

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

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### Key texts

- Enarson E 1999, 'Violence against women in disasters: a study of domestic violence programs in the United States and Canada', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 5, issue 7, pp. 742-768
- Fothergill A 1999, 'An exploratory study of woman battering in the Grand Forks flood disaster: implications for community responses and policies', *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, vol. 17, issue 1, pp. 79-98
- Houghton R 2009b, 'Everything became a struggle, absolute struggle': post-flood increases in domestic violence in New Zealand', in Enarson E & Chakrabarti PGD (eds), *Women, gender and disaster: global issues and initiatives*, Sage, New Dehli, pp. 99-111
- Jenkins P & Phillips B 2008, 'Battered women, catastrophe, and the context of safety after Hurricane Katrina', *Feminist Formations*, vol. 20, issue 3, pp. 49-68
- Parkinson D in press, *The way he tells it*, vol. 1, Executive summary and recommendations, Women's Health Goulburn North East, Wangaratta, Victoria
- Wilson J, Phillips BD & Neal DM 1998, 'Domestic violence after disaster', in Enarson E & Morrow BH (eds), *The gendered terrain of disaster: through women's eyes*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, USA, pp. 115-122

### INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, natural disasters have become more common with severe and devastating impacts, as experienced in Australia with the Victoria Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 and Queensland floods and cyclone in 2011. Sudden-onset natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, bushfires, tsunamis and cyclones have significant, far-reaching and lasting impacts. These types of disasters can result in widespread devastation, causing complete infrastructural collapse of social, criminal justice, health, education and legal services; killing or displacing thousands of people; and devastating communities and individual families. The impacts for individuals can be multiple and compounding, including: homelessness; unemployment; mental and physical health problems; loss of social support networks; and loss of material items.

In the disaster and emergency preparedness field, researchers have identified populations which are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of disasters and are often marginalised and excluded from disaster preparedness, planning, response and recovery processes. In the 1990s, feminist scholars began to identify gender inequalities in disaster preparedness and response which marginalise women and place them at greater risk for negative impacts from disasters. As the gender analysis and research of disasters has grown, an increasing awareness has surfaced of women's vulnerability to and experiences of violence after disasters.

While there are significant challenges in measuring the prevalence of gender-based violence, especially in a disaster context, several studies indicate a significant and substantial increase in gender-based violence that occurs following disasters and often persists at exceptionally high levels for years past the event (Anastario, Lawry & Shehab 2009; Clemens *et al.* 1999;

Houghton 2009a; Houghton 2009b; Houghton *et al.* 2010; Schumacher *et al.* 2010).

Rates of non-intimate partner sexual assault have shown a sharp increase in the first year after a disaster, followed by a somewhat rapid decline (Anastario, Lawry & Shehab 2009). Intimate partner violence or domestic violence, has been shown to account for the greatest amount of the increase in gender-based violence post-disasters. For example, two years after Hurricane Katrina, rates of lifetime intimate partner violence increased by 21% compared to a decline in lifetime experiences of non-intimate partner sexual violence (Anastario, Lawry & Shehab 2009). While research, policy, guidelines and planning tools are being rapidly developed to address the increased vulnerability and impacts of violence on women post-disasters, most of this work is focused in developing countries or only on sexual assault.

A few researchers had begun to explore the issue of domestic violence post natural disasters in the late 1990s in the United States (US) and Canada. Nearly a decade passed before researchers, again in the US and now for the first time in New Zealand (NZ) and Australia, conducted more in-depth research examining the link between domestic violence and disasters.

This paper will examine the common themes of these past and recent studies as they address measuring domestic violence during and after a disaster; understanding what 'causes' the increase in violence after a disaster; vulnerability, impacts and recovery for individual victims; impacts, responses and recovery of organisations; and preparedness and planning for the increase in service needs of domestic violence victims. This paper will also include a discussion of what changes have occurred in the last decade in understanding and responding to increased domestic violence after natural disasters.

The key themes discussed in this paper will be helpful in informing practice of both the domestic violence and emergency management sectors. As disasters become more frequent and severe from the impacts of climate change, more people and communities are likely to experience significant impacts from disasters. It is estimated that one in six Australians will be affected by a natural disaster in their lifetime (Caruana, cited in Parkinson in press). By understanding how domestic violence victims and services are impacted by disasters, organisations and practitioners can be better prepared to plan and respond to increasing service demands.

