

## Natural disasters and gender dynamics

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Worldwide statistics reveal that the increasing number of risks and disaster impacts within the last decades have caused highly severe damages, with high death toll and huge economic damages (World Bank, 2010). As a consequence people's vulnerabilities have increased disproportionately in recent years. Individuals' ability to anticipate, prepare, cope, respond and recover from disasters differs according to some socio-economic attributes present in each community. The research on natural disasters in a gendered perspective is fairly limited compared to other variables. In fact, the need to track social vulnerabilities and investigate gender dynamics into all levels of the disaster life cycle has been recognized only recently, during the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015).

For this purpose, we propose a review of the literature regarding the ways men and women conceptualise natural disasters, prepare and react, both physically and psychologically, to catastrophic events. This work tries to give some interpretation to these subjects analysing the social context in which sex discrepancies are developed, in different countries, cultures and in various socio-economic backgrounds.

Findings highlighted that women perceived more the risk, and they have developed personal strategies to better react and withstand the impacts of negative occurrences. Being at home, working in the house and caring the children have been always placed them at a higher exposure to disasters. However, these circumstances, they gave them the means to organize the family for evacuations thanks to their deep knowledge of the territory they live and the neighbourhood networks they create. Women seem to be not sole victims, but valuable resources able to take leading roles in building disaster resilience. Some case studies, however, continue to demonstrate a female's higher fear and powerless face hazardous events than their counterparts, showing various mental health disorders. Men, on the other side, feel more often prepared to overcome the crises, but what emerges from the stress and the losses caused by disasters are different types of violence (self-harm and interpersonal violence). It is therefore necessary to recognize violence and mental health pathologies as part of the negative consequences that occur after natural disasters and that can be part of people's vulnerability if those events recur frequently.

Living conditions, demographic, economic attributes, behaviours and beliefs reflect gender power relations in the disaster context. Failing to recognize it, may lead to inefficient community-based risk management plans. Gender dynamics in the disaster context should be the interest not only of non-governmental and/or international organizations. They should be a priority for researchers that have to contribute more in their studies to find a gendered differentiation, without limiting gender to an isolated attribute. This will help public authorities to develop sensitive management plans in order to let the disaster relief an easy process to achieve. This work will contribute to the scientific recognition of gender in the disaster management context, in order to raise further investigations on this topic.

World Bank (2010) Natural Hazards, Unnatural Disasters: The Economics of Effective Prevention. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development Reports.