

## TRAINING RESOURCES ON GENDERING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

---

Eight documents are excerpted here from this more comprehensive Canadian document:

Gender Mainstreaming in Emergency Management: A Training Module for Emergency Planners (Canada) Available on-line:

[http://www.womenandhealthcarereform.ca/publications/GEM\\_MainFINAL.pdf](http://www.womenandhealthcarereform.ca/publications/GEM_MainFINAL.pdf)

Developed by Elaine Enarson, 2009, for the Women and Health Care Reform and the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence. Includes background and general information and specific exercises and tools for assessing and improving existing approaches to better incorporate gender issues and opportunities to engage with women to reduce risk. The manual is potentially of use to emergency managers in the US as well, including Issues Facing Women in Disaster, Frequently Asked Questions about Gender and Disaster, Gender Matters Through the Disaster Cycle, Mapping Gendered Vulnerability and similar resources.

The manual was trialed at a February, 2009 workshop at York University, and the author gratefully acknowledges feedback from participants.

These materials could readily be adapted to the American context:

1. Frequently asked questions about gender and disaster
2. Why support gender mainstreaming?
3. Mapping gendered vulnerability
4. When gender matters
5. Issues facing women
6. Selected issues for men
7. Organizational self assessment guide
8. Women in emergency management

Contributions to this training resource are warmly invited. Individual or organizational partnerships are invited to help fill the many gaps in research, policy and practice, and to help adapt this for use in the United States.

Rev March 10, 2010 for EmForum presentationl. Feedback or requests for source information, please contact E. Enarson: [enarson@gmail.com](mailto:enarson@gmail.com)

## Frequently Asked Questions about Gender and Disaster

---

### **Don't people's urgent survival needs come first?**

Of course. But women and men may not have identical needs. Gender-fair planning anticipates differing needs and capacities, and also the barriers or constraints often faced by women and girls in accessing resources.

Don't assume that gender doesn't matter. Ask the experts—local women and men themselves.

### **I'm not the gender expert on the team. Is this really my job?**

True, everyone is trained to use specific skills to help the team do its job. But everyone also represents your agency in the community and to stakeholders. To do your job effectively, you must know who is most hard-hit and what will—and will not—help them put their lives back together. Who is most prepared to help themselves and others, and how can they be supported?

### **Not everyone agrees that gender matters in our work, even on our team—and what about our partners and volunteers? What can I do?**

It is good practice and agency policy to deliver services equitably, not a question of individual discretion. Check with the gender focal person in your office for advice.

### **Disasters don't single out women. Isn't this really all about one group's political agenda?**

Too often, measures targeting women are seen as “political” or “gendered” while other relief projects reaching only men are seen as serving “people” or “the community.” Effective emergency planning that leaves women and men alike more prepared is really our goal.

### **When it comes to gender, aren't we imposing our own values?**

Respecting people's dignity and fundamental human rights in disasters is essential—and women's rights are human rights, too. Disasters can sometimes open up new opportunities for advancement or challenge old stereotypes and inequalities. Taking advantage of this potential to increase social justice is not cultural bias but good practice.

### **At a time like this, don't we need everyone pulling together? Why divide the community?**

Gender sensitivity means being inclusive, not divisive. Too often, the particular needs and capacities of girls and women are overlooked and only men speak for the family or community. Not talking about this is what really hurts in the long run.

### **I haven't noticed much difference—pretty much everyone needs the same things. Why look so hard for differences?**

Women and men, adults and children, generally do different things throughout the day and these differences can be life-saving or life-threatening. As outsiders these patterns may not be evident to us without talking with different groups of women and men. Ignoring gender differences in everyday life, and in periods of social crisis, doesn't make these patterns any less real or significant.

### **Do we even agree on what “gender” is? How about gender equality?**

You're right, these terms often mean different things to different people. Here are some generally accepted working definitions:

*Gender* is not the same as “women” but refers to socially differences between women and men that are taught and learned in different places and times. *Gender identities* are deeply held feelings about being masculine or feminine, and carry specific expectations about roles and behavior. Sexuality is one expression of gender.

