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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

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This special issue of the American Behavioral Scientist focuses on organizational and group behavior in disaster. The papers represent one attempt to deal with behavior in the crises event called disaster. They concern themselves with problems as old as man but ones which have had only sporadic and isolated social science attention.

### Stereotyped Behavior

Disasters have always captured human imagination. Throughout the Old Testament, the frequency with which disasters are used as central or as incidental themes suggests that they have always been familiar to man's experience and that they conveyed meanings beyond the significance of the events themselves. Even today, a close examination of the news media forces one to the conclusion that disasters continue to be "newsworthy."

We seldom question this continued and consuming interest in disasters. If one does inquire into the continued preoccupation, the interest seems to be sustained by the fact that disasters provide the context in which significant human dramas are revealed. Perhaps only in such unusual circumstances can these dramas be so vividly depicted.

Disasters are a major vehicle in which one may observe both heroism and suffering. Heroism is a rare and valued trait, and disasters provide an opportunity for personal energy to overcome danger and fear. Disasters also illustrate the possibilities of human tragedy and, in particular, the ubiquity, inevitability, and randomness of suffering. Man's highest capabilities can be expressed while his ability to face suffering and tragedy are severely tested. For those in the modern world who face the drab routines of existence, there are few opportunities for heroism and little direct contact with mass suffering. Disasters, thus, can provide a vicarious contact with these universal themes.

Because of the frequency, vividness, and potential significance of such events, a number of widespread stereotypes have developed about behavior in disaster. The popular image of disaster has often centered on the theme of personal and social chaos. Such an image is frequently documented by isolated anecdotes used to prove the universality of such behavior. This image suggests that individuals panic and that individuals lose their concern for others in their immediate social scene. They act irrationally in terms of their own self-interest. Also, as a result of the disaster experience, it is suggested that people become hostile and take aggressive action toward others. Another facet of the image suggests that victims develop a "disaster syndrome," a docile, childlike condition and, as a result, must be "cared for" by some protective organization, acting in a parental way. The victims, it is suggested, become psychologically disturbed by their traumatic experience, some temporarily, but others more permanently. At the level of the community, the image of a "social jungle" prevails. People, hysterical and helpless, gradually shed the veneer of civilization and exploit others. It is said that looting is common, and outside authority is perhaps necessary in order to inhibit these resurgent primitive urges. It is assumed that many will flee from the disaster area in mass panic, leaving the community stripped of its human and natural resources.

This image of disaster behavior is widespread, reinforced by popular literature, through the mass media, and occasionally by studies assumed to be scholarly. More careful research does not support this image. In general, research suggests that, after recognizing danger, the behavior of people is adaptive, aimed at protecting their families, others, and themselves. Panic is infrequent and does not occur on a mass scale. Disaster victims act positively, not irrationally or passively. Mutual help and self-help are frequent. Psychological disturbances do not render the impacted population helpless. Much of the initial rescue work is done by the victims themselves who do not wait to be told what to do. Contrary to the public image, movement toward the impact area is more significant than movement away. Those who converge on the impact area do present problems, but their actions are usually motivated by anxiety for those in the area, by a desire to assist victims, and by a need to understand what happened, rather than by exploitation. Authenticated cases of looting are extremely rare. While disasters create personal and community problems, they do not result in chaos. The individual and the community are confronted with new and unfamiliar tasks under difficult and threatening conditions. What people have learned about social life in the past is not suddenly discarded, however.

The social networks which ordinarily sustain people do not disintegrate into the social jungle which disaster stereotypes imply. The pre-disaster social networks become the basis -- indeed, the central core -- of the efforts to cope with the disaster. By focusing solely on individual actions, the more significant social processes are in fact overlooked; therefore this issue focuses on the activities of groups and organizations in disaster.

### The Research Tradition

In certain respects, the literature available on disasters is extensive. Much of it, however, consists of eyewitness accounts or reconstructions of particular disasters. Many writers use disasters for the inherent drama. In doing so, they usually select the unique, the personal, and the atypical to develop their word portrait. If the writer personally experiences a disaster, the vividness, but seldom the accuracy, of his account is enhanced.

Other information is buried in documents of governmental and quasi-governmental agencies. Such documents are often filled with descriptive statistics, but seldom provide insight into the activities which created the statistics. Too often also, these "official" reports are intended for public relations purposes and are designed to emphasize the efficiency or the heroism of agency efforts.

The more significant and worthwhile segment of the disaster literature is professional and scientific. Concerted efforts to study disasters systematically -- especially in the field -- are only about two decades old. During 1950-54, a disaster research project was undertaken by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Similar but less extensive projects were also conducted at the University of Oklahoma, the University of Maryland, Michigan State University, Louisiana State University, and the University of Texas. A major source of disaster research in the United States was the Disaster Research Group (formerly the Committee on Disaster Studies) of the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council. Starting as a clearinghouse, DRG began supporting field research as well as conducting its own. Much of this research

dealt with some of the more prevalent popular images of "typical" disaster behavior, resulting in many misconceptions.

After the DRG was phased out, the Disaster Research Center (DRC), located at Ohio State University, continued the work. Founded in late 1963, this center studied organizations experiencing stress, particularly during the emergency period in disasters. Since that time, DRC has conducted field work at over 73 different disaster sites. Major attention has been given to those disasters which are quick and unexpected, which affect more than one major urban community, and in which there is extensive personal and property loss.

