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CONTEMPORARY USES OF
SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH:
SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTER

Russell R. Dynes
Thomas Drabek

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Russell R. Dynes, University of Delaware, USA
Thomas Drabek, University of Denver, USA

Introduction

The value of sociological research is dependent on the cultural conceptualization of an issue and its public policy implications. For most of human history, disasters have been considered collective misfortunes but not objects of study, or even issues of public policy. However, much of recorded history is structured around disaster and, in literature, disaster has been used as a metaphor to explain universal human actions. Usually, disasters have been considered "acts of God", conveniently outside social systems, although certain consequences of disaster had important social implications. Those in power often perceived disasters as weakening social systems which made rulers vulnerable to conquest from outsiders. Disaster, then, had implications for maintaining social order. There was also concern for disaster "victims". Even if God were responsible, his randomness did not necessarily coincide with worldly notions of justice. This unjustly affected were deserving of compassion. Even in the colonial period, disaster victims deserved relief.

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The emergence of industrial societies generated a more active view toward disasters. The notion developed that technology could become the solution to disaster related problems. Floods could be eliminated by better constructed dams and the cost of earthquakes could be substantially reduced by better materials and construction. These assumptions about the hopes for industrial societies were generalized with the implicit assumption that disaster prone countries would be healed by increased development. At the same time, there was increasing recognition that not all disasters were "natural" and that a number of emergent situations could be properly seen as technological. Since God was technologically illiterate, political systems, in some recent theories, should bear the blame. Since the interest in and the puzzlement with disasters have been so closely tied to world history, it is not surprising that, in time, they have also interested social scientists.

Sociological Studies of Disasters

Social science attention to disaster is relatively new. The first empirical study was of a Halifax ship explosion at the end of World War I (Prince. 1925) and the first theoretical work was Man and Society in Calamity by Pitirim A. Sorokin (1942). The primary initiation of such studies came after 1950, and, while the greatest concentration of research has been done in the United States, the research community in recent years has become increasingly international. In addition, it has become increasingly multidisciplinary and, while here, we have focused on contributions

by sociologists, we have mentioned some research, and researchers, from other disciplines.

While the sub-field is quite young in history of the discipline, it is large enough to deserve several attempts to summarize existing research findings (Barton 1969, Dynes 1970, Drabek 1986), efforts to recap international and cross cultural efforts (Dynes 1988) and even discussions of the intellectual history of the field (Quarantelli 1987, 1990). Drabek has suggested that, while some sociologists consider disaster research trivial, one can argue that disaster research is at a strategic intersection among several dimensions--public policy, user applications and middle range theories. While here our focus is on the "uses" of sociological research, it is also appropriate to underscore the fact that disasters can provide significant payoff for sociological theory since they represent types of uncertainties in which elementary forms of social processes and structures are revealed. They provide the opportunity to observe the emergency of social structure and the functioning of such structure under stressful conditions (Kreps, 1989). In certain ways, disasters represent unique laboratories, ethically acceptable natural experiments. If disasters are seen in this way, they are unique social experiments for nearly all subspecialties within sociology, rather than trivial aberrations in social life.

Research Settings

There have been a variety of settings which have generated this research tradition. The various settings for disaster

research follow the pattern of the way other research has been institutionalized within each society.

The most common pattern is research done by individual scholar/researcher in a University setting. A second pattern has been the development of combined teaching/research programs where an interdisciplinary curriculum on disaster or emergency management create research expectations for that faculty. There are now two examples; the Institute of Emergency Administration and Planning, University of North Texas, U.S.A., and the Center for Disaster Management, University of New England, Australia.

A third pattern is the establishment of a University based center with primary focus on some aspect of disaster. Perhaps best known is the Disaster Research Center, formed by sociologists at The Ohio State University and now located at the University of Delaware, U.S.A. DRC, founded in 1963, is administratively located in the Department of Sociology, although heavily involved in multidisciplinary networks, nationally and internationally. Other Centers, such as the Hazards Assessment Laboratory, Colorado State University, U.S.A. and the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, Texas A and M University, U.S.A. are headed by sociologists, although administratively located in other parts of the University. A similar University based Center is the Katastrophen-forschungstelle, located at Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel, Germany where Wolf Dombrosky is co-Director.