*Gender relations* are society-wide connections and divisions between women and men prevalent at a particular historical moment in particular contexts. These social relationships between gender groups are maintained by power structures and manifest in the division of labor and other forms of interaction.

*Gender analysis* is a tool for reducing the social invisibility of girls and women. Key questions are asked and answered about the gender relations and the gendered division of labor. This approach also asks what constraints or barriers affect women's social status, physical integrity, and self determination.

*Practical and strategic gender needs* are related but distinct ways of thinking about gender in crisis. *Practical needs* refer to the need to restore the ability of girls and women to meet everyday gender roles and responsibilities, for example safe access to adequate food, clean water, fuel and fuel woods, reliable energy sources, health care for children, transportation and so forth. Longer-term *strategic gender interests* can be undermined while meeting urgent post-disaster needs, for example through gender-blind projects controlled by men. Conversely, disaster recovery can meet the strategic interests of girls and women, for example by promoting equal wages and nontraditional skills training, protection of sustainable environmental livelihoods, freedom from gender-based violence, ensuring education and voluntary marriage and pregnancy for girls, participation in decision-making at all levels and so forth.

*Gender equity* refers to practices that promote fair treatment of women and men in the long run. This can be achieved without adopting identical approaches or distributing identical resources, recognizing that there are sex and gender-based differences between people, most evidently with respect to physical and reproductive difference.

*Gender equality* is the condition of social justice between women and men. Institutional structures and monitoring and accountability systems are in place to ensure that the conditions of everyday life promote the capacity of girls and women, equally with boys and men, to realize their fundamental human rights in safe and secure environments.

## Why Support Gender-Sensitive Emergency Planning?

---

Budgetary constraints are real-can we afford to focus on gender? It's a question often asked. Gender responsive planning, in fact, adds value to the core functions of emergency planning and disaster management, maximizing effectiveness and community engagement. For example:

- Risk mapping should identify all subpopulations at risk:

Sex-specific data and community mapping that are participatory and based on community knowledge of culture and gender more accurately reflect vulnerabilities and capacities at the local level.

- Public participation in emergency planning must be as inclusive and meaningful as possible:

Community meetings planned for times and places that are realistic for women, and include child care, increase participation. Networking with women's and men's groups for information reaches additional subpopulations.

- Stakeholder groups should be diverse in order to fully engage all sectors of the community :

Women's groups are potential new community partners for local emergency managers, as are men's professional, sporting, and faith-based networks. These networks have resources and energy.

- Risk communication must reach those most in need of information and awareness:

Gendered messaging, images, language and distribution networks will reach more people more effectively and address gender norms that inform human decisions and actions.

- Preparedness information should be relevant to all social groups :

Identifying everyone's needs is important, e.g. health information for pregnant women or women of child-bearing age who may have concerns about heat hazards or possible exposure to hazardous materials.

- Hazard mitigation information is needed by some more than others:
 

Assisting women's businesses, women in construction, women renters and women-operated social service agencies in nonstructural mitigation campaigns makes communities more disaster resilient.
- Stockpiling of critical supplies is needed to meet all needs:
 

Recognizing women's and men's different needs is essential, e.g. protective masks suited to both female and male health providers in the event of pandemic flu, or vitamin supplements for pregnant women.
- Service continuity plans should anticipate staff shortages:
 

Gender-based work and family obligations will create conflicts and strains for both women and men, but advance planning can minimize disruptions.
- Evacuation sites must be safe for all:
 

Gender-sensitive planning can ensure women and children at risk of assault or abuse are not unnecessarily exposed during the period of evacuation, and that young boys and girls are protected from possible abuse.
- Emergency assistance must reach those who are most vulnerable:
 

Sex and gender expose women and men differently in different hazard contexts, so gender analysis helps identify those most at risk.
- Reception centres must be equally accessible and designed to meet the needs of residents :
 

Functioning is improved by meeting sex-specific needs, e.g. for personal hygiene items, quiet space for breast-feeding mothers. Child care is needed for children and respite care for their caregivers.
- Temporary accommodation sites must provide an enabling environment for recovery:
 

Working with women's groups in their design, siting and operation can help avoid post-disaster conflict, e.g. due to insensitivity to children's needs, perceived lack of safety, distance from public transport or child care etc. Outreach to women also helps support caregivers in their critical roles at this time.

