressive as Parkinson (2019) asserts:

> *The aftermath of Black Saturday presents Australians with the opportunity to see how deeply embedded misogyny is and how fragile our attempts to criminalise domestic violence and hold violent men accountable.* (p.2357)

In Iran, women suffer from a lack of knowledge about the right to live without violence (Sohrabizadeh 2016a). However, disasters aggravate violence against women and this contributes to mental and physical disorders for affected women. It can be concluded that important and progressive change can be driven by disasters, breaking the cultural taboo of violence against women in Iran. This may take place slowly, but disasters may be a catalyst for this positive change. While women need to be informed and trained about prevention and response to violated behaviours during pre and post-disaster phases, men also have an important role in preventing such violence.

Alcohol and drug abuse

A cultural difference is the role of alcohol and drug abuse in Australia compared to Iran, where drinking alcohol is forbidden due to the Islamic rules. Intoxicated people are punished physically and economically, thus, alcohol abuse is not reported formally. Disaster-affected men cannot resort to drinking in Iran. However, men use drugs as a pain killer and an increase of drug abuse among affected men has been reported by some authors (Farhoudian *et al.* 2006, Rahimi Movaghar *et al.* 2007). Although formal reports do not include the role of drug abuse in increasing violence against women in Iran, current evidence is that violence against women can be exacerbated due to using drugs in disaster-stricken regions. After the Australian Black Saturday bushfires in 2009, abuse of alcohol was widespread. Many communities objected to the use of pubs as venues for community meetings, advertising for alcohol at family events and the inclusion of alcohol in community get-togethers. The immediate aftermath of the bushfires was likened to a 'wild-west' environment, with men getting together in the street to drink in

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the absence of the tempering influence of women and children (Parkinson & Zara 2011). One participant said:

> *The men were really started to drink. My friend was having people rock up at the door at all times of the day. They were drinking in the street. They were getting together as blokes.* (p.111)

That study concluded:

> *It appeared that alcohol and drug use increased post-fire as people struggled to cope with the wholesale destruction of property and life and ongoing frustrations. Workers described many people self-medicating with alcohol to escape the pain and they linked the increased alcohol to men's use of violence*[3] *… Alcohol is very much a part of the Australian culture and some workers viewed its use as an understandable, if not legitimate, response to the fires.* (Parkinson & Zara 2011, pp.167–168).

Men's roles in preventing or responding to violence against women in disasters

In Iran and Australia, there have been considerable efforts to prevent violence against women over the past 40 years. Two approaches have been followed:

- focusing on violence against women prevention before it happens
- involving men in violence against women mitigation and prevention.

Men, as the main perpetrators, are increasingly acknowledged as important partners in reducing violence against women. In Iran, as a male-dominant country with a huge gender gap, men play important roles in responding to violence against women and girls. Furthermore, men's decision-making and economic dominance in the family and the community is an important predictor of violence against women (Sohrabizadeh 2016a).

In Iran and Australia, men have more access to resources and are active in management and policymaking positions than are women. Men can allocate resources and make decisions to mitigate post-disaster violence against women at local, regional and national levels. Men must be engaged in community-based interventions addressing violence against women in disasters. For example, men can participate in education and training programs and social campaigns for violence against women prevention. Their roles as policymakers, advocates and activists can improve prevention and build gender equality (Berkowitz 2004, Flood 2010). In Iran, the strong capacity of the health care network can facilitate the involvement of men and boys in community-based interventions to reduce violence against women. This wide network can provide training programs in violence against women prevention for men and boys living in rural and urban regions. As men predominantly hold the key positions of responsibility at household and community levels in Iran, they can lead the change needed for violence against women prevention and management in disasters.

3. Although the domestic violence literature identifies the strong link between violence and alcohol (Abramsky *et al.* 2011, Foran & O'Leary 2008, Livingston 2011), there are concerns that alcohol be misconstrued as causing the violence, 'thereby reducing perpetrator responsibility for their violence and failing to target its real causes' (Braaf 2012, p.1).

