Australian Disaster Resilience
Conference 2019 papers

The future is now for the inclusion of women in emergency management planning

Mary Farrow
Emerald Community House

connection · empowerment · respect · wisdom

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

The future is now for the inclusion of women in emergency management planning

Abstract

The everyday challenges for women and those in their care pose additional threats to their wellbeing when disasters occur, compounded with threats of violence, trauma, exclusion, homelessness and financial stress. The application of gender equity, representation, empowerment and inclusion, especially for local women, in planning, relief, response, recovery and resilience roles has the potential to improve the broader wellbeing outcomes for women as well men, their children, their families and the community at large.

This paper will discuss the obstacles to equitable inclusion for women in decision making roles, the threats to effective emergency planning and identify potential strategies to gain a seat at the planning table now.

Obstacles to inclusion

Today, traditional attitudes, responsibilities and lack of inclusion still present obstacles for women in participating in decision-making, gaining skills and accessing resources. Emergency planning decisions are typically made without the inclusion and consultation of local women. These committees can have a resistance to inclusion based on traditional attitudes, practice and custom even in advanced countries. Yet, women manage risks every day, deal with adversities and connect through strong, trusted and respected social networks.

According to the Australian Disaster Resilience Community Recovery Handbook #2, community development (positions often held by women) "strengthen the community to absorb stresses and raise collective resilience overall to better manage adverse events in the short and long term (AIDR, 2018)." Yet planning emergency planning committees still reflect a nagging gender imbalance between emergency management planners and inclusion of local women, especially those who work in the local community sector - a key interface for successful disaster management. While local women continue to experience obstacles in participating in municipal emergency planning, they often spend considerable time as employees and volunteers in relief and recovery activities when disasters occur.

A majority of local community caring and service roles are performed by women as employees and volunteers such as childcare, aged care, education and not for profit management. Their exclusion from decision making input on municipal emergency planning committees could negatively impact

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

recovery and survival outcomes rather than contribute to beneficial local knowledge, planning and decision making. Local women can be disempowered if prevented or discouraged from being

recognized and authorized partners in emergency planning and recovery roles when their priorities and experience are dismissed.

Extreme climate events (droughts, floods, storms, heat waves) represent over 80% of all disasters in the past decades. What does that mean for women who are the most negatively impacted by these and other related events such as bushfires and thunderstorm asthma? Current emergency planning positions, traditionally held by a majority that does not include a fair representation of local women, has dwarfed the awareness of the impact of gender discrimination and exclusion within community plans for these extreme events.

It is widely recognised that women and their children are more likely to die than men in disasters according to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction which has identified that cultural restrictions, lack of appropriate skills and less physical strength contributes to women and girls becoming disproportionate victims of disasters (UNISDR, 2017). In addition, the gender pay gap for women continues to lag behind male incomes even in Australia, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) creating further division and availability of women who must work longer to

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

achieve equitable income (ABS, 2018). The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) reports in the Human Cost of Natural Disasters – A global perspective (2015) that income levels have a significant impact on disaster death tolls in that "levels of economic development, rather than exposure to hazards per se, are major determinants of mortality (CRED, UNISDR)."

Benefits of including local women

Inclusion, empowerment and investment in local community service groups and organisations that strengthen women may contribute to the success of long-term sustainability and socio-economic development in high disaster risk environments. Whether or not a disaster ever happens, it is readily understood in the global humanitarian sector that economic empowerment and education of women in between disasters also delivers benefits to men, families and their community by stimulating inclusive economic outcomes across the board (UN Women, 2015).

The National Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines (Gender and Disaster Pod, 2016) cite advice from the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, stating that "a gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster policies and practices and that women's leadership should be promoted and facilitated." Further, the Framework declares that:

 "Women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for

AFAC2019 Oral presentation paper (2559 words, excluding references)
The future is now for the inclusion of women in emergency management planning

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

preparedness as well as to build their capacity to secure alternate means of livelihood in post-disaster situations;" (UNISDR, 2015)

As inclusive thinking on the roles of women in the planning and management of disasters can be a pivotal element in building a resilient society, it is important to understand the influences and provide the necessary resources required to maximize women's involvement, empowerment and

inclusion across the disaster management spectrum. Further, emergency management planners should include local community development practitioners as well as the community service/caring sector which is largely staffed by women according to the ABS (ABS, 2011).

The UN Sustainable Development Goal #5, Gender Equity, contributes to all of the 17 SDGs. They are dependent on the achievement of SDG5, according to the UN (UN, 2016). Two of the target areas are particularly relevant in changing disaster outcomes for women:

- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.
- To adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Australian opportunities

Women contribute to disaster resilience and community strength by combining community development practices with care skills acquired through personal and professional development, working with children, families, priority groups, neighbourhoods and communities*.* Australian

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

civilian community development practitioners and community services support the wellbeing and human rights of communities across Australia every day as their core business. And that business is growing according to current employment projections by the ABS (ABS, 2017).