- Post-disaster recovery plans must recognize different losses and coping capacities:

Psychosocial programmes with gender-aware training for women and men will reflect gender norms and reach everyone in the family, potentially reducing post-disaster stress and the potential for violence.

Integrating a gender perspective into your work with people of different cultures or language groups, the poor, persons with disabilities, seniors and other high-risk groups just means remembering that sex and gender are part of everyone's life. Addressing gender with sensitivity to age-based norms and to cultural values is a positive step toward inclusive emergency planning.

## Mapping Gendered Vulnerability: Focus On Women Selected Indicators For Disaster Planners

---

Because effective disaster response and mitigation depend on accurate knowledge of vulnerabilities and capacities, community assessment and mapping should include social as well as environmental factors. Sex-disaggregated data on the points below are a vital planning tool for practitioners.

### *HOUSING, HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY STATUS:*

- How many senior women live alone here, and how many women reside in social housing projects?
- What proportion of local households are headed by women? What is their economic status and family size?
- What is the average family size in this community? How many are very young or very old?
- How many single women reside here, in what age groups? How many women are widowed? How many local women are primarily homemakers, married, with children under the age of 18?
- What child care and elder care resources are there, and how are they accessed by various households? How many households typically include foster children?
- How many women reside in nonfamilial institutions on average throughout the year, including battered women's shelters and transition homes?
- What proportion of homeowners and renters are women?
- How many predisaster homeless are there here and what proportion are women? How many of these are women with children, and what resources do they access?

### *ECONOMIC STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT:*

- How is women's and men's work different locally in the household, in voluntary community work, in agriculture, and in work organizations?
- What percent of local women and children live beneath the poverty level? Where do most reside?
- How many local women are in the paid labor force? What is women's seasonal unemployment rate? What are the average annual earnings of employed women?
- How many women work full-time in dual-earner households? How many work part-time, in family-owned businesses, or as self-employed homeworkers? How many own small businesses and are employed in executive or managerial positions?
- How many women are employed in disaster-responding professions such as counseling, primary school teaching, and nursing? Do disaster agencies employ many dual-career couples in response roles?
- Do migrant worker families reside in this community seasonally? How many are headed solely by women?
- Are women land-owners in this community? Do they access credit through banks and other lending agencies?

#### *EDUCATION, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION:*

- What proportion of local women did not complete secondary school? What proportion of post-secondary diplomas or degrees are awarded to women locally?
- How many women here lack formal education and literacy in any language? How many are multi-lingual?
- What training institutes or post-secondary institutions do women here access?
- What community papers, radio stations, and other media are most popular among area women?
- Which radio programmes, newsletters, or community papers serve primarily female audiences, if any?

#### *ETHNIC AND CULTURAL PATTERNS:*

- What are the primary ethnic and cultural communities represented here? What is the overall economic status of these groups and where do the majority reside?
- How integrated or segregated is the community by national origin, citizenship status, race, or ethnicity?
- How many languages are spoken by women in this community? How many women do not speak the dominant community language?
- What formal or informal leadership roles are available to women in different communities at the local level?
- What is the economic, social, and political status of First Nations women in this region? What are their primary health and housing needs?

#### *HEALTH AND WELL-BEING:*

- How many residents on average reside in extended health care facilities here? How many are women?
- How many local residents are physically and/or intellectually disabled? How many are women?
- What resources exist for women experiencing sexual or domestic violence and for women living with AIDS or substance abuse problems?
- Are reproductive health care services affordable and accessible? What resources exist for maternal and infant care?
- What mental health services exist here? How many specialized programmes target women?
- How many ill, disabled, or other residents are cared for at home by informal caregivers? What alternatives to in-home care are available locally?