## KEY TEXTS

Three early studies in the US and Canada were conducted using diverse methods to explore the link between domestic violence and natural disasters. Wilson, Phillips and Neal (1998) conducted case studies of three communities in the US following an earthquake, tornado and hurricane in cities ranging from populations of 23 000 to one million. Their research focused on organisational perception of and response to domestic violence after the disaster by interviewing 18 staff and analysing media and organisational materials.

Focusing on the individual experience of victims, Fothergill (1999) described two case studies of individual women who were victims of domestic violence after a flood in the US as part of a larger ethnographic study of women's experiences of the disaster.

Finally, Enarson (1999) surveyed 77 domestic violence service providers in Canada and the US about their general experiences and knowledge of disasters, without focusing on one specific disaster. This research focused on the preparedness and response of organisations who work with women experiencing domestic violence.

Ten years later, following more frequent and severe natural disasters, researchers are examining these issues with a more in-depth focus. Jenkins and Phillips (2008) developed a comprehensive community case study after Hurricane Katrina in the US using focus groups with women, interviews with advocates, secondary data sources and observations of domestic violence interagency meetings. Their in-depth analysis went beyond preparedness and response, to consider the risks and strengths of organisations and individual women that fostered recovery or furthered vulnerability.

In NZ, Houghton (2009b) conducted a community case study after floods through interviews with staff who provided domestic violence services at several government and non-government organisations. This research was part of a larger study that examined five communities in total. This particular study, like that by Jenkins and Phillips (2008), provides an in-depth perspective of organisational and individual factors that affect vulnerability and recovery.

Most recently, Parkinson (in press) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with 29 women and 47 workers after the Black Saturday

bushfires in Victoria. This research explored the complex gendered dynamics of violence after a disaster and the subsequent effects on victims and perpetrators. This is the first research conducted in Australia to identify and examine the link between violence against women and disasters.

These recent studies provide insight into the progress and opportunities for ensuring the safety, well-being and empowerment of women who experience domestic violence in the context of disasters.

## THEMES ACROSS KEY TEXTS

### Does domestic violence increase after a natural disaster?

None of the studies reviewed in this paper set out to empirically document an increase in domestic violence. Yet, all of the researchers reported findings from anecdotal evidence that indicated a concerning increase in women seeking help for violence. They also discuss the challenges encountered in attempting to assess domestic violence post-disaster.

Wilson, Phillips and Neal (1998) found that two of the three communities reported an increase in domestic violence and sexual assault post-disaster. For example: following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake a Santa Cruz city commissioned report identified a 300% increase in sexual assaults (p. 118) and, after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Miami helpline reported a 50% rise in calls for partner abuse (p. 119). However, other than a local church's perception of an increase in domestic violence, there were no other indicators of change in Lancaster, Texas after a tornado in 1994. At the time of the disaster, Lancaster had no agency or community actions which specifically addressed domestic violence. The authors hypothesised that with no prior understanding or awareness of the issue, agencies were unlikely to perceive a change in domestic violence. More importantly, victims would be more likely to seek help from nearby communities with agencies known for providing domestic violence specific services, thereby masking the problem.

Fothergill (1999, p. 86) reported that after the 1997 Grand Forks Flood, there was more than a 50% increase in protection orders. Domestic violence service providers in Enarson's (1999) study generally reported an initial decline in women seeking help, followed by an increase in demand for services, which in some cases persisted for six months to a year after the event.

The initial decline was most often accounted for by a lack of access to services immediately after the disaster.

In 2006, the year following Hurricane Katrina, statistics indicated a drastic drop in protection orders statewide but the researchers noted that the number of police, courts and service providers available to respond was severely reduced due to infrastructure damage (Jenkins & Phillips 2008). Interviews with service providers paint a different picture; most reported seeing as many, if not more women than before the disaster (Jenkins & Phillips 2008). Service provider reports were similar in Houghton's (2009b, pp. 104-105) research, reporting a threefold increase in workload for the refuge and government welfare provider which works with domestic violence clients, and a doubling in workload for police and victim support. After the Black Saturday bushfires, anecdotal reports from family violence agencies, recovery authorities and community leaders indicated an increase in family violence (Parkinson in press). The researcher described the significant challenges of measurement due to organisations' failure to track statistics, as well as victim and practitioner reticence to disclose or report violence as a direct impact of the experience of the disaster.