Conclusion

Sharing the experiences of violence against women post-disaster in distinctive socio-cultural contexts and considering the similarities and differences focusing on men's roles provide valuable insights. Collecting and sharing these experiences could successfully reduce and prevent violence against women in disasters. For example, education for boys about how respecting the rights of girls and women is important to achieve a safe community without violence. This could be conducted through public education and building cultures of gender equality.

The predominance in Iran and Australia of men in emergency management roles and women in violence against women prevention work must be urgently addressed. Men can influence other men and can use that influence for positive change to reduce violence against women. In this way, women are not alone in progressing change. It is vital that women and men are involved in disaster response and recovery activities and that they work to eliminate violence.

It is equally vital that research into violence against women in disaster be continued and findings accepted, despite the sensitivity of this in disaster-affected communities. Women and children have the right to live free from violence in any circumstance.

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Abstract

Globally, disasters disrupt human lives and women tend to be more vulnerable during such events. This narrative review explores women's experiences during disasters and identifies common factors increasing their vulnerability. After critical reading, 39 articles were included in this review. This paper underlines the themes in that literature to show that women across the world experience domestic violence, sexual assault, psychological and health problems as well as social and financial deprivation in disasters. The paper discusses the vulnerability of women particularly in Australia and New Zealand, through the lens of the global experience of women in disaster. This review highlights that, while there is consensus on the challenges faced by women in Australia, more research regarding interventions is required to reduce the negative effects of disasters on women. This review aims to inform emergency management practice in Australia and to direct further research to improve the outcomes for women and their safety.

Understanding the experiences of women in disasters: lessons for emergency management planning

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Introduction

Gender equity and reducing inequality are 2 prominent priority Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030 (UNDP 2015). The *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* acknowledges the importance of gender equity and the central role of women in preventive disaster management and building resilience (UNDRR 2017). These global frameworks underline international concern that women remain at a disadvantage in preparing for, surviving through and recovering from disasters. They are usually the most vulnerable group in a disaster context (WHO 2010), although the extent of women's vulnerability and exposure to hazards may vary and depend on a range of social, economic and cultural factors, as well as their vulnerability, and the level of exposure experienced (Ginige, Amaratunga & Haigh 2014; Rezaeian 2013).

This paper summarises features of women's vulnerability and experiences during and after disasters to improve the understanding of their vulnerability and depict the parallels between global and Australian/New Zealand vulnerability in disasters. An understanding of the vulnerability of women in the local region places Australian emergency management practice in context and suggests further research to improve women's experiences and wellbeing in disasters.

Method

A narrative review is a non-systematic review that summarises the published literature on a specific topic or concept to reveal a new perspective based on existing knowledge, and to direct further research on the topic, thereby avoiding duplication of research (Ferrari 2015). The literature related to women's experiences during and after disruptive events was searched using combinations of keywords of 'women', 'disasters'/'disaster', 'emergencies'/'emergency', 'gender', 'post-disaster', 'bushfire'. To identify a specific sub-set of the literature, the name of the countries 'Australia' and 'New Zealand' were used. Articles written

in English and published in or after 2007 were selected to provide relevance and validity of content. Additional articles were included after checking the reference lists of the identified papers. Searching continued until saturation was reached. After reviewing the titles of the identified papers, 74 papers including refereed papers and grey literature were obtained using electronic databases Scopus, ProQuest, Science Direct, Elsevier and Google Scholar. Articles were eliminated if there were inadequate referencing or lack of understanding due to language. In total, 39 articles were included after critical reading.

Results and discussion

The papers highlight how women's disaster-associated experiences across the globe align with women's challenges in Australia and New Zealand during and after disasters, irrespective of socio-economic class and cultural background. Despite evidence of women contributing to disaster preparation and response by building resilience in communities, the reported negative experiences by women generally outnumber the positive. The most notable among adverse outcomes were domestic violence, sexual assault and gender discrimination.

Domestic violence and intimate partner violence

Domestic violence and intimate partner violence are experienced by 30% of women worldwide under a wide range of circumstances (WHO 2017). However, during and after disasters, women experience higher rates of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. These occurrences are often overshadowed, and at times explained away, by other pressing matters associated with recovery and reconstruction after disasters.