In some countries, research is focused in the Academy of Sciences, such as Boris Porfiriev and Constintine Popov, Institute of System Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences and George Pogolian,

Institute of Philosophy and Law, Armenian Academy. In France, a research group on Crises is located in the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, under the leadership of Patrick Lagadec and Claude Gilbert, both political scientists. In the United States, some national laboratories, such as the Oak Ridge National Laboratories and the Batelle Human Affairs Center, Seattle, have had an established research program.

On occasion, there may be research generated within particular governmental units. Within the Chinese State Seismological Bureau, the Institute of Geophysics has a section responsible for "seismo-sociology" which has focused on understanding human reactions to earthquake prediction. A final pattern is private research centers, such as the Emergencies Research Unit, established by Nicolas Petropolous in Greece.

Funders and Users

It is obvious that sociological research does not have high funding priorities any place, especially for basic research, while University settings may emphasize "basic" research, agencies which provide grants for such research often take practical applications into account in the grant evaluation process. In terms of disaster research, one could argue that, historically, Universities around the world have provided the most resources in the support of individual researchers. There is grant and contract funding available in the disaster field but the overwhelming portion of that funding goes to the physical sciences and engineering (For example, in the U.S., there is a National Center for Earthquake

Engineering Research with an annual budget of between five to ten million dollars. Of that amount, about \$300,000 is devoted to "social science activities" which includes educational efforts and conference subsidies, and a small portion to actual research.)

There are, in every nation, governmental agencies with responsibilities for some aspect of disaster management which may provide funding for sociological research. These are such agencies as civil defense, interior or home office, social welfare, international development as well as agencies that have responsibility for the consequences of certain physical disaster agents--geological survey, meteorological agency, water resources and energy. On occasion, regional, state and local governments might provide types of research supports. In addition, supranational governments may provide some research funding--such as the United Nations agencies, especially UNDP, UNDRO, WHO and UNESCO, as well as the European Community, the World Bank, the Organization of American States, the League of Red Cross. The latter agencies are more often willing to support the preparation of documents and materials than to sponsor research.

It is very difficult to estimate the level of funding, even in any one country since support is neither constant nor continuous. Consequently, for research operations, this means limited and episodic funding. The Disaster Research Center, however, has had continuous funding since 1963. The funding level has averaged about \$250,000 a year, ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Those figures would exclude faculty salaries and some University support. The bulk of the grants have been used for support of graduate

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students. Overall, in the United States, the total amount of social science research funding would be about three million dollars, with the bulk of the monies coming from the National Science Foundation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Institute of Mental Health. There are periodic research funds, from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States Geological Survey and the Department of Energy. In other countries, where sociological research is less well institutionalized, funding is much smaller and, in some cases, almost nonexistent.

The extent of the users of disaster research is, of course, much wider than those who fund research. While many of the funders are national in their responsibility, persons in agencies at lower levels of government-regional, provincial, and local are more likely to need and apply research. In addition, many nongovernmental agencies, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Salvation Army, as well as many religious and secular relief agencies are research users. An increasingly important users group is city management professionals. Recently, the International City Managers Association published a book on Emergency Management: Principles and Practice for Local Government (1991) as a part of its Municipal Management Series. Edited by Drabek and Gerald Hoetmer from ICMA, the contributors include eight social scientists who base their contributions on current research. In addition, there are a growing number of people who identify themselves as "Emergency Managers". In the U.S., this had led to the development of professional associations, mechanisms of communication, such as

Hazards Monthly, which publishes popularized version of research, and there is the beginning of a "professional" literature. For example, Drabek (1990) has examined successful emergency management offices and their strategies for maintaining organizational integrity. There is also a demand for materials in the efforts to teach emergency management skills, some of these efforts are in new university curricula while many more efforts are found in extension and short courses, such as those found at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, AIT, Bangkok, the Emergency Management Institute, Maryland, U.S.A. and the Australian Counter Disaster College. A number of U.N. agencies use disaster research materials in their in-service training. While it is possible to detail a longer list of users of disaster research, we would argue that the major impact of disaster research has been to completely reconceptualize disaster policy in social science terms. This reconceptualization has had profound implications, not just in the U.S., but in other countries and in international agencies.

On The Conceptual Use of Disaster Research

Quarantelli (1991a) has suggested that there are three different uses made of the findings of research:

1. the instrumental, or action, uses
2. the conceptual, or understanding, uses
3. the symbolic, or political, uses

The first usage, the instrumental alternative, relates to specific studies which can be used as a basis for future decision making on specific issues. The second alternative suggests that research can

provide background information and perspectives which influence future action in the much broader sense. The emphasis here is on understanding and not on specific items of knowledge. The third alternative points to the ways in which research results can provide a legitimating function for certain policies. For example, most research on nuclear power accidents, from Three Mile Island to Chernobyl, is now used to legitimate various policy decision. Interestingly, the same evidence is often used in completely contradictory ways.