Workers and volunteers in the community sector provide services for priority groups which are considered to be vulnerable, isolated or marginalised people. These workers and volunteers can also be some of the very same people who are disproportionally at risk in mass casualties during

emergencies and disasters. These risks could potentially be reduced if they were included on emergency planning committees. As women make up 50% of the population and 85% of community service /care providers in Australia, shouldn't their needs, connections, input, knowledge, networks and experiences be included in disaster planning?

If women's careers and economic security are disproportionately threatened after disasters, then consideration should be made regarding what women need for income stability as a priority to reduce negative impacts of disasters. Opportunity to engage in non-traditionally women's activities, training and employment can have the important benefit of upskilling women in preparation for emergency survival, provide skills and help to close the gender pay gap.

For example, training in the trades for women can raise the skills, income and employability for women and practically eliminate the pay gap for those who work in this sector. Yet the training and work environment can be toxic, exclusive and abusive. Failing to address this abuse by those in charge is not only negligent, it is a missed opportunity to increase the working relationship and understanding between men and women in non-traditional workplaces. Ensuring that women have safe access to non-traditional workplaces can also increase the number and diversity of skilled tradespeople who would be valuable assets in post disaster environments. Currently only 2 % of women work in the trades in Australia and that has not changed in 20 years. Yet the demand for trades is high enough to call for foreign candidates to be brought in to fill the need. Reports by tradeswomen of bullying, harassment, sexism and violent behaviour are not unique and continue to haunt the trades leadership to this very day. It has also been reported that emergency service organisations are not immune to sexism, harassment and bullying of women.

Volunteers for emergency services can often come from the trades sector, having more of a flexible work schedule to respond to the needs of volunteer emergency demands when called upon. A balance of gender in the trades sector through targeted educational programs, placement support and application of the laws, particularly for apprenticeships, could challenge the negative behaviours toward women, reduce abuse by upholding laws and banish resistance to inclusion and diversity.

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

Victoria's reform strategies

The Victorian Emergency Management Reform legislation is a wind change moment and now provides the opportunity for inclusion of women and increased diverse representation on municipal planning committees as authorized partners under the Act. The Reform provides for Ministerial guidelines to give municipal emergency planning committees the detailed, practical guidance they need to undertake emergency management planning at the community level. While the guidelines can be refined over time to take advantage of best practice developments for community needs, inclusion strategies should be one of the first refinements to be undertaken with direction of the Minister.

The Victorian office of the Inspector-General for Emergency Management summarizes in "10 Years of Reform – Common Themes" that the following elements are the foundation of emergency management reform for community engagement (IGEM, 2018). Success in achieving these elements could be increased by the inclusion of local women on planning committees as key stakeholders in every instance.

- Effective communication between the affected community and partner agencies
- Offering activities, services and infrastructure that builds on local aspirations, histories and community development work already undertaken
- Acknowledging, supporting and building capacity in individuals, and community groups and organisations
- Developing and supporting community leadership and decision-making for preparedness, relief and recovery activities
- Consulting diverse members: women, men, children, young people, older people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities who may have different needs.

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

Diverse community representation

Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI) has played a significant role in developing new thinking through its community-based disaster resilience forums which contributed to the development of the Compendium of Case Studies: Victorian Community-based Resilience Building Activities. Ten years ago, these forums attracted a large following of predominantly single gender emergency service members and uniformed personnel who were usually focused on disaster events not consequences per se. A decade later, attendance at these forums has transformed into a healthy diverse mix including local government, community service groups, various religious groups and civilian community development practitioners with a large cohort of women focused on disaster consequences, recovery and community resilience.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council recently took a bold step and identified the inclusion of women as a key component of their Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee in their Prevention of Violence against Women in Emergencies Action Plan 2018-2019 (Macedon Ranges Shire Council, 2018). Gender differences impact communities who are preparing, responding and recovering from disasters and that "issues related to gender are known to compound effects on disasters". Continuing to ignore, resist or avoid the inclusion of local women on municipal planning committees and in emergency management leadership roles could contribute to negligent practices at the municipal and state levels. This can result in unnecessary trauma and a repeated backlash from the community after a disaster event. If we continue to do the same when we know better, we can expect to experience the same outcome. Lessons should be learned.

Emergency service agencies are designated members of the municipal and regional planning committees according to the legislation. While the Victorian government has a variety of strategies through legislative reforms and funding identified to increase diversity in emergency services employees and volunteers, not much has been committed to, nor policies set which includes local women on municipal emergency planning committees. The Minister only needs to make the inclusion a condition of forming these committees to affect lasting and beneficial change.

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

The award winning Emerald Community House (ECH), one of over 400 neighbourhood houses operating across Victoria is overwhelmingly run by women and takes an interest in emergency planning, recovery and resilience. It has made the choice to engineer resilience capacity into its core business practice as "community continuity" through their Centre of Resilience (CoR) strategy. Having learned the lessons from other disaster affected communities, community-led resilience capacity is embedded in their programs, funding applications, partnerships and services. Other centres, such as Morwell Neighbourhood House, also a Centre of Resilience, can contribute to local disaster planning as members of municipal planning committees.