#### *POPULATION PATTERNS AND TRENDS:*

- What is the age distribution among the total population, and among the female population?
- What is the citizenship status of the women in this community? Are many recent immigrants to this country?

- How transient is the local population? Do women migrate here for work or other reasons?
- What proportion of women here live outside municipal boundaries? How many reside in isolated rural areas?

#### *SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE:*

- What forms of political leadership do women exercise here by appointment or election? How active are different groups of women in local electoral politics?
- Who exercises informal leadership or is visible locally on women's issues? Who here speaks for which women?
- What formal and informal groups or organizations serve women locally? Which take leadership roles on gender equity issues?
- How integrated are women's services with other community-based organizations or networks? How visible are women's issues in this community?
- How have local women been involved traditionally in disaster mitigation or response, for example as agency volunteers or staff, in school or neighbourhood-based activities, or in environmental groups?

### **BUT WHERE ARE THE DATA?**

Statistical data on some of these indicators are readily available for your community or province through Statistics Canada. Because social relationships rather than numbers are most important, alternate indicators for gender relations must be used cautiously. For example, "the percent of single-headed households" in a census district is used to indicate "gender" though household income when headed by women is typically lower.

Disaster planners can work with local researchers, women's groups, and community leaders to create this knowledge base, ensuring more inclusive and comprehensive planning and engaging women as partners in disaster preparedness and mitigation.

Among other strategies:

- Request sex-specific data from provincial, regional or national planning authorities and extrapolate to your jurisdiction
- Collaborate with local college and university researchers, including gender studies students
- Network with local women's groups to learn what sex-specific data they collect or have access to
- Consult foundation reports and case studies conducted with women or on gender relations in your area
- Estimate local conditions by examining higher-order Statistics Canada data, e.g. on the proportion of women who rent or grandfathers who are primary caregivers for young children
- Partner with women's groups active on such areas as sustainable development, environmental, safe cities, immigrant rights, or disability to fund local research and background reports

- Ask municipal authorities, health operations, or housing specialists to track relevant trends by sex for use by emergency planners
- Post queries on specific topics to the Gender and Disaster Network of Canada
- Form a community advisory committee that includes organizations working with high-risk women and their families, and help them conduct participatory action research strategies to meet your knowledge needs as local planners for community safety

### BUT WHAT ABOUT MEN?

These indicators focus on girls and women to highlight their increased risk and the need to incorporate this into vulnerability assessments. Too often, generic data stand in for “people’s vulnerability” but really relate most to men. Examples are the use of overall employment rates (many women work part-time or are self-employed in work based at home) and the overall percent of home-owners (can mask significant proportions of low-income women renters).

What indicators are needed to map risk factors related to gender for men and boys?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

He lost weight, he wasn't shaving. I at least could take some down time and take the kids out in the wagon. He would gobble down some food at noon and then go back to [flood] work. . . . He started crying [when he saw the flooded house]. You wouldn't know unless you're from a small town.

[Flood-affected woman, Southern Manitoba]



Photo credit: FEMA/Roll

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

---

To better incorporate gender analysis into disaster work, planning and response agencies in the private and public sector should:

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

*What can we learn from the past experiences of women in disaster?* The specific needs of women through emergencies will vary and can best be assessed by gender-sensitive vulnerability and capacity analysis, but may include the following:

### **Communications and Preparedness**

- including emergency warnings specifically targeting women, using community languages, women's networks, and innovative communication (e.g. printed shopping bags, school publications)
- communicating through women's organizations to reach non-majority language speakers, isolated women, low-income women
- expanding outreach to relevant women's groups, agencies, and coalitions
- adding crisis line numbers and women's services contact information to relief referrals
- consulting with women community leaders on language or cultural needs, life cycle issues, service or information gaps

