

Reviews

society, because they are not governments, yet their economic power is as great or greater than many national governments. For example, General Motors' 1997 revenues exceeded the gross domestic products of all but the very largest countries. In 1997, the combined revenues of the 25 largest U.S. corporations equaled the revenue of the U.S. federal government. It is significant that Mobil Oil, the eight largest U.S. corporation with 1997 revenues of \$60 billion, ran a vigorous ad campaign in the business press against the global warming treaty. The power of financial capital cannot be ignored. In the capitalist system, the world's largest investors, whether operating as institutions or private individuals, will be likely to have the loudest voice and greatest influence on any regimes that will be concerned with natural resources. However, commercial interests may have a very low public profile.

There is also little attempt in this book to analyze why global governance is needed in the first place. This is a serious omission, because it obscures the reality that the very agencies (giant multinational corporations) that have created the "current challenges of governance," through their pursuit of unlimited economic growth, are the very agencies that are becoming the most active global civic society shapers of the new governing regimes. We might suspect that their participation might be self-serving, and their particular vision is likely to be short-sighted, given that investor response to quarterly profit returns are now the primary determinants of corporate policy. However, what I perceive as shortcomings in this book in no way detract from its overall importance. This collection is an excellent general introduction to the language and conceptual frameworks, as currently presented in the literature on global regimes. These are extremely timely issues that deserve a much wider audience.

The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women 's Eyes, Edited by Elaine Enarson and Betty Hen Morrow, Westport CT: Praeger Press, 1998 xiii, 275 pp.

Reviewed by Pamela S. Showalter, Department of Geography and Planning, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX 78666.

The editors of *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women Eyes* have several ambitious goals. They attempt to address the disaster literature's general paucity of information regarding the gendered terrain within which disasters are experienced, offer workable recommendations to planners and practitioners for incorporating women and gender issues into their work, provide researchers with new directions for conducting studies and for utilizing and constructing theory, as well as provide the general reader with ". . . a new perspective on women's experiences, needs, and interests in disasters" (p. xii). No matter your area of expertise, if you are engaged in efforts to reduce the impact of disasters on humanity, this is an instructive volume regardless of whether or not you have an interest in "gender issues" per se.

Following introductory remarks, the book is separated into three sections, beginning with an overview of the topic to reveal theoretical gaps and directions as well as field-based themes. The second section addresses the social construction of vulnerability vis-à-vis issues of age and poverty, land ownership and family structure, domestic violence and community organization, and how vulnerability is rooted in gender and national development. The third section provides a

Reviews

number of case studies to support the volume's thematic framework, and the book concludes with a chapter by the editors that provides policy-oriented recommendations and research questions.

The book's underlying premise is that, historically, US disaster research has largely ignored the larger cultural and sociopolitical contexts within which disasters are situated. There are a number of reasons why this has been the case, but emerging support for analyzing hazard and risk in a structural context is encouraging exploration of the issue of gender. Gender is an important variable since it is clear that those living in poverty are more vulnerable to disaster impacts and the majority of the world's poor (70%) are women. Since disasters occur in gendered social systems and are addressed by gendered disaster management programs, the editors argue that it is imperative these constructs no longer be ignored if we wish to improve the effectiveness with which we respond to extreme events.

Part I - Perspectives on Gender and Disaster - is launched by Fothergill's, "The Neglect of Gender in Disaster Work: An Overview of the Literature," which is a review of over 100 studies addressing the issue of gender in disaster. In the course of her review, Fothergill found it advisable to replace the common "preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation" mantra that guides most US disaster studies with the nine-point taxonomy that follows, and wherein she made the following observations:

- 1) Exposure to risk-women are more exposed.
- 2) Risk perception-women perceive disaster events andlor threats as more serious and risky.
- 3) Preparedness behavior-because women are largely absent from institutionalized preparedness organizations, it is only possible to explore women's preparedness behavior at the household level but here information is sketchy and consequently the results are mixed.
- 4) Warning communication and response-women are more likely to receive risk communication and respond with protective action such as evacuation.
- 5) Physical impacts (mortality)-women in developing countries are more likely to die in disasters than men.
- 6) Psychological impacts-here results are also mixed; while women and children may express more mental health problems, men may be more likely to increase alcohol use [different coping mechanisms?].
- 7) Emergency response phase-gender affects the division of labor, relegating (for a variety of reasons) women to childcare, food preparation, and supportive roles.
- 8) Recovery phase-women may be more likely to seek out assistance, poor women face the largest obstacles to recovery, and domestic violence appears to increase.
- 9) Reconstruction phase-poor women have the most difficult time returning their lives to "normal," and female business owners may have more trouble acquiring loans.

In closing, Fothergill advocates increased use of qualitative research methods to allow researchers ". . . to obtain a better understanding of women's lived experience in disasters, in the context of their specific situations" (p. 24).