### Context and causes of domestic violence post-disaster

Relying on anecdotal reports and limited research, it is difficult to determine what the increase in domestic violence can be attributed to. Fothergill (1999b) hypothesised that the increase could be accounted for by all existing clients seeking services at the same time or the possibility that women who had not previously sought help for ongoing violence before the disaster were now seeking help for the first time. The increase in demand may actually be an increase in new help-seekers, instead of an increase in new experiences of violence. The findings have varied among the studies.

The services in Enarson's (1999) study reported that the increase in demand was mostly from existing clients, though new clients were identified as well. Parkinson (in press) found that of the 16 women who reported partner violence after the bushfires, nine experienced this violence for the first time and six reported the violence had escalated. An escalation in violence was also confirmed by service providers in Jenkins and Phillips (2008) research, who reported that the violence after Hurricane Katrina intensified more rapidly and resulted in more serious injuries. Women from this study reported that prior to the disaster, they had tolerated

a degree of abuse but with the escalation of violence compounded by external stressors from the disaster, women were motivated to seek help for the first time. In this same study, one service provider noted an increase in new clients who were previously employed. It is possible that previously, women with additional resources had relied on informal ways of managing and coping but, due to significant disruptions to financial, housing and social supports resulting from the disaster, would access domestic violence services as the only source of support available after the disaster. However, Enarson (1999, p. 756) suggests that asking whether violence increases after a disaster is '...simply the wrong question'. Wilson, Phillips and Neal (1998) concluded that regardless of a documented increase in violence, agencies responded only when they perceived and understood an unmet need.

Increased stress is commonly cited as the explanation for an increase in violence against women during and after disasters. The community, family and service providers often denied or minimised women's disclosures of violence after the Victoria bushfires, citing the stress experienced by men as an excuse for their behaviour (Parkinson in press). Workers in Houghton's (2009b) study cited the primary reason for increased violence as financial stress, noting loss of earnings, possessions and housing and a lack of insurance. However, both Houghton and Parkinson suggest that stress is not a cause but, rather, it is the abuser's sense of losing control over all other aspects of their life (housing, employment, food, shelter, communication, social support, etc.) that motivates them to seek more intense control over their family. Subsequently, this may lead to more severe or additional types of abuse. In Fothergill's (1999) case study research, *Karen* reported that her partner had been controlling and emotionally and financially abusive prior to the disaster but that her partner's behaviour became progressively more severe, escalating to physical violence, which prompted Karen to leave. Fothergill (1999, p.83) cites experts who argue '...that crisis conditions do not cause the abuse nor do they cause men to lose control'. Instead, both Fothergill and Parkinson discuss how men, practitioners and the community use the crisis of the disaster to justify and excuse abusive behaviour.

### **Vulnerability, impacts and recovery for victims**

As a result of experiencing a disaster, all individuals are at risk for the physical, social, mental and infrastructural impacts, often resulting in serious

injury and trauma. However, women's heightened vulnerability, particularly as victims of domestic violence, compounds these impacts in the aftermath of a disaster. As a result, there are additional negative consequences unique to women who are also victims of domestic violence.

### **Impacts unique to victims of domestic violence**

Several of the studies documented the significant impacts to individual victims and families from the disasters including unemployment; increased parenting responsibilities due to closures of childcare centres and schools; loss of social support and networks; homelessness; loss of material possessions; and loss of normal routines and stability (Fothergill 1999; Houghton 2009b; Jenkins & Phillips 2008; Parkinson in press).

One of the most commonly perceived and expected outcomes after a natural disaster is a loss of housing; this issue becomes more complex for victims of domestic violence. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, there is often a significant housing shortage for the entire population and living conditions can be overcrowded. For example, in Houghton's (2009b) study, the refuge was filled to capacity with families living in the garage and the individual domestic violence workers housing three families in each of their own homes. A community worker in Parkinson's (in press) research reported that 72% of housing was lost after the bushfires. A lack of housing can persist for years after a disaster. Again, in Houghton's (2009b) study, some families spent more than a year living with extended family. More than two years after Hurricane Katrina, more than 4000 public housing units were still closed and only 20% of applicants to the homeowner compensation program had completed the process (Jenkins & Phillips 2008, p. 59). Even when a victim's primary home is unaffected by the disaster or temporary housing is available, these options may be unsafe. Interruptions and failed communication services can prevent victims from accessing emergency police assistance if an abuser finds them, and emergency shelters or staying with families and friends are locations likely to be known to an abuser (Enarson 1999).