### **Emergency Relief**

- eliminating mandatory evacuation based only on gender

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

### **Temporary Housing**

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

### **Long-term Recovery**

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

## Community-Based Mitigation

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

We had not received any weather warnings, and it was only after the sky changed colours that I phoned a neighbour to tell her that her TV antenna and garbage cans had been blown away by the wind. . . I had two young children aged 1 and 3. I thought that by pushing a table against the fridge and huddling over my children, we would be safe. I thought of hiding in the basement, but was too afraid that we would not be found if, heaven forbid, trees fell on the house and a fire started. When the storm subsided, the house was surrounded by debris, and I immediately called for help. I have no idea how I managed to react like this in just a few seconds. I later created my safety plan and emergency kit, because I now knew that this did not just happen to others. This came in handy because I was hit by the 1998 ice storm in Montreal. I was there for work and was staying at a hotel for what was supposed to be two days. I arrived Tuesday, only to leave Saturday. One could say that I could see the signs of this threat on Wednesday based on what I had experienced 20 years earlier. I put together my emergency kit by late Wednesday afternoon. I got a flashlight, radio, battery, juice and bottled water, as well as food I could keep and eat easily, and of course cash. When the blackout hit Montreal, I became the point of reference at the hotel, as I was autonomous and had information via the radio. This enabled the hotel to keep its clients informed because people were in a panic, and to take people in because they understood the scope of the problem. Today, I am ready. My kids and grandson know how to make their own kit, because they know the unexpected can happen to them. Source: Hurricane and ice storm affected mother, Quebec, [getprepared.ca: <http://www.getprepared.gc.ca/prod/str/str005-eng.aspx>]

## Issues Facing Women After Disasters

---

### Housing

- Evacuation voluntary?
- Affordable housing for low-income women?
- Clean-up, repair, and rebuilding help targeting women heading households?
- Access to housing loans?
- Input into reconstruction policies?

### Transportation

- Access to public transportation in temporary accommodations?
- Access to family transportation?
- Key services on public transportation routes?

### Income and employment

- Accessible child care available for employed mothers? Family child care providers supported?
- Child care for women workers in response roles? Family/work concerns of volunteers addressed?
- Family-friendly work policies allowing leave and support during clean-up and rebuilding?
- Home-based jobs disrupted or destroyed? Women-owned businesses at risk?
- Access to nontraditional work and training during reconstruction?
- Equity in credit and loans during rebuilding, relocation, and recovery?
- Continuity of income support through nonprofits, crisis agencies, government programmes?
- Long-term economic impacts monitored by gender?
- Legal services available in disputes over relief money?

### Dependent care

- Child care available to help women prepare, access relief resources, relocate, and rebuild?
- Respite care for long-term caregivers during recovery?
- Continuity of health care services to women caring for ill or disabled dependents?

### Physical and mental health

- Appropriate health care services in temporary accommodation?
- Mental health workers trained in gender violence issues?
- Reproductive health services available in temporary accommodation?
- Counseling, support groups, and respite care for women victim/survivors and women responders?
- Long-term recovery assistance anticipated?

### Violence

- Increased physical, emotional, or sexual violence?
- Access to safe evacuation space? Priority attention to women and children in shelters?

- Continuity of services to women at risk? Increased services loads anticipated?

**Access to relief resources**

- Provision for women with children coming to relief and recovery sites?
- Assistance to complex households with multiple household heads?
- Transportation, work release, and child care available?
- Physically accessible sites with culturally diverse materials?
- Long-term recovery services to caregivers available?

**Full participation in disaster decision-making**

- Women's specific needs identified? Relief monies monitored for gender impacts?
- Community meetings scheduled to facilitate women's participation? Child care provided?
- Most vulnerable women sought out and included on recovery projects?
- Women's voices heard in all aspects of disaster recovery and mitigation initiatives?