We would argue that, of these three uses, the primary use of disaster research has been in providing conceptual understanding. That research has changed the notion of the nature of disaster, its "causes", its consequences, and the potential for action. To make that point, it is necessary to posit a rather universal view of disaster in the past, and then to suggest ways in which that initial conceptualization has been changed. To sharpen such a contrast, the baseline conceptualization might be stated in the following way:

Disasters were events which had social consequences but were generally outside human control. When such events occurred in communities, they created great fear and personal trauma. This created social chaos, making local communities incapable of effective action. Outside authorities, especially the military, were needed to re-establish command and control. Outside agencies were needed to aid these helpless people. Disaster planning was to enhance the national government's ability to reestablish social order and to facilitate recovery. Since some national governments were inept and weak, it was the responsibility of donor governments to provide assistance.

While some elements of this baseline conceptualization persist in some agencies, in general, the research tradition has dramatically altered it. Drabek (1986), in his inventory of research, has

conceptualized those research findings in terms of both a temporal and a structural dimension. The temporal dimension placed disaster response in an inclusive social process, tying response to preparedness, recovery and mitigation. For the structural dimension, he used different system levels, not different disaster agents, starting from the individual, group, organizational, community, society and international. Such a classification already suggests the appropriateness of viewing disaster generically, not differentiating them by agent and of viewing them as social occasions, not events nor natural happenings. In addition, there is the suggestion that responses from various social levels are required to understand the consequences. Using Drabek's classification of increasing social complexity, certain "findings" can be identified which modified the more traditional view.

Individuals. Disaster victims do not exhibit irrational and self destructive behavior nor do they become helpless and dependent. While some are killed and injured, most "victims" are not. They become resources. Most early emergency tasks, such as search and rescue, are done by disaster victims themselves. Disaster "victims" also constitute organizational resources and can work effectively in the emergency period. Such victims seldom exhibit traumatic indication of stress but do exhibit types of altruistic behavior uncommon prior to the disaster. While there are a series of problems created by the disaster, victims know how to solve such problems better than persons from outside the

community. Problems of social order are rather minimal except as they are reflected in coordinating an effective emergency response.

Group. The family tends to expand its protective role, reassuming "traditional" functions--providing food and shelter to members of extended family. Families and neighborhood groups turn attention away from conventional self interested economic activities toward more altruistic and helping concerns. Families can become role budget centers reallocating usual family tasks so that persons can function in more community oriented roles. Various family and neighborhood groups expand their social support activities.

Organizational. Community organizations provide the backbone for a community's response to disasters. By and large, such social systems prove to be effective. They possess human and material resources which can be mobilized effectively and which can sustain emergency activity. Such organized activity can, of course, be enhanced by disaster planning and in developing social mechanisms to coordinate their activities with other actors. Such organizations can make the adaptations necessary for an emergency. Even nondisaster relevant organizations play an important roles in an emergency. The success of that response is heavily dependent on predisaster experience and planning. Disasters may hurt but do not completely destroy existing social systems. Much of what is interpreted as "disorganization" is the process by which communities adapt their resources to new problems. In addition, new social organization emerges to cope with unanticipated

problems. Organizations need to develop flexibility to adapt to new problems and military models of planning restrict that ability.

Community. Disaster impacted communities remain viable social units. The most important initial information in most sudden disasters is not the number dead but the number who survived; not the extent of destruction but the extent of existing resources. Communities also have the ability to take a proactive, rather than a reactive, stance toward disaster. Responses can be anticipated and preparations can be made. Disaster planning should be oriented toward enhancing the human and material resources of the various social units, rather than on the assumption of maintaining order and controlling people. Planning which assumes the major problem is maintaining order and the major solution is in developing centralized decision making is bound to fail. Disaster planning which enhances the capabilities of various social units to make decentralized decisions is likely to succeed. Preparedness and mitigation activities can reduce both costs and consequences at the community level.