The housing shortage also directly affects the presence of social support and networks. Being displaced or relocating may mean moving away from neighbours and nearby family and friends or, in the opposite scenario, friends and family may be relocated leaving the victim behind. Three years after Hurricane Katrina, reports estimated that 150 000 to 200 000 evacuated

people had not returned to New Orleans (Jenkins & Phillips 2008, p. 58). Following the Victoria bushfires, it appeared that less than half of the population has returned to some communities (Parkinson in press). This isolation can be furthered by failures and collapses in communication systems (Enarson 1999). Jenkins and Phillips (2008) found that the loss of support and experience of isolation, like many impacts from disaster, can persist, particularly when people return to their homes to find no other residents in their neighbourhood and to discover that family and friends died in the disaster. Social networks are also weakened as managing with the effects of the disaster will reduce the capacity of family and friends to support victims (Enarson 1999).

One consequence only Jenkins and Phillips (2008) explored was the impact on custody arrangements for parents who had separated before the disaster due to domestic violence. Women talked about significant issues, specifically when children were in the custody of their abusive father during the disaster, such as not knowing where their children were during and after the evacuation, and having their children's well-being threatened. Advocates reported that in some cases, parents who had primary custody, mostly mothers, were still working two years after the disaster to regain their children (who had been with their father during the disaster) and return to their pre-disaster custodial arrangements.

Nearly all of the studies discussed the link between financial resources and heightened vulnerability to violence. Both victims and perpetrators may experience an immediate loss of income from being unable to get to work, for example, due to road closures resulting from damage or staying home to care for children when childcare centres and schools close (Houghton 2009b; Parkinson in press). Long-term impacts from the disaster may result in unemployment when workplaces are destroyed in the disaster or close due to economic pressures (Houghton 2009b). In fact, every victim focus group conducted by Jenkins and Phillips (2008) indicated that the most needed resource was child care; a significant issue that Parkinson (in press) also identified as increasing women's vulnerability when absent. Relief funds may be difficult to access when living in a shelter (Enarson 1999) or connected to the abusive partners. In the study by Jenkins and Phillips (2008), women reported returning to abusive partners simply to access the federal relief funds or that abusive partners tracked them down to claim they were part of a household, in order to access relief funds.

These impacts are compounded when family members, community and practitioners fail to adequately respond to women's disclosures and help-seeking. In Parkinson's (in press) research, half of the women reported unsuccessfully seeking help. Specifically, many women reported that practitioners denied or minimised their experiences of violence by blaming the behaviour on stress resulting from the disaster and reprimanding women for being 'disloyal' to their partners. All of these factors put women at increased risk and in some cases provide no other alternative than to remain with or return to the abuser (Enarson 1999; Fothergill 1999; Houghton 2009b; Jenkins & Phillips 2008; Wilson, Phillips & Neal 1998). Reports from refuge workers in NZ indicated that approximately 85% of women who sought assistance from their service returned to their partner after the flood (Houghton 2009b, p. 106).

### **Increased vulnerability**

Fothergill's (1999) detailed case study was the only research to specifically consider the experience of a woman with a disability whose partner had been severely abusing her for nine years. Attempting to evacuate from flooding, *Liz* was turned away from three emergency evacuation shelters because they refused to meet her disability accommodations. After the floods receded, despite her home being severely damaged and her abusive partner remaining in the area, she felt forced to return to her community to be near her medical provider and daughter for assistance with her care. Enarson (1999) and Jenkins and Phillips (2008) acknowledged that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) who were first time seekers of help might experience increased vulnerability and challenges. Unfortunately though, none of the studies specifically examined the experiences of or services for CALD women or other populations of women who might be at an increased risk, including Indigenous women and gay and lesbian women.