## Selected Issues & Actions For Boys And Men In Disasters

---

### A. What Gender Factors Increase Risk For Boys And Men?

- Biological sex
- Sexualities
- Gender identities
- Cultural gender norms (expectations)
- Gendered division of labour
  - In the family
  - In the paid labour force
  - In the community
- Gender authority/social power
  - In the household
  - In electoral politics/decision-making bodies
  - In community life

### B. Which Men Are At Increased Risk In Your Community Based On Gender?

- widowers
- single fathers, men with major family care
- orphaned boys
- boys put to work/trafficked
- male 'first responders'
- men in hazardous response and recovery occupations
- homeless men
- migrant workers
- men in agricultural communities under stress
- un- and under-employed men
- socially isolated or marginalized men
- men living with disabilities
- men exposed to health hazards, e.g. HIV/AIDS

### C. What Can be Done? Consider the need for

- \* Targeted emergency communications recognizing gender norms in male hazard awareness, household preparedness, emotional recovery, etc.
- \* Access to nontraditional occupations and roles in emergency management
- \* Community-based strategies for educating boys, teens and adult men about the human impacts of disaster
- \* Support services for men in caregiving roles, e.g. single fathers, disabled spouses
- \* Organizational practices sensitive to men's family responsibilities, e.g. In dual-career responder couples, dependent caregivers
- \* Pre-disaster mental health initiatives targeting at-risk first-responders
- \* Post-disaster mental health initiatives targeting impacted boys and men
- \* Workplace-based programs identifying at-risk men severely impacted by disaster
- \* Gender-sensitive disaster outreach to especially vulnerable boys and men including:

#### Talking points:

- \* What other boys or men would you add to this list, and why?
- \* What factors would facilitate or hinder outreach to men based on gender?
- \* How would this list change depending upon the specific hazard context or disaster?

**They will call me and ask me things like, 'I don't know how to help here, can you help? Can you help me figure out how I can help my husband who—he won't talk to me. He hasn't talked to me in weeks. You know, I know it's not me. Can you help?**

[Farm stress counselor, herself a farmer, on some of the BSE-affected wives she hears from, in "Just another nail in the coffin: BSE on the Canadian prairie." E. Engeson et al. presentation to the Canadian

## Women In Emergency Management

---

Especially in an era of retrenchment, when local communities must find or develop their own resources, it is important to learn how women and men, respectively, take steps toward mitigation, preparedness and recovery. Part of the answer lies in the relationship of residents to local emergency management and voluntary organizations active in disasters. These are the local people who cajole, nudge, enable, encourage or otherwise promote community resilience to disaster. It is, therefore, important to understand the gender dimensions of emergency management.

### The gendered emergency management workplace

The Canadian emergency management system has historically had a strong basis in civil defense and the traditionally male-dominated jobs and occupations at its core, from law enforcement, emergency medical care, and engineering to senior management, public administration, information technology and utility managers.

This workplace culture is significant for at least three reasons. First, a military culture is response oriented and fosters a climate in which the ‘tyranny of urgency’ prevails and issues of gender (or culture or disability) are seen, if at all, as distractions. Secondly, this creates a work force in which gender, ethnicity and income converge, arguably undermining the capacity of emergency management to connect with those at risk who do not share their class, ethnic or gender status. Third, there is a concern that if emergency managers and responders are not confident of the safety of their families in the event of a disaster, the system as a whole may be jeopardized. Previous studies on this question of “role abandonment” were based on a workforce more likely to be married men with female support systems than is the case today.

### Working in a Man’s World?

I am often asked about working in a “man’s world.” I believe it is not a man’s world but the world you make it out to be. The emergency management “world” encompasses not only the traditional first responder roles – police, fire and emergency medical services – but also the military, volunteer agencies, government departments and industry. Traditionally, female emergency managers have been represented in the health care, social service and educational agencies, while male managers have represented the police, fire and emergency medical services agencies. However, I have noticed that when municipalities move from using traditional first responder agencies such as fire and police for their municipal emergency managers to hiring a civilian emergency manager, a woman is often the successful candidate. As well, there seem to be more men in health care emergency manager positions in the last few years. The message? Emergency managers should not be defined by gender, but by the education and experience they bring to the job.

