



Gender Note # 3

## Women, Gender & Disaster: Men & Masculinities



The gender division of labour often places men at high risk in the emergency relief phase of disasters. Credit: IRIN

Sex and gender shape men's lives before, during and after disasters. While gender relations typically empower men as decision makers with more control than women over key resources, gender identities and gender norms can also increase their vulnerability. Gender shapes men's interactions with men as well as women during crises, and differently in different contexts.



Muhammad Irfan's youngest brother cannot recall anything of life before the 2005 quake Pakistan. Credit: Kamila Hvat/IRIN

Many in these coastal towns [in Indonesia] were fishermen who survived at sea or farmers in the hills above the high water line. But their wives and children were killed at home not far from the beach when the driving waves turned the village into ruins on Dec. 26. In Lamteungoh, there are 105 widowers and only 19 widows. These rugged men are now grappling with unfamiliar roles, dependent on one another and uncertain about what comes next. With their families gone, some say their lives have lost purpose. They are caring for children in communal style and tending to the injured. They are struggling to move through their grief and reclaim their future. "Life today has no meaning at all for me," said Baharuddin, 49. "Now, suppose I find a job and make money. To whom can I distribute it?"

Source: Ellen Nakashima, Washington Post Foreign Service, 1/25/05, p.A01

### Challenges

- Institutional dominance by elites with low awareness of gender-based power and power for men
- Few or no rewards for men working on gender/men issues in disasters – policy, practice, research
- Low levels of awareness among organizational leaders, policy makers and established researchers about gender analysis
- Limited sustained interest in gender analysis among men in lead roles in disaster research, policy and practice
  - Over-identification of gender as "personal" rather than structural and institutional
  - Dichotomies accepted between women/vulnerability and men/capacity
- Lack of sex-disaggregated data for gender analysis of changes for different groups of men in disaster contexts
- Neglect of power relationships among different groups of men that are based on sexuality and masculinity norms

# Talking Points

Gender is often conflated with “women,” neglecting sex and gender as factors in the lives of boys and men in disaster contexts.

- ◆ Gender is a core principle in family life and intimate relations and these dimensions of life are critically important to men. They are also subject to change, for example, single fathers or male youth heading families may have unique needs.
- ◆ Gender is a powerful predictor of the everyday working lives of men, just as it is for women.
- ◆ Men’s relationships with other men are shaped by gender norms, too.
- ◆ Minimizing the significance of sex/gender for men leads to the mistaken belief that gender mainstreaming in disaster management is of benefit mainly to women and is ‘women’s work.’

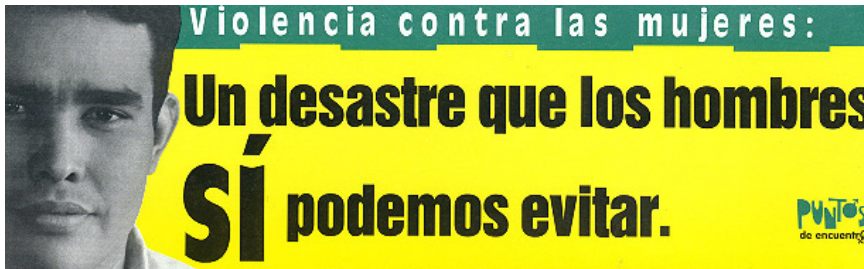
Gender-sensitive case studies clearly indicate that gender norms can increase risk to boys and men in disasters.

- ◆ Health conditions affected by sex and/or gender vary culturally among men, for example, increasing male fatality rates in Russia, or higher rates of obesity and drug use in some contexts which increase male susceptibility to extreme heat. Men’s reproductive health, like women’s, is also affected by exposure to contaminants in technological disasters.
- ◆ Social ties to family and kin promote resilience but may be tenuous for some men, including widowers and male economic migrants displaced to risky living conditions.
- ◆ “Front line” or “first responder” roles are occupied more by men in most parts of the world, exposing them to work-related injuries, e.g. hazardous materials spills, firefighter deaths.
- ◆ Gender norms related to men’s reduced risk perception and increased tolerance of risk can endanger men and their families. When preparedness and evacuation are choices, men may delay and under-prepare or be injured in the clean-up period by overly casual use of power equipment.
- ◆ Feelings of ‘invulnerability’ and reluctance to acknowledge dependence can also deter men from asking for assistance.
- ◆ Economic and political conditions rarely affect the sexes identically. For example, men are still more likely than women to migrate for economic reasons and to be killed as combatants in conflict situations.
- ◆ High-risk groups are often male-dominated, for example homeless men, male migrants, orphaned boys, men with minimal family ties and those with HIV/AIDs and other chronic health conditions, boys/ men at risk of interpersonal and/or state violence. These are conditions that lead to increased gender-based social vulnerability.
- ◆ Men with marginalized sexual identities may be subject to violence or isolation during periods of social crisis especially.

Gender is seen as “shorthand” for inequality or vulnerability in disasters--but this cannot be assumed for men or for women.

- ◆ Men benefit from gendered life experiences, intimate relationships and social networks, just as women do. Both women’s and men’s leadership in crisis situations is essential though it may be manifested differently.
- ◆ Men draw on gender-based control over resources in ways that benefit themselves, their families and their communities in crisis situations.
- ◆ Men employed in male-dominated workplaces bring essential skills, work-based networks and professional/technical expertise to the challenges of disaster risk reduction throughout the disaster cycle. These skill sets are based as much on the gender division of labor as on other social markers.
- ◆ Men in first response and emergency management roles may experience conflicting obligations to work and family. Dual-job couples in which men, as well as women, work in disaster-relevant occupations often face difficult choices in disasters.

# Opportunities for Action



“Violence against women is one disaster men can prevent.”