### **Resiliency and new opportunities**

During a disaster, some women have greater resiliency and/or find the situation provides new opportunities to change their circumstances and gain safety. For example, despite the challenges faced by *Liz*, from Fothergill's (1999) case study, she was able to find temporary housing, arrange to have her home rebuilt and access counselling from the local domestic violence service. *Liz* felt that as a result of coping successfully with the challenges brought by the disaster and with support from her family and the local

domestic violence worker, she now had the confidence, strength and supports to leave the relationship and still remain in her home. Indeed, Fothergill (1999, p. 93) noted that many ‘...participants expressed positive consequences of the disaster, such as new skills acquired, and personal strength and confidence discovered’. Living through a disaster gave some women a different perspective and, as a result, they were no longer willing to tolerate the violence (Jenkins & Phillips 2008). In addition to gaining a new-found confidence and refusal to tolerate further violence, the services and systems post-disaster also offered practical opportunities for change. For example, some women reported using federal relief funds or using their evacuation to a different location than their abusive partner as an opportunity to establish a new life (Enarson 1999; Jenkins & Phillips 2008).

## Domestic violence organisation impacts and responses

### *Impacts to service delivery*

One of the most visible impacts of a disaster is the damage and destruction to buildings and infrastructure, including domestic violence organisations and allied services (Enarson 1999; Fothergill 1999; Jenkins & Phillips 2008). Enarson (1999) reported that one shelter had no power and no backup generator for six weeks after a hurricane, which delayed payroll and for another shelter, 14 staff shared one room and two phones for three months after floods. Of the five programs which offered domestic violence services in New Orleans, three were severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina; one closed permanently; one re-opened providing only non-residential services; and one re-opened with a new service model (Jenkins & Phillips 2008). Agencies and workers have also reported isolation and confusion when working with other social service agencies as a result of disrupted communication services and contradictory messages regarding access to basic disaster relief services (Houghton 2009b; Parkinson in press).

Staffing is also severely affected by disasters, from staff being unable to get to work due to unsafe road conditions, being relocated for their own safety, needing to cope with their own and their families’ safety, and experiencing extreme workloads (Enarson 1999). Refuge workers in Houghton’s (2009b) research indicated a tripling in their workload, while also reporting feeling poorly supported personally. Staffing

among domestic violence services can be at even greater risk, as many organisations rely on volunteers who may (quite reasonably) prioritise their own safety or general disaster relief activities after the disaster. One agency reported a 45% decrease in volunteer hours a year after the disaster (Fothergill 1999, p. 86). Of the 77 agencies surveyed by Enarson (1999), only one had a plan for managing staffing and personnel in a disaster.

Allied agencies across the justice, police, criminal, health and social service sector will experience these same infrastructure and staffing challenges with far-reaching effects for domestic violence victims and service providers. In Fothergill’s (1999) study, the homeless shelter which accommodated domestic violence victims pre-disaster was destroyed in the flood, leaving only motel accommodation which all disaster victims would have been seeking. The impacts of Hurricane Katrina demonstrate the level of impact where ‘Virtually every aspect of the criminal justice system was damaged or destroyed’ (Jenkins & Phillips 2008, p. 58). This resulted in a reduction from eight to three domestic violence detectives, an inability to retain a sufficient number of officers to manage general crime and the highest rates of violent crime ever in the city, which likely contributed to a drop in domestic violence reports by 70% in districts where police buildings were destroyed.

Studies from the 1990s document local jails releasing domestic violence perpetrators (Fothergill 1999) and giving only citations versus arresting abusers who violated protection orders (Enarson 1999). All of the women in Parkinson’s (in press) research who were involved with the police felt the police response was inadequate; several women specifically reported that the police failed to respond, refused to take action and did not prioritise safety from violence. However, Houghton (2009b) found that the NZ police’s proactive and positive relationship with the local refuge helped bring awareness to media and the Civil Defence Welfare Group about the issue of domestic violence after the disaster. Jenkins and Phillips (2008) also noted the dedication of US domestic violence police detectives and shelter staff who took actions to assist victims. These two studies, which document appropriate and positive responses from allied services, demonstrate the importance of having strong interagency relationships which encourages agencies and workers to support one another in a time of crisis and sustained service need.

### **Organisation response and recovery – doing more with less**

Most of the studies discussed how agencies responded to increased demand with reduced capacity, including responding to new referral pathways, supporting new client populations and adding new services. In Whakatane, NZ, the domestic violence welfare specialist went from one half-hour of service per week to full-time services after the floods and the child and family service government agency expanded their counselling and coordination support to anyone affected by the flood (Houghton 2009b). In Grand Forks, US, one domestic violence agency developed new children's support groups and, in a nearby community, another domestic violence agency included emergency kits and informational flyers with their regular public education activities (Enarson 1999). Agencies unaffected by disasters also often extended their services and reach to support agencies damaged by the disaster (Enarson 1999).