Source: Joanne Sheardown, Coordinator, Emergency Planning and Preparedness Program, Lakeland College, Vermilion, Alberta. IAEM Bulletin, 2005

It may be that fundamental shifts in the gender structure of Canadian emergency management will follow only when women acquire formal political power, as suggested by Joe Scanlon in his discussion of gender as “the missing element in disaster response.” Noting that response agencies are typically unaware of discrimination against women, though awareness is increasing, he concludes that:

[R]eal change may come only as women acquire political power, especially at the local level. Canadian research suggests that the head of local government inevitably plays a key role in disaster response. As women assume increasing power in local government, they will also assume increasing power in disaster response. (Scanlon, 1998, p.51)

Nonetheless, Canadian women are an increasing presence in emergency management, represented symbolically by the designation of Marg Verbeek (who has held leadership positions in the Canadian Emergency Preparedness Association and the Ontario Association of Emergency Managers) to the post of President of the International Association of Emergency Management in 2006. As she notes, “Women are eager to enter the field of emergency management, recognizing that they’re going to be part of a collaborative consortium. . . Women make great team builders and are good at bringing people together” (IAEM Bulletin, 2005).

Many factors support the entry of women, including the professionalization of emergency management and with it increased demand for skill sets supporting collaborative and problem-solving approaches. Academic degrees will provide alternate paths of entry for women who will find more demand for the skills and abilities they offer. The strong health focus of Canada’s emergency management system also supports the integration of women health advocates, researchers, providers, and managers in a variety of roles.

### **To Understand Needs, Ask Women**

If you want to understand what’s going on in homes and neighborhoods, ask women. In every culture, as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and nieces, they are the primary caregivers. Women are attuned to the needs of their families, especially those of dependent members, such as children and the elderly. Extending into the community, they are more likely to know what’s going on in their neighborhoods, including the presence of an elderly man down the street who needs extra help in an emergency. . . Women are more cautious and tend to approach danger differently. For example, it is well documented that women are more likely to heed official advice and urge their families to evacuate in an emergency. This suggests that community women’s groups are effective venues for educational programs on evacuation and other emergency policies and initiatives.

Source: Betty Hearn Morrow, *Special Focus Issue: Women in Emergency Management*, IAEM Bulletin 22, 9, 2005.

Finally, in line with the growing commitment of Public Safety Canada, Public Health, the Canadian Red Cross and other lead agencies to engaging at the local level with high-risk populations, it is likely that emergency management jobs, professions, and workplaces will prove more attractive to indigenous and new Canadians, persons living with different kinds of abilities/disabilities and other high-risk populations, women and men equally.

As of yet, no research is available on gender relations in the Canadian emergency management system. However, Canadians responded when the new advocacy group EMPOWER conducted an internet survey in 2006 geared to gender issues in emergency management. Over two hundred people responded from the US, Canada, Cayman Islands, England, Australia, and New Zealand; 71% were female and 29% male. A highly educated group (nearly three in four have either an undergraduate or graduate degree ), they are relative newcomers; three-quarters have held their current emergency management job for five or fewer years.

### **Work and Family in Emergency Management**

Who stays and who reports for duty when one parent is a police officer and the other a nurse? What happens when one is a chemist with knowledge of hazardous chemicals, the other a teacher, and an incident occurs when children are at school? . . . Access to emergency child care may need to become part of emergency plans. . . Planning involves looking ahead. It is time to examine how the changing nature of the family may affect emergency responsibilities. One way to start would be to have traditional emergency agencies survey their staff to see how many are single parents and how many have spouses with emergency responsibilities. The next step would be to examine those with problems or conflicts then work out some solutions: perhaps writing these persons out of emergency plans, perhaps working out child care arrangements, perhaps meeting with other emergency agencies to discuss priorities.

Source: Joe Scanlon, The perspective of gender: a missing element in disaster response. Pp. 45-52 in Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow (eds.), *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women's Eyes*, 1998

Interestingly the largest gender difference reported concerned “influential factors in professional advancement,” with women much more likely to cite mentoring. Women and men also reported different professional backgrounds. For men, past positions included senior management, military experience, technical expertise and political office; for women, clerical, sales and social service experience pointed them to emergency management.

Peer support and effective mentoring are likely to help emergency management organizations recruit and retain women as the profession continues to evolve. Men with different skill sets and backgrounds are also coming to the field, which will also reshape the influential culture of emergency management that dominates today.