Harville and co-authors (2011) investigated the extent of intimate partner violence after Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast region of the United States using the Conflict Tactics Scale (a recognised instrument in domestic violence research used to quantify different forms of violence). The Conflict Tactics Scale was completed by 123 women affected by the hurricane and showed the level of violence they experienced. The findings were that nearly 5% of the respondents had been raped, sexually abused and/or battered on at least one occasion after the event. Excluding this 5%, the remaining respondents reported that they had been emotionally compromised and/or verbally abused, with 87% humiliated or insulted an 19% slapped, shoved and/or pushed repeatedly by their partners. Campbell and co-authors (2016) interviewed 208 women affected by the earthquake in Haiti, with 62% identifying as victims of physical assault and 80% of this sub-group being attacked by their partners and in some cases, their ex-partners. This highlighted the inability of women to reach out for help within their communities. This triggered mental health issues including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder among the respondents.

Fisher (2010) and Pincha (2008a) provide evidence of increased levels of domestic violence and intimate partner violence in the temporary shelters in India and Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami. Fisher (2010) conducted 60 semi-structured interviews in tsunami-affected areas and documented incidents of beatings and murders of women by their husbands, often as a result of excessive alcohol or drug use and intoxication. The author also recorded brutal killings, including a husband burning his wife to death. Both Hines (2007) and Pincha (2008) worked on the tsunami disaster and its impacts on people in Tamil Nadu, India. They conducted qualitative research and a survey that confirmed the increased domestic violence towards women in the temporary shelters of these regions.

Research into intimate partner violence after Hurricane Katrina revealed an increase in incidents and that victims cannot easily reach out for help

Image: American Psychological Association

Gender-biased socio-cultural practices

Day-to-day, gender-biased, socio-cultural practices, household and community responsibilities and expectations of women may cause undesirable experiences for women during and after disaster. This has an impact on their rights, health and safety. Fagen and colleagues (2011) identified that, during the evacuation phase of Hurricane Katrina, women from New Orleans were not well-prepared for evacuation. Many did not get assistance from their partners and children were solely dependent on their mothers. This delayed the evacuation process for women. In some cases, the lack of willingness by male counterparts, and the taken-for-granted maternal culture, meant women took on full responsibility for their families and households in the post-hurricane stage. Men, living in the shelters during the recovery stage or in their houses after the recovery-rehabilitation stage, were reported by Thornton and Voight (2007) to have spent more money on personal entertainment than on household needs. As a result, many women had to take on responsibility for providing food for their families (Thornton & Voigt 2007).

Nelson and co-authors (2002) argued that women from many cultures are expected to take sole responsibility for a range of activities including organising food and caring for children and sick family members. For example, during the recurrent floods in Manila in the Philippines, 68 female survey participants reported the expectation to take care of family during the flood emergencies, with 78% being responsible for providing food for family members and 56% looking after sick family members (Reyes & Lu 2016). In listing women's priorities, Reyes and Lu

(2016) found that the women themselves prioritised caring for their family members and protecting their households over personal care and safety. The tendency of prioritising others led many women to die in Sri Lanka during the 2004 tsunami because women kept gathering household belongings and checking on family members, which delayed their evacuation (Jayarathne 2014). While staying in the temporary shelters after the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, many men, driven by a false sense of ego and superiority as reported by Jayarathne (2014), refused to attend the relief centres. They forced female family members to travel from the shelters to relief distribution centres multiple times a day to line-up for several hours to collect relief supplies on the men's behalf. This put additional physical and psychological stress on the women in addition to their existing household responsibilities (Jayarathne 2014).

The male-controlled relief distribution management system in India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines did not accommodate for the purchase of women's essentials such as sanitary napkins, hygiene products, nutritious food for pregnant women and birth-control pills after the 2004 tsunami and Typhoon Haiyan (Valerio 2014, Pincha 2008a, Jayarathne 2014).