This increased demand is compounded when general temporary relief funds and services are withdrawn long before the needs of domestic violence victims are met. Refuge workers reported a second spike in service demand two to three months after the floods when social service agencies ended relief services (Houghton 2009b). Agencies in Enarson's (1999) study reported a loss of funding due to cancelled fundraisers and the redirection of regular funding to general disaster relief. Even when additional funding is available, it can still be inadequate, as evidenced by a shelter that received special funding to house an estimated 660 victims of domestic violence impacted by floods but actually housed more than 3400 women and children over the year of extended funding (Enarson 1999, p. 747).

Despite the severe and long-lasting damages to domestic violence organisations' infrastructure, staffing and funding, some organisations used the disaster as an opportunity for change, exploring fundamental shifts in their service delivery. In Grand Forks, prior to the disaster there was no housing specifically for victims of domestic violence, who were instead referred to the community homeless shelter (Fothergill 1999). As the unmet and unique needs of domestic violence victims became more apparent after the disaster, the community centre began raising funds to establish a permanent shelter for victims of domestic violence. After the complete loss of its building, resources and funding, another agency restructured their service delivery model, sought new federal funding and participated in the development of a one-stop Family Justice Center (Jenkins & Phillips

2008). Just as disasters have offered individual women opportunities to develop new skills and resources, so too have domestic violence agencies discovered new funding opportunities, frameworks for service delivery and pathways to reach clients.

### **When communities and social services fail to identify and respond to domestic violence**

In addition to domestic violence shelters and counselling organisations, Wilson, Phillips and Neal (1998) interviewed individuals from emergency management, city offices, and non-government organisations who specialise in relief. They also conducted research in a community where no agencies provided domestic violence services. By comparing these agencies and communities, Wilson, Phillips and Neal (1998, p. 119) identified that a lack of awareness or services related to domestic violence pre-disaster was '...a factor in not identifying violence or in not responding'.

More recently, Houghton's (2009b) community case study indicates a trend among general relief and social services of an increased awareness of domestic violence both generally and in the context of disasters. However, Parkinson's (in press) research suggests that this awareness and understanding is still inadequate to effectively identify and respond regardless of the presence of domestic violence services in the community. After the Victoria bushfires, women often reported seeking assistance, only to be referred to another service or the bushfire case management system. The case managers were not trained to identify or respond to family violence and women faced additional barriers in identifying the violence they were experiencing, which Parkinson cites as a reason why only nine cases of family violence were documented among the more than 2500 households served by the case management system in the Hume region over two years (in press).

### **Emergency preparedness & planning**

Enarson (1999) provides the most in-depth analysis of domestic violence organisational attitudes and knowledge of hazard awareness, risk assessment, and preparedness. In general, programs reported low levels of awareness and preparedness. Less than half of the organisations had taken any concrete actions for preparedness, most of which focused on localised or contained events (such as a fire in the building) rather than a catastrophic event (p. 753). Only one of the 77 organisations had a plan in place for staffing during a disaster (p. 759). Of those that had other preparations,

actions included written disaster plans, survival kits and emergency transport plans for shelter residents.

This research also examined what influenced preparedness and planning for domestic violence organisations. Factors such as prior knowledge or experience of a disaster, government mandates, local leadership, personal relationships, and a community culture of preparedness influenced preparedness. Even when organisations had direct experience of regional disasters, awareness of risks may have increased but agency specific planning and/or engagement in general disaster planning was rarely in place. In general, domestic violence services struggled to prioritise disaster planning when considering daily demands to meet the urgent needs of women and children. Those same organisations indicated a strong interest in participating in training, receiving technical advice, developing plans, ensuring facilities are prepared and participating in general community disaster planning. Indeed, state domestic violence coalitions reported significant roles in supporting local services immediately after disasters by securing grants, responding to media requests, providing staff emergency preparedness training, facilitating referrals and publicising resources.

Adequate risk assessment and planning requires expert knowledge, resources and proactive engagement from the emergency management sector. Yet, Enarson (1999) documents the systemic failures of general emergency management activities to address or include domestic violence. For example, few of the surveyed domestic violence services reported 'receiving any official information on disaster preparation' (p. 752) or participating in local or regional disaster planning groups; one statewide coalition was actively excluded from a resource guide for a flood hotline.