Society. Even if disasters are infrequent in the life of most social systems, preparedness and mitigation can reduce both costs and consequences. Emergency planning can be built into existing social organization. Such efforts need to become a customary function of local government. Emergency management, however, constitutes a unique set of skills, not necessarily to be borrowed from other occupations, especially the military. Part of emergency management is to understand the effects of hazards and to understand how people act toward risks. Risk is an evaluative

social concept, not a statement of objective probabilities. Part of emergency management is understanding how people receive and act on warnings. Warning is a social process. Neither official nor scientific information provide sufficient motivation to evoke preventative action in and of itself. Part of emergency management is to develop social incentives to initiate preparedness and mitigation. As a result of the importance of these skills in urban industrial societies, a new role of emergency manager is beginning to emerge. The major payoff for emergency management is at the community level, not the national level. The major national thrust should be to enhance that activity and to develop those skills at the local level.

Since disaster response is only one phase of a continuous social process, actions taken in the response and recovery period can enhance mitigation and preparedness actions in the future. However, although disasters are occasions for limited social change, the post disaster period is not the time for extensive social experiments in housing, population location or changes in income distribution.

International. In most urban, industrial societies, there are few long term social consequences from disaster, but, in others, disaster becomes a serious obstacle to sustainable development. International disaster relief is generally counterproductive. It is neither needed, timely nor culturally appropriate. The usual function is to enhance the charitable image of donor countries, but that generally postpones the recovery process. A better form of international assistance is to provide those countries with local

resources and skills to support their indigenous preparedness and mitigation efforts.

POLICY IMPACT

The consequences of the research tradition has been to transform policy approaches to disaster. That transformation has been most complete in the United States, but, in general, those policy changes have also had other national and international implications. In the United States, responsibility for disaster was "demilitarized". At the national level, this has meant pulling together diffuse functions to create a Federal Emergency Management Agency with responsibility for "comprehensive" emergency management which emphasizes an all hazards approach and what has been oriented toward the development of an integrated emergency management systems on the local community. Greater emphasis is on the development of emergency planning and in the development of various community based mitigation programs. The whole emphasis has been to strengthen local community resources to deal with its own problems and to de-emphasize national and other outside "assistance". A similar shift in emphasis has occurred in the handling of international disaster assistance though the development of an Office of Foreign Assistance within the State Department. That program has begun to emphasize support for preparedness and mitigation activities as being at the center of assistance and to downplay conventional relief activities. An increasing emphasis is being made to incorporate mitigation and preparedness activities within development programs. Similar

directions in policy can be seen in other nations and in the networks of international nongovernmental disaster and development agencies. (For a more extensive account of the evolution of emergency management in the U.S., see Drabek, Chapter 1,1 1991.)

In suggesting the extensive impact which sociological research on disaster policy requires further explanation as to the various mechanisms by which sociological research moves into the policy process. We would argue that a major reason that sociological research has had significant impact has been the involvement of researchers in science policy and disaster policy roles. for example, in the United States, a major source of the establishment of research policy is the National Academy of Sciences and, its research arm, the National Research Council. A number of sociologists have chaired disaster related committees in the NRC: Socio-economic Effects of Earthquake Prediction (Ralph Turner), International Disaster Assistance (Russell R. Dynes), Natural Disasters (Dennis Mileti), Disasters and the Mass Media (Everett Rogers), _____ (Thomas Drabek). Other sociologists have also been members of other NAS/NRC Committees. Much of that participation was facilitated by the mediating roles of two sociologists Charles Fritz, on the staff of the NAS and William A. Anderson, at the National Science Foundation.

In addition, sociologists have participated in multidisciplinary advisory capacities, Joanne Nigg has served as Vice-Chair of the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute and the Scientific Advisory Committee of the National Center for Engineering Research. Kathleen Tierney serves on the Advisory

Committee of the National Earthquake Reduction Program. At particular times, the direction of national policy is modified through activities generated by politically appointed Commissions. While Cora Marrett was appointed for her knowledge of complex organization to President Center's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island, Russell Dynes headed the staff task force on Emergency Preparedness and Response. That task force included two other sociologists, Dennis Wenger and Robert Stallings (Dynes et al, 1979). Both Dynes and Dennis Mileti have provided "expert" testimony in several administrative law hearings concerning certain dimensions of research on emergency planning. At times, the assistance of researchers is sought by other countries and international agencies. For example, Drabek (1989) conducted an evaluation study for the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on the operational aspects of the rehabilitation program which was implemented following the Mexico City earthquake. Its intended audience was the donor societies and it was oriented to improving the process. Subsequent to the same earthquake, Dynes acted as an informal consultant to the Secretario de Gobernacion, Federal Government, Mexico in the development of legislation creating a national system of "civil protection." Similar involvement in the policy process by sociologists has been evident in other countries: Barry Turner (U.K.), Carlo Pelanda (Italy), Orjan Hultaker (Sweden).