 Neighbourhood Houses, funded by Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) can be important incubators for municipal emergency planning committee members in identifying risks and threats that may be unknown to local planning authorities. They are already serving the needs of

the community and strengthening the local people through community development and human rights practices. Emergency planning should be recognised in DHHS's Neighbourhood House Coordination Program funding guidelines (due at the end of 2019) as up to 18% or more of centres have already reported planning, response, recovery, resilience and crisis support activities as core business. More community groups operating as not for profit businesses could and should be

AFAC2019 Oral presentation paper (2559 words, excluding references)
The future is now for the inclusion of women in emergency management planning

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

building community resilience capacity, placing this role at the centre of their sustainability ethos to increase collective community strength, especially during times of adversity.

Conclusion

Men and women experience disasters differently. If women are the most negatively impacted demographic when a disaster strikes, then achieving gender equity and equal representation on municipal emergency planning committees as well as in non-traditional roles now has the potential to improve the outcomes for women and those in their care in disasters as well as everyday life. By including and consulting with women in a resilience building capacity, the community and emergency management benefit exponentially.

Behavioural change is still required not only amongst community members but at all levels of business and government, especially in emergency service agencies, trades and local government. Inclusion strategies for women are beginning to appear but they are not always welcome by those who resist inclusion. This is the time to put that resistance to rest.

Disaster events can provide an opportunity to advance gender equity and the roles and responsibilities of women in managing disaster impacts as well as advancing health outcomes. But women need an equitable seat at the emergency planning table, both at the municipal and regional levels, in decision making roles in representing the community. The emergency management reform provides an excellent opportunity for the Minister to provide specific and targeted guidance regarding balanced inclusion of diverse local community participants. Recognising the role of local community development practitioners is consistent with the latest AIDR advice and guidelines in their training literature. Training and gaining experience in emergency planning can provide additional pathways for future employment for women and can help to close the pay gap especially when working in non-traditional employment such as the trades or emergency services.

Empowering and strengthening the role of women in the communities where they live and work in between disaster events is where the longer term benefits lie, thus building community resilience for everyone. The legislation is in place, the literature supports inclusion and the laws against abuse are clear. We have the tools, policies, guidelines and statistics at hand. Equal representation for women on municipal emergency planning committees is necessary now if we truly value a safer, inclusive community.

AFAC2019 Oral presentation paper (2559 words, excludibg references)
The future is now for the inclusion of women in emergency management planning

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

References

AIDR. (2018). *Community Recovery Handbook 2.* East Melbourne, Vic, Aus: Australian Institute of
    Disaster Resilience. Retrieved from https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5634/community-
    recovery-handbook.pdf

ABS. (2011). *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends.* Retrieved from
    http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au:
    http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/LookupAttach/4102.0Publication21
    .09.114/$File/41020_Community_Sep2011.pdf

ABS. (2017). *Community and Personal Service Workers on the rise.* Retrieved from
    https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/03B07F4B9599
    CBAECA2581D3001504D1?OpenDocument

ABS. (2018). *4125.0 - Gender Indicators, .* Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from
    https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202018~M
    ain%20Features~Economic%20Security~4

CRED, UNISDR. (n.d.). *The Human Cost to Natural Disasters - A global Perspective.* Université
    Catholique deLouvain . Brussels: Centre for Researchon the Epidemiology of Disasters
    (CRED). Retrieved from
    https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317645955_The_Human_Cost_of_Natural_Disas
    ters_-_A_global_perspective

Gender and Disaster Pod. (2016). *The National Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines.*
    Gender and Disaster Pod. Retrieved from https://www.genderanddisaster.com.au/wp-
    content/uploads/2016/08/Gender-and-Emergency-Guidelines.pdf

IGEM. (2018). *10 Years of reform – common themes.* Victorian Government, Inspector General for
    Emergency Management. Retrieved from
    (https://engage.vic.gov.au/download_file/10565/1882)

Macedon Ranges Shire Council. (2018). *Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies Action
    Plan.* Retrieved from https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/About-Council/Our-Council/Strategies-
    Plans/Prevention-of-Violence-Against-Women-in-Emergencies-Action-Plan

UN. (2016). SDG5- Gender Equality. Retrieved from
    https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

UN Women. (2015, April). *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*. Retrieved from
    http://www.unwomen.org/: (http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-
    empowerment/facts-and-figures#sthash.6EUjicbg.dpuf).

MaryFarrow   mfarrow@iinet.net.au 0403765314

UNISDR. (2015). *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030.* Geneva. Retrieved from
        https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

UNISDR. (2017). *Gender*. Retrieved from United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction:
        http://www.unisdr.org/we/advocate/gender