A decade later, Houghton's (2009b) research demonstrates that these issues remain. The local refuge had no plan for service continuity in the wake of a catastrophic event. At the time of the study, there was also no mention of domestic violence service needs or refuge services in the local, regional or national disaster preparedness plans in New Zealand. The women's refuge was not included in the general community welfare response committee and it was only after local police advocated on behalf of the refuge, that the issue of domestic violence was considered by the committee. Parkinson (in press) also found that the bushfire case managers organised by the Department of Human Services to provide case management for up to two years to every fire-affected household were rarely qualified or trained to handle family violence.

In 1998, Wilson, Phillips and Neal noted that an organised response to increased domestic violence post-disaster was affected by '...a community context supportive of their [domestic violence] mission before and after the disaster' (p. 119). Ten years later, Jenkins and Phillips (2008) in their discussion of violence against women post-disaster, suggest that the persistent systemic inability to adequately acknowledge and address domestic violence after a disaster is part of a larger issue of not considering women's vulnerability and needs in a disaster context.

## CONCLUSIONS

### What has changed in a decade?

Prior to 2000, only four<sup>1</sup> studies conducted in the US and Canada had specifically attempted to document the increase in domestic violence after disasters and the impacts from disasters on victims, workers and organisations. These early studies were part of a wider movement to acknowledge the role of gender in disaster preparedness, experience, response and recovery. They focused primarily on general organisational response and victims' housing needs. The main responses identified for victims after three disasters in the 1990s in the US addressed housing and counselling needs (Wilson, Phillips & Neal 1998).

A decade later has seen growth internationally in awareness and exploration of violence against women post-disasters, though often with a focus on sexual assault and/or developing countries. However, 11<sup>2</sup> additional studies, including the first ever research in Australia and New Zealand, have examined domestic violence post-disasters in developed countries. This more in-depth research has provided further evidence to document the increase in domestic violence reporting and service demands after a disaster, and has improved our understanding of the dynamics of post-disaster domestic violence and the needs of victims.

Listening to victims has indicated that their greatest needs are childcare (Jenkins & Phillips 2008) and financial security (Houghton 2009b). This shift in recognising the impacts on and needs of victims acknowledges the broad array of victims' experiences and the reality that most victims are not living in a shelter at the time of the disaster. This research also explores the context of the increased rates of violence, suggesting that the increase may not be limited to new cases of violence brought on by increased stress. Rather, the increase may be due to an escalation of

a perpetrator's previously controlling and violent behaviour after a disaster in the context of exerting control and power over their family as other areas of their life become disrupted and unstable.

The research of Enarson (1999) and Wilson, Jean and Phillips (1998) demonstrated the detrimental effects to domestic violence agency funding and service delivery post-disaster when allied agencies are unaware of domestic violence issues and agency missions. However, the last decade has seen a significant shift to developing interagency relationships in relation to domestic violence, particularly between non-government and government sectors. The benefits of pre-disaster collaborative relationships were clearly evident in Houghton's (2009b) and Phillips and Jenkins (2008) research where agencies relied on previous partnerships for referrals, advocacy and meeting basic needs of victims. However, Parkinson's (in press) research indicates that in the Australian context there remains a significant inability to identify and respond to domestic violence after disasters, particularly among allied agencies and disaster relief organisations.

### Future directions and recommendations

Several recommendations were identified in all of the texts reviewed for this paper, remaining consistent over the last decade and relevant in the Australian context (Enarson 1999; Fothergill 1999; Houghton 2009b; Jenkins & Phillips 2008; Parkinson in press; Wilson, Phillips & Neal 1998). Domestic violence organisations need to have emergency preparedness plans and policies that address evacuation and safety during the disaster, service delivery afterwards, and staffing and staff support. Victims of domestic violence should also be supported to develop emergency plans that are inclusive of disasters. Local, state and national disaster preparedness and response policies and plans need to anticipate domestic violence as a widespread community issue in the context of a disaster. These policies should include planning to support existing domestic violence services and offer additional services immediately and long term post-disaster.