Family support is essential for all those with family responsibilities, in all sectors of emergency management. Human resource policy and practice in emergency management need close examination to ensure that women and men with competing family demands are supported through family leave, child care, opportunities for part-time employment, and other family-friendly approaches.

### **How We Adapt: Listening To Women in Emergency Management**

- From PR, I am able to better facilitate communications between various stakeholders.
- Sociology helps me to anticipate people's actions and reactions in group settings.
- Many of the skills I used working in the non-profit community (planning, organizing, coalition-building) are important in the role of emergency management, planning and operations.
- My policy background has made our emergency management program more mature and focused.
- I believe that my experience in health planning and promotion assists with the education and training components of emergency management.
- My multi-disciplinary background helps me see the whole picture, where many have discipline-specific tunnel vision.
- As a banking auditing office manager, I have the ability to track and understand budgets, and grant accountability.

Source: Statements from respondents to an on-line survey, adapted from the EMPOWER presentation to the World Disaster Management Conference, Toronto, June 2006.

Recruiting and retaining women in high-risk populations poses additional challenges due to the Anglo-Saxon and male dominated workplace culture of most emergency management workplaces.

When the skills, abilities, and networks of those who come from community work and/or academia are more valued, more diverse groups of women and men with important life experience and perspectives may well chose emergency management careers.

Emergency managers are nothing if not pragmatic. If and when working with women as peers and partners is perceived as helping emergency managers to do their job, doors will open.

### **One Woman's Story: From Volunteer to Professional**

When I began emergency planning, I entered into a profession historically dominated by retired military men or men from the public safety field. . . It is my observation that public service personnel progress through the ranks depending on how well they fit into the "good old boy" culture. Most of the women I know in the field of emergency management got their start as public educators and do not seem to be as motivated by whistles and red lights. Like myself, these women tend to emphasize the basics of emergency management~preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. Perhaps when more women are employed in fire departments, law enforcement and the military, women in emergency management will be accepted more readily. In the meantime, women who work in this male-dominated profession will continue to experience gender bias and will have limited access to upper management. As one example, when emergency management is part of the fire department women who are not "sworn" fire personnel do not advance up the career ladder.

Source: Carrie Barnecut, Disaster prone: reflections of a female permanent disaster volunteer. Pp. 51-159 in Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow (eds.), *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998

### Additional recommended readings:

- Childs, Marilyn. "Counting women in the Australian fire services". *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, v. 21 no. 2, May, 2006.
- Gibbs, Susan. 1990. *Women's Role in the Red Cross/Red Crescent*. Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute.
- Krajeski, Richard and Kristina Peterson. 1997. 'But she is a woman and this is a man's job:' lessons for participatory research and participatory recovery. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 17 (1): 123-130.
- Phillips, Brenda. 1993. Gender as a variable in emergency response. Pp. 83-90 in R. Bolin (ed.), *The Loma Prieta Earthquake*. Boulder: University of Colorado, Institute for Behavioral Science.
- Proudley, May. Fire, families and decisions, *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Vol. 23 No. 1, February 2008
- Robertson, Doone. 1998. Women in emergency management: an Australian perspective. Pp. 201-206 in Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow (eds.), *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster*.
- Wilson, Jennifer. 1999. Professionalization and gender in local emergency management. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 17 (1): 111-122.
- Wraith, Ruth. 1997. Women in disaster management: where are they? *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. January: 9-11.

For excellent materials on women in firefighting, visit the website of the International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services: [http://www.i-women.org/about\\_us.php](http://www.i-women.org/about_us.php). Recommended articles include: Taking care of our families, Alicia Mathis [[http://www.i-women.org/archive\\_articles.php?article=17](http://www.i-women.org/archive_articles.php?article=17)] and Beyond Ground Zero, Linda Willing [[http://www.i-women.org/archive\\_articles.php?article=4](http://www.i-women.org/archive_articles.php?article=4)]



Adapted from E. Enarson with M. Haworth-Brockman, S. Walsh & A. Daniels, *Gender Mainstreaming in Canadian Emergency Management*, 2008, pp. 17-22. Photo credit: FEMA./Henshall.