Gender-blind disaster management guidelines were also evident in Iran after the East Azerbaijan twin earthquakes in 2012 and the Bushehr earthquake in 2013. Despite women comprising half the total population (Statistical Centre of Iran 2013), they were not included in any disaster management and rehabilitation activities as women in the affected areas were considered a weaker group in the community and, therefore, incapable of contributing to issues as important as managing disasters (Sohrabizadeh 2016).

Other global issues

This review showed that, globally post-disaster, women face more unemployment and financial discrimination than men. Women staying in the evacuation centres in Tohoku, Japan after the tsunami of 2011, worked voluntarily in the shelter kitchens whereas male evacuees were offered paid jobs such as collecting debris (Saito 2012). After the 2004 tsunami in the Maldives, many employers recruited internally displaced men to replace their female workers, resulting in a 5% increase in the rate of women's unemployment (Fulu 2007). Financial discrimination and dependence on men put women into delayed rehabilitation and resulted in increased theft, begging, and prostitution following disasters (Juran 2012, Gokhale 2008, Takasaki 2012, IFRC 2016).

Disaster-affected women frequently experience health challenges as a result of their physiological needs not being addressed in emergencies and during relief budget allocations. Thapa and Acharya (2017) found that after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, the care of pregnant women was not prioritised in the disaster areas. Local authorities considered that pregnancy was a natural physiological condition and needed no additional consideration in emergencies. This triggered anxiety and depression among many pregnant women. In 2013, when super Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, over 270,338 pregnant women suffered either a lack of skilled birth attendants during childbirth or inadequate treatment facilities for obstetric complications such as pre-eclampsia, eclampsia and sepsis (Valerio 2014).

Women from minority groups generally appear to experience more adverse outcomes during and after disasters. Pongponrat and Ishii (2018) focused on the vulnerabilities of a minority group of Thai women living in Ishinomaki, Japan. During the 2011 tsunami, their experience of evacuation and survival was more difficult because they had not participated in pre-disaster tsunami evacuation drills and there was insufficient support for them compared to Japanese citizens.

During the post-tsunami recovery phase in Tamil Nadu, India, women from the lower-caste Hindu Dalit community, identified as the most deprived group in the country, remained largely excluded from recovery policies and did not receive any compensation and/or financial aid (Pincha 2008b).

Enarson (2012) showed that racial issues in the Unites States put women of colour into vulnerable situations during disasters, with African-American women in many states receiving less assistance than did white women.

The literature selected suggests that regardless of women's ethnicity and socio-cultural background, their experiences of disaster events show a distinct and recurring pattern of violence, inadequate health support and added pressure to fulfil household responsibilities that affects their wellbeing around the world.

Women's experiences in Australia and New Zealand

In terms of post-disaster domestic violence and intimate partner violence, the experience of women in Australia and New Zealand was similar to the global experience of women.

Parkinson (2017) explored the incidence of post-disaster intimate partner violence among women who lived through the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, Australia in 2009. Thirty women were interviewed who had experienced intimate partner violence following the fires. A total of 16 reported violence after the bushfire (14 experiencing it themselves and 2 reporting violence experienced by family members). Of these respondents, 9 were victimised for the first time in the relationship and the other 7 had previous experience of violence in their relationship, with the fires escalating the violence.

After the 2010 series of earthquakes in the Canterbury region of New Zealand, domestic violence including child abuse and intimate partner violence rates increased in the affected areas (Campbell & Jones 2016). Callouts made during the weekend following the earthquakes to the New Zealand police for domestic violence increased by 50% over the 'normal' rate (Houghton *et al.* 2010). Even though the number of these incidents doubled, it was projected that almost 76% of total domestic violence incidents during the recovery stage were not reported to police (Campbell & Jones 2016). In addition, the incidence of domestic violence increased by almost 50% over the previous year (Ingber 2011). The literature on increased domestic violence and intimate partner violence following New

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Zealand earthquakes suggested that the filed complaints were regarded as sudden outbursts from male partners and therefore ignored. This indicates the barriers that women face in accessing assistance from support organisations (Campbell & Jones 2016).