The Central American NGO Puntos de Encuentro integrated this message into their community work following Hurricane Mitch.



Following Oxfam-supported research on gender and tsunami recovery, Chaman Pincha and her team worked with men and women to raise awareness about gender, especially among men. Here, Tamil Nadu residents participating in a gender training are role playing to raise awareness of the discrimination faced by aravani or transgendered people in tsunami relief.

Credit: Chaman Pincha, from Indian Ocean Tsunami Through the Gender Lens:  
[http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/Pincha\\_IndianOceanTsunamiThroughtheGender%20Lens.pdf](http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/Pincha_IndianOceanTsunamiThroughtheGender%20Lens.pdf)

“Indeed, men are situated higher on the ladder of gender hierarchy, but there is need to recognize that power and privilege are determined by a complex array of factors such as age, economic class, and social norms. . .

Engaging with men as agents of change rather than barriers to change would help push conventional boundaries.

To effect lasting change we must identify positive role models within the community, use the real life experiences of men in disasters and in other times of their lives, identify effective entry point activities for men and boys, and design and implement programmes that address underlying gender inequities.”

Source: Prafulla Mishra, Let's Share The Stage: Involving Men In Gender Equality And Disaster Risk Reduction, in Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives, E. Enarson and P. G. Dhar Chakrabarti, eds.

## MEN'S ROLE IN GENDER EQUALITY IN DISASTERS

Conference report from men at the 2004 Gender Equality & Disaster Risk Reduction Workshop, Honolulu, Hawai'i

- Men need to advocate for gender equality
- Men need to deliver gender mainstreaming messages to other men
- Men need to be full partners in gender sensitivity training
- Men as leaders need to be committed to bringing gender equity results within their own organizations
- Men need to confront gender stereotyping, and create opportunities for personal and institutional transformation
- Men need to recognize that women have lots of personal knowledge and skills in coping with disasters, and that more women need to be trained as first responders
- Tools and methodologies are needed to sensitize and empower men to implement gender equality
- A separate workshop on men's role in gender equality/gender mainstreaming is needed, and sessions should be held at upcoming meetings, such as the National Hazards Research Workshop, sociology, disaster mitigation, and other forums.
- Utilize the Gender and Disaster Network to share ideas, tools, and best practices (e.g. examine gender sensitivity that was provided to troops who served in East Timor, which resulted in a major reduction in violent incidences against women)

## Research Questions

- What specific factors put boys and men at increased risk through the disaster cycle? How do these vary culturally?
  - What are the implications for boys and male youth, especially?
- How do boys/men interact to promote their psychosocial recovery after disasters? How do men's lives in the family change in the post-disaster period?
  - Under what conditions does gender-based violence against men or boys increase?
  - What gender-targeted risk communication strategies reach high-risk men effectively?
- What service gaps exist in post-disaster response to boys, male youth, adult men and male elders?
  - What models exist to overcome these?

## Policy Guidelines

- Gender-based analysis must be applied with respect to both men and women.
- Male championship of gender equality and disaster risk reduction is needed.
- Gender mainstreaming initiatives should include men at all levels & in all sectors of organizations.
- Male leadership in gender mainstreaming should be rewarded in performance evaluations.
- Indifference, resistance or lack of performance in this area should also be reflected in personnel reviews.
- Targeted support for boys and men identified as at increased risk is expected.
- Sex- and age-specific data needed for gender-sensitive risk maps are made available.
- Rights of men with transitional or unconventional sexual identities as well as sexual minorities should be protected.
- Non-stereotypical services must be equally available to promote individual and collective recovery of boys & men.
- Organizational policy should promote a gender-fair and family-friendly workplace that works for men, too.

## Practical Steps

- Mixed-sex gender training teams and gender research teams should be developed.
- Gender-aware trainings should include men and/or consideration of men and their experiences and feelings in crisis.
- Gender-responsive practice guides should identify specific resources & needs of men in all high-risk groups.
- Loss of partner, loss of livelihood, interpersonal violence and other factors should be addressed with sensitivity to men
- Hazard identification, vulnerability analysis, mitigation strategies & risk communication programmes should be evaluated from a gender perspective with attention to local context,
- The full engagement of men should be sought in community-based initiatives relating to gender and disaster risk.
- Gender and development consultants knowledgeable about men's issues should be consulted in project planning.
- Boys as well as girls should benefit from health promotion and family planning campaigns before and after disasters.
- Nontraditional gender roles should be promoted for men as well as women in post-disaster livelihood reconstruction.

## Selected Resources

- Mainstreaming men into gender and development: Development Debates, Reflections and Experiences. S. Chant & M. Gutmann, 2000, Oxfam Working Papers
- UN Division for the Advancement of Women, The role of men and boys in Achieving Gender Equality, Report from expert group meeting, 2003: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/>
- "Let's Share The Stage: Involving Men In Gender Equality And Disaster Risk Reduction," P. Mishra, in Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives, E. Enarson and P. G. Dhar Chakrabarti, eds.
- Masculinities Matter!: Men, Gender and Development, F. Cleaver, ed. Zed Books, 2002
- Men, Masculinities and Development, A. Grieg et al., UNDP Gender in Development Monograph Series #10, 2000: [http://www.health.columbia.edu/pdfs/men\\_masculinities.pdf](http://www.health.columbia.edu/pdfs/men_masculinities.pdf);
- IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action: Women, Girls, Boys & Men--Different Needs, Equal Opportunities: <http://ochaonline.un.org/HumanitarianIssues/GenderEquality/KeyDocuments/IASCGenderHandbook/tabid/1384/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

And visit the website of the Gender and Disaster Network for additional references, accounts from the field, policy & practice guides, examples of good practice, and core concepts for gendering disaster risk reduction: [www.gdnonline.org](http://www.gdnonline.org)