A few comments on the nature of field work are perhaps necessary. Since the primary interest is in the emergency period, DRC attempts to send a field team to a disaster site as quickly as possible to act as observers. Once in the field, observers initially attempt to gather data on the pattern of emergency response within the community. Such data is usually collected through semistructured interviews with personnel in those community organizations most critically involved during the emergency period. After the initial interviewing, an assessment is made of the involved organizations to determine especially interesting cases, such as a particular organization that had exceptional problems, or one which played a critical role in the pattern of coordination, or one which adapted in an unusual way. Such cases are more intensively studied by interviewing all top level personnel and a systematic sampling of lower level personnel. These two phases of study provide, on the one hand, an extensive record of organizational involvement in a variety of disaster situations and, on the other hand, selected intensive analyses of particular organizations in specific disasters.

### The Concept of Disaster

Disaster is one of the many "sponge" concepts within the English language. When it is used, it often refers to different things. Initially, we can distinguish four different meanings of the term. (1) Disaster often refers to the disaster agent -- i.e., a hurricane, an earthquake, a fire. (2) Disaster also refers to the physical impact which the agent has -- i.e., the resulting property damage and the loss of life. The other two meanings are more psychological and sociological. (3) Disaster can mean the evaluation of the physical event. In other words, evidences of physical damage are evaluated as being disastrous. The same event, however, may be defined differentially by different individuals and by different communities. (4) Finally, disaster can mean social disruption created by the physical event. Social organization at many different levels -- family, neighborhood, or community -- may be disrupted.

Our prime interest here is on the meaning of disaster as social disruption within specific communities. Communities provide the organizational base for response to impact. It is true, however, that there is a close relationship between the nature of the disaster agent and the nature of the social disruption. The pattern of social disruption is closely related to the various characteristics of the disaster agent; these characteristics determine the nature of the disaster tasks to which community emergency organizations have to respond. We know that disaster agents differ in frequency, predictability, controllability, cause, speed of onset, length of possible forewarning, duration, scope of impact, and destructive potential. In some of the papers which follow, implications of some of

these differences in disaster agents are delineated. For example, in several of the papers, a cross classification in terms of extensiveness and period of duration is used to provide the instantaneous-focalized and progressive-diffuse type disasters. In most of the papers, however, it is assumed that the disaster agent is sudden, unexpected, and diffuse and that the locale of physical impact is an urban community which has somewhat typical resources in terms of the more usual community emergency organizations.

### The Order of Presentation

The sequence of presentation is in large part dictated by certain logical groupings. The initial paper by Drabek deals with the methodology of studying disasters. In certain ways, the techniques required to study disasters appear to violate certain research traditions which have become normative. Drabek points to some of the important considerations in studying group and organizational response to disaster.

The paper by Yutzy, "Priorities in Community Response," delineates a process which seems to characterize, in particular, those communities which experience widespread disaster impact. This shift in priorities is functional in the community since the reordering provides the various community emergency organizations with clearer guides for action.

The next seven papers are concerned with a specific emergency organization. Three of the papers, those of Kennedy, Warheit, and Brouillette, focus on various agencies of local government, specifically the police department, the fire department, and the department of public works. The next three, those of Quarantelli, Adams, and Ross, deal with important private medical and welfare organizations which inevitably become involved in community emergencies -- hospitals, Red Cross, and Salvation Army. Anderson's paper on the military is the primary example of a type of extracommunity organizational assistance which is common in most widespread disasters. While these seven papers encompass most of the major organizations which routinely become involved, there are others which could have been included. For example, the local Civil Defense Office often plays an important role as do other municipal offices such as the Mayor's Office. Ham radio operators, mass media personnel, church groups, and the like often become involved. Neither does the article on the military exhaust the range of extracommunity assistance from nearby cities and from state and federal agencies.

In all of the articles dealing with specific organizations, the attempt is made to orient them in terms of a typical organization. Typicality is always problematic, but the intent is to concentrate on the resources and structures that one might find in moderate-sized American cities, and not to highlight unusual and ideal circumstances. In addition, all of the articles concentrate on the problematic aspects of the activities of the organizations. This was done by design, but, in doing so, we may tend to perpetuate the common myth of community breakdown. As a matter of fact, in our field work, we have found that most organizations function very effectively, even in the most difficult circumstances. It is easier and probably more fruitful, however, to concentrate on problems and difficulties.



Not all disaster activities can be noted by observing only the more established emergency organizations. In certain situations, new groups emerge which perform important functions. Because these groups are so ephemeral, previous disaster research has tended to ignore them. Parr, in his paper, explores the various conditions which lead to such group emergence.

The problem of extensive organizational involvement in disaster activities has important implications for changes in community structure. Dynes, in his paper, attempts to deal with a paradox which is implicit in the disaster literature: that disasters, to some extent, both disorganize and develop community cohesion. The final paper, by Roth, initiates the development of a cross-cultural-perspective on disaster. Practically all of the research, including that reported in this issue, is drawn from American experience. Roth attempts to indicate potential similarities and differences which might be expected when research moves to other cultural settings. A bibliography completes the issue, providing a guide to what is sometimes a fugitive literature for the reader who wishes to further explore some of the issues raised here.

Two final comments should be made. First, the reader will notice that in most articles, identification of the specific disaster event and specific respondents is minimized. We desire not only to protect the anonymity of our respondents but also to sustain our conviction that specific identification is not necessarily related to the truth value of a statement. Second, a number of credit citations are both necessary and willingly given. Obviously, we owe a debt of gratitude to all of the intellectual ancestors who pioneered this area. Many of them are cited along the way. We are indebted to literally thousands of persons across the United States and in several other countries who have given their time to talk to DRC personnel. In one sense, interviews with DRC personnel have become one of the expected disaster "demands" for many organizational personnel across the country. Their experiences and their insights provide the continuing data for the Center. Each of the contributors in the issue have been dependent on the field work of other DRC field team members, past and present. On this occasion, it is appropriate to recall just how much cooperation is necessary in research.

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