Most of the literature on women's experiences, did not specify the underlying reasons behind domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The trends reported by the respondents suggested that violence was persistent from their partners and that frustrations from uncertainty and insecurity after the disaster was a catalyst for the violence. For example, almost 47% of the female participants in the Australian study who were assaulted for the first time in their relationship, acknowledged receiving disrespectful gestures from their partners multiple times beforehand and foreseeing the tendency for violence in their partners (Parkinson 2017). The culture of denial and deeply embedded male-dominated social structures gave men the opportunity to get away with such offences because, in many cases, these incidents were overlooked by law enforcement personnel, health workers, neighbours and even the victims themselves who rationalise spousal abuse as an understandable response to post-disaster trauma and frustration for men (Campbell *et al.* 2016, Fagen *et al.* 2011, Harville *et al.* 2011, Parkinson 2017).

Similar to women's experiences in disasters across the globe, women in Australia and New Zealand experience discrimination and inequity in their households as a consequence of the patriarchal social structure (Parkinson & Zara 2011, Reynolds & Tyler 2018). Eriksen (2014) conducted a survey interview with 44 participants (26 women and 18 men) to identify the issues affecting women's involvement in bushfire preparedness activities. Of the respondents, 78% strongly agreed or agreed that during a bushfire emergency, women are more likely to rely on male family members and peers for warning information, evacuation instructions and rescue activities. This can, at times, prevent them from taking action during emergencies.

Reynolds & Tyler (2018) argued that the preparedness and rescue practices of firefighters and volunteers have been highly masculinised and that evacuation was portrayed as 'for the weak' and considered as 'feminine' behaviour, which is one of the reasons for the disproportionately high percentage of male firefighters, officials and civil volunteers during bushfires. Although the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) has adopted a strategy to increase women's representation in the fire management sector, the percentage of women's overall representation is only 24% (AFAC 2019). This is still inadequate considering women comprise more than half the Australia's total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021).

Because of gender bias, women's roles are often devalued within their households. Parkinson (2017) described women's despair at not being taken seriously by their male partners during the Black Saturday bushfires. A similar argument was made by Tyler and Fairbrother (2018) finding that women's knowledge of bushfire preparedness and response was often devalued and ignored in the male-dominated rural areas of Australia and that females in heterosexual relationships experience frustration and difficulty in convincing their partners to evacuate early.

Similar to the issues faced by various ethnic groups in the country, women of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background have also faced challenges in getting involved in community resilience programs because the management approach of the Australian Government does not often recognise nor include Indigenous gender issues (Russel-Smith 2017).

Lessons for Australia

The selection of existing literature on women and disasters reviewed for this paper, both in a global context and in the Pacific region, highlights women's vulnerability and exposure and the disproportionate effects of disasters on them. Even though a dialogue on the gendered nature of disaster events has been opened, and research has been undertaken on these issues over time (of which this paper reviews a selection), women's voices have remained relatively unheard and are not effectively incorporated into national policies. This continues to have negative consequences for women's wellbeing during disasters around the world.

Strategies should be revisited to minimise domestic violence, recognise it as a consequential outcome during the recovery phase and put in place suitable services. Women should be consulted frequently and included by organisations that have crucial roles during planning and preparedness activities. The particular needs of women, including financial support, employment and health needs should be identified and assimilated into existing response and recovery plans. Ethnic diversity and lifestyles should be acknowledged and incorporated in planning and policies to maximum the inclusion of women to develop practical and sustainable resilience plans.

In India, multi-purpose shelter task forces carry out search, rescue and first aid and have 50% participation of women, which strengthens their capacities and the capacity of the community.

Image: World Bank

Conclusion

The recurring issues faced by women in disasters highlight the significant need for their input into emergency management policies because people who have lived experiences can inform the decisions about important considerations in an inclusive manner. Future research should develop better understandings of women's experiences, considering age, ethnicity, education and qualifications, marital status, levels of financial independence and other variables to distinguish patterns of women's changing perceptions of their life situations in disasters. This can develop an improved understanding of women's roles and potential in emergency and disaster preparedness and response activities, and in building the resilience of families and communities.

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