On one level, we would argue that sociologists in the disaster area have had a much greater influence in the development of science and public policy than in any other area of comparable

research, especially in their participation in the National Academy of Sciences, where social scientists generally play a quite marginal role. This significant impact tends to be impressive if compared with the small number of sociologists doing research in the area. It would be too much to claim that the quality of the research is so convincing by its theoretical significance and its methodological sophistication that its application is assured. On the other hand, that "success" might provide certain clues as to the elements necessary to insure the use of sociological research. Certainly important are the critical structural conditions of a nation state which is somewhat open to the utilization of social science research in the "solution" of social problems and of a University system which provides considerable flexibility in the choice of research topics and in the allocation of research time. In addition, as we have already indicated, some research funding is possible in the U.S. although generally not in the form of support for "basic" research. The disaster area in the U.S. has had several individuals who have continued research for a number of years. While these persons maintain a reputation as a sociologist within the discipline, they also have participated in a variety of science and public policy forums. This has often meant endless hours enduring multidisciplinary and multi-interest settings where issues are discussed and where social science conceptualizations may be introduced. These are usually settings where social science knowledge is devalued by physical scientists and by engineers. Such settings require persistence, often over years. They require the ability to communicate "findings" to many different audiences

in quite different formats. To be effective, such persons need a basic knowledge of the legislative history and the current agency controversies. These are tasks and require skills which are not often considered in research methods courses. While these comments are certainly not intended to initiate a full discussion of the policy process, it would be our judgement that researchers in the disaster area have been more heavily involved in the policy process than many of their colleagues in other research areas. In any case, to have important policy implications requires much more than publishing in sociological journals.

On The Future

In looking to the future, what can be said about the sociology of disaster? First, there is increased attention given to disaster preparedness and planning by various nation states. An international network of people involved in disaster policy has emerged which shares information and that facilitates the diffusion of innovation of policy ideas around the world. Current and past disaster research constitutes a major element in that communication process. In addition, United Nation agencies as well as agencies such as The World Bank are increasingly concerned with building in disaster preparedness into the development planning process. These activities are both cause and consequence of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of a resolution to make the 1990's the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction. Such a declaration also involves the encouragement to member nations to develop national committees to develop and encourage attention to these

issues. While it is expected that much of the concern of the decade will center around the improvement of technologies, at least two sociologists were members of the overall scientific advisory body. In addition, within specific national committees, there may be participation by social scientists. In the U.S., E. L. Quarantelli is a member of the National Committee on IDNDR, formed by the National Academy of Sciences. The Decade both internationally and nationally is to set goals to introduce programs with the intent to reduce the cost of disasters. With those aims, past research is extremely important and future research may be generated.

In addition to the awareness which the International Decade will create, it is also obvious that disasters as an object of study will not quickly nor easily disappear as a topic of concern. In fact, Quarantelli (1991) has recently argued that there are a number of social trends which will produce more and worse disasters. This increase will come about from the following trends.

1. There are new and increasing kinds of technological accidents that have been almost nonexistent in the past.
2. There are technological advances that reduce some hazards but add complexity to old threats, e.g., high rise fires and plane accidents.
3. New versions have developed of old or past dangers, e.g., urban droughts, rather than rural droughts.

4. There is the emergency of new kinds of technological accidents that can lead to disasters, e.g., computer accidents, biotechnology.

5. There will be an increase in multiple or synergistic type disasters resulting in a more severe impact, e.g., the convergence of a tornado and a radioactive cloud.

6. Disaster agents will have more to hit and have greater impact, e.g., hurricanes in an increasingly developed coastal areas.

7. More vulnerable kinds of populations will be impacted, e.g., in many areas such as Florida in the U.S., new retirement communities are particularly vulnerable to hurricanes.

8. Increasingly, metropolitan areas will be impacted. Both the complexity and diversity of these areas create new problems of coping.

9. Increasingly, localities will have disastrous conditions created by sources quite distant, e.g., the scope of radiation from Chernobyl.