While these recommendations are clear and seem practically achievable, many hurdles remain. As the recent research by Houghton (2009b), Jenkins and Phillips (2008) and Parkinson (in press) demonstrates, domestic violence organisations are still inadequately prepared for disasters and rarely included in broader disaster risk and reduction planning activities at local, state or national levels. Despite a desire to improve

agency preparedness and participate in broader community preparedness, domestic violence services are constrained by funding, time, a need for disaster specific knowledge, staffing and resources (Enarson 1999; Houghton 2009b). The emergency management sector lacks awareness and understanding of domestic violence generally and, in the disaster context, rarely considers domestic violence victims or services in planning (Parkinson in press). All of the studies recommended that staff and agencies from the domestic violence and emergency preparedness sectors would benefit significantly from developing new partnerships and participating in cross-sector training (Enarson 1999; Fothergill 1999; Houghton 2009b; Jenkins & Phillips 2008; Parkinson in press; Wilson, Phillips & Neal 1998). Enarson's research also highlighted that peak bodies and state networks are well-placed to take leadership roles in both supporting local agencies and facilitating these new partnerships.

Domestic violence services, general non-government agencies and government agencies must explore new services and ways to expand existing service to meet increased demands following disasters. This expansion in services will require increased and sustained funding that matches the increased and sustained demand. Several studies discussed the ways in which funders should consider new pathways for both disaster relief and domestic violence funding, in addition to retaining existing domestic violence funding levels (Enarson 1999; Jenkins & Phillips 2008; Parkinson in press). Additionally, agencies and media will need to partner to promote access to existing and new services. This is particularly important as usual service accessibility may be unavailable when communication systems are disrupted or services are physically displaced, and individuals may be seeking assistance (particularly for domestic violence) for the first time.

Despite the growing body of literature and guidelines addressing violence against women after disasters, many unanswered questions still remain. There are still significant gaps in data collection and measurement to adequately document the severity of the problem. More specifically, Fothergill (1999) highlights the need for research to document the chronic and persistent nature of violence against women post-disaster through a longitudinal study. Studies have often indicated that increased service demands persist up to two years after the event. However, few if any studies have examined violence more than two years after the event. No systematic research has explored the factors which influence coping, resiliency and recovery of domestic violence victims in the wake of a

disaster in a developed country. Lastly, while many of the recommendations in the reviewed studies target emergency preparedness and management services and workers, no studies have explored attitudes, knowledge and behaviours among the emergency management sector specifically related to violence against women.

These six texts identify the increase of domestic violence post-disasters and provide a springboard for new partnerships and improved planning that offers an opportunity to significantly improve women's safety and well-being after a disaster.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Anastario M, Lawry L & Shehab N 2009, 'Increased gender-based violence among women internally displaced in Mississippi 2 years post-Hurricane Katrina', *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, vol. 3, issue 1, pp. 18-26

Clemens P, Hietala J, Rytter M, Schmidt R & Reese D 1999, 'Risk of domestic violence after flood impact: effects of social support, age, and history of domestic violence', *Applied Behavioral Science Review*, vol. 7, issue 2, pp. 199-206

Houghton R 2009a, 'Domestic violence reporting and disasters in New Zealand', *Regional Development Dialogue*, vol. 30, issue 1, pp. 79-90

Houghton R, Wilson T, Smith W & Johnston D 2010, "If there was a dire emergency, we never would have been able to get in there": domestic violence reporting and disasters', *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, vol. 28, issue 2, pp. 270-293

Schumacher JA, Coffey SF, Norris FH, Tracy M, Clements K & Galea S 2010, 'Intimate partner violence and Hurricane Katrina: predictors and associated mental health outcomes', *Violence and Victims*, vol. 25, issue 5, pp. 588-603

## Fact sheets and other resources

- Gender Disaster Network: <http://www.gdnonline.org/>
- Women and disaster fact sheet from Women's Health Goulburn North East: [http://www.whealth.com.au/documents/publications/is-women\\_and\\_disaster.pdf](http://www.whealth.com.au/documents/publications/is-women_and_disaster.pdf)
- Domestic violence and disasters: a fact sheet for agencies (NZ): <http://www.mmsi.org.nz/toolkit-pdfs/Newsletter/DVDisasterFactsheet.pdf>
- *Appendices* of Enarson E 1997, 'Responding to domestic violence in disaster: guidelines for women's services and disaster practitioners', Disaster Preparedness Resources Centre, University of British Columbia and BC Institute Against Family Violence and the Feminist Research, Education, Development & Action Centre: <http://usgdra.org/resources/training-resources/>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Three of these studies were included in this paper. A fourth study used limited data analysis to examine the relationship between flood impact and rates of domestic violence (Clemens *et al.* 1999).
- 2 Several of these studies are included under *Additional References and Further Reading*.

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