Quarantelli concludes "It is that solutions are not to be found primarily in new technologies or better use of existing ones. The difficulties note stem from social factors. Social problems can only be dealt with socially; technological improvements can only address technological problems." (p. 27)

Thus, for the immediate future, the potentialities for disaster research seems encouraging. There will be in the next decade, a considerable increase in the attention which policy makers will give to the research issues which have characterized

the field in the past. In addition, as Quarantelli has suggested, the increased technological dependance, urbanization and social complexity will produce more and worse disasters. So, researchers in the field will not experience a paucity of research opportunities. Of course, these future trends will also affect the role and status of the social sciences. It is to that future that we will turn now.

The uses of sociological research in the future will depend upon changes in world society. And those changes in turn will affect the nature and uses of the social sciences. Neil Smelser (1991) has suggested some of the outlines of these changes. He points to three master trends which will continue: the drive toward economic productivity, a pressure to improve technology and the movement toward the internationalization of the economy. Given these master trends, there will be additional tendencies, some directly derivative from the master trends. These include: (1) that environmental crises will get worse before they get better; (2) continued structural differentiation and complexity; (3) increased application of knowledge to decision making; (4) internationalization in the cultural area, including science; (5) continued pressure toward democratization; (6) social problems will become increasingly internationalized; (7) a continuation of widespread problems of chronic instability; and (8) the continuing erosion of traditional forms of social stability.

Smelser argues that, in the future, the social sciences should be expected to thrive in such an increasingly complex world. He suggests that it will be in the interest of governments everywhere

to support the social sciences for its potential utility for problem solving. He also suggests there will be an improvement in the ideological infrastructure essential for the social sciences. These can be seen as positive portents for the future. On the other hand, the demand for applied social science and the continuation of structural differentiation suggest other trends which have much more negative consequences. There will be an increased separation between basic and applied research and between theory and empirical research. At the same time, there will be increasing fuzziness of the lines between disciplines since applied work is interdisciplinary in nature. The fuzziness may not be problematic if researchers are both rooted in their disciplines and can relate their interdisciplinary research to disciplinary concerns. For example, the members of the Research Committee collectively produced a book which attempted to show the relevance of certain sociological concepts to disaster research (see Dynes, DeMarchi and Pelanda, 1987). On the other hand, the research problems and emphases in the sociology of disaster are increasingly becoming alienated from "mainstream" sociology. For many in the area, research reported in more traditional sociological journals is irrelevant and esoteric. Too, within traditional departmental structures, those interested in applied fields are increasingly alienated from their local colleagues and more comfortable with their extended research networks which are international in scope. This trend suggests the future importance of the Research Committees and the increased viability of some but not all of them in the future. The future is likely to reveal what sociologists

have known all along that health of some of the parts does not necessarily insure the health of the whole discipline.

Conclusion

The paper suggests that, while disasters have been a recurrent theme in literature and throughout history, only recently has disaster become a topic of interest and attention by sociologists. While disaster could be considered a strategic research site for sociologists, the research field has primarily evolved since 1950. While the research interest is international and by its nature, multidisciplinary, sociologists, primarily in the U.S., have been at the center of the development of a critical mass of research. That research base is not necessarily extensive but it has had a rather profound effect on public policy. With that change, communities can be encouraged to adapt a proactive response and to mobilize human and material resources to prepare and respond. That view has modified the direction of social policy in both national and international agencies.

The future suggest that, given certain world trends, disasters will continue to be a focus of applied social research. In fact, the future may bring more and worse disasters. That encouraging outlook for the future of the sociology of disaster does not necessarily mean that research will necessarily contribute to the basic theoretical issues within the discipline nor will the sub-field necessarily find the discipline to be a fertile source of research ideas for understanding disasters.

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NOTES

1. A preliminary disclaimer is in order. We will make no attempt to define the limits of what might be called "disaster" research. We have no particular objections if others wish to include conflict situations, such as war, or chronic conditions, such as desertification, global warming and famine under that rubric. We have not wished to exclude here but only to focus on those occasions where social structure is rather suddenly stressed by what sometimes are called "natural and technological" disaster agents.

In addition, while we have tried to maintain a focus on sociological research, we have used illustrations in a broader category of social scientists. While in the United States the core of social scientists interested in disaster research are sociologists, but that is not true in most other countries.

Finally, the dominance of illustrations from the U.S. reflect both a cultural bias and a reflection of reality. Most disaster research has been initiated in the U.S. so illustrations of that research based reflect that fact. On the other hand, both of the authors have had considerable experience in and knowledge of disaster research around the world.