Fothergill is followed by Bolin, Jackson, and Crist's, "Gender Inequality, Vulnerability and Disaster: Issues in Theory and Research." The authors assert that lack of attention to women's experiences can be blamed on out-of-date methodological and theoretical approaches as well as

Reviews

research structured by funding agencies that do not encourage in-depth analyses of social inequalities. They assert that the classic “event focus” of most US disaster research is too simplistic, ignoring broader socioeconomic forces occurring over time that can affect an area’s (and its population’s) level of vulnerability. They assert that it is not sufficient to simply incorporate into quantitative analyses queries that identify differences between the sexes, for such an approach also fails to reveal social-structural inequalities (e.g., economics, laws) that produce gender differences. US disaster researchers are accused of largely ignoring decades of research (e.g., language and discursive practices, human agency and subjectivity) that other social scientists have embraced in their attempts to understand social phenomena. While some disaster studies note that differences exist between female/male response in a disaster situation, explanation of these differences is rarely offered, and certainly not within the context of understanding the way social inequalities account for the observed differences. Bolin et al. also discuss problems with the commonly used “family as system” approach, asserting that researchers and policymakers must discard the notion of defining the word “family” as though this entity exists only in terms of wife/husband roles and explore “. . . the complex ways in which the conjunctural effects of gender, ethnicity, culture, race, class, and age structure everyday family life in the context of existing political and economic forces” (p. 33). They believe US disaster researchers could learn from studies performed by Third World scientists, which are described as being much more cognizant of the way “historically situated political economic forces” (p. 36) impact local culture, most notably where capitalism alters traditional family structures by introducing wage labor that women have less access to, which relegates women to the domestic sphere, and consequently increases their vulnerability. The authors use famine disasters to inform their discussion, and suggests US researchers could learn from Third World literature how to: explore unequal distribution of power and resources in families, stop assuming gender is unimportant, utilize qualitative analysis to add explanatory depth to the commonly used quantitative survey instrument, examine the role of social inequality, and explore women’s experiences across lines of class and culture. The policy implication of altering the methodological framework is that expanded data would inform mitigation efforts, helping to develop appropriate assistance programs that do not exacerbate social inequalities.

The final paper of this section, Scanlon’s “The Perspective of Gender: A Missing Element in Disaster Response,” provides a revealing (if brief) discussion of gender-situated myths in relation to disaster. While it was refreshing to learn of the heroism of women following the 1917 Halifax explosion, it was distressing to learn that gender bias not only led a leading scholar of the time to omit all positive references to these heroic acts of women from his papers, but also led him to omit any less-than-heroic acts of men. Ultimately, Scanlon writes, “male-dominated response organizations act on a view of society in which vulnerable women must be superseded or managed by men or left to carry out traditional family roles-roles that in fact add to their vulnerability” (p. 49). To counteract this tendency, Scanlon asserts that as women play increasing roles in initial disaster response they must acquire “new, nontraditional skills” such as operating communication equipment and taking part in search and rescue operations. The lynchpin for accomplishing this, according to Scanlon, is that it is first necessary to free women from having the sole responsibility of caring for families in times of crisis.

Part II - Social Construction of Gendered Vulnerability - begins with Hoffman’s, “Eve and Adam Among the Embers: Gender Patterns after the Oakland Berkeley Firestorm,” a compelling personal account of her home’s destruction by the fire and some fascinating observations regarding how both genders retreated into “traditional” roles in the fire’s aftermath. Hoffman’s mix of extremely readable prose - “I was singed into a living laboratory where I could observe the molecules of our society reaggregate from cultural atoms” (p. 61) - with more ‘standard’ social science terminology such as “bilateral consanguinous kinship” (p. 58) is a tour de force of writing skill.

Following Hoffman is no easy task, and Wiest’s “A Comparative Perspective on Household,

Reviews

Gender, and Kinship in Relation to Disaster,” though admirably researched, are informative but dry. However, Wiest’s assertion that the “natural, independent, self-sufficient, functionally efficient, or even morally correct,” nuclear family household does not exist, and his categorization of the policy implications of attempts by disaster personnel to reconstruct such households as “. . . demonstrably sexist, ageist, classist, and racist” (p. 76) is compelling. Only by using such ‘in-your-face’ terms are we likely to see disaster preparedness and management personnel take notice and initiate efforts to make necessary changes to improve their assistance to an affected population’s recovery by, for example, channeling food aid primarily through women in both developed and developing countries.

Fordham and Ketteridge follow Wiest with, “Men Must Work and Women Must Weep: Examining Gender Stereotypes in Disasters,” where they examine how “biological reductionism has implications, not only for how lay men and women act in disasters, but also for organized disaster management” (p. 81). As in several previous chapters, the public-private sphere model of the spaces men and women generally occupy is found to frame the way people expect others to respond to disaster (the authors acknowledge that while many women participate in the public sphere it is often in such a way that their participation is devalued or not validated). Traditional disaster management as a top-down, male-dominated process has the capacity to invade the private domain, leaving women in a particularly precarious position. Women bear increased burdens during and long after a disaster, but because these burdens occur in the private sphere (e.g., increased child care, care of elderly, provision of basic necessities such as washed clothes), their work often goes unrecognized and can even be exacerbated because needs assessments are largely skewed to the public sphere. The authors call for more “emotional first aid” to be made available during and after disaster, not only for women but for men and children who have difficulty asking for such help. It is also argued that women need to be part of any formalized emergency planning and disaster management process.

The topic, “Women and Postdisaster Stress,” is addressed by Ollenburger and Tobin in a study that, although relying on quantitative analysis of a survey instrument, does not simply point out that differences exist between women and men and their response to disaster, but also addresses some of the underlying causes of these differences. Following exhaustive analysis of the survey, the authors conclude that the multifaceted concerns facing women after disaster (e.g., care taking for children and family [including elderly members], employment, finances) cause them to have higher levels of stress. This stress factor is also intertwined with age since women live longer, leaving them even more susceptible to the impacts of a disaster due to age-related health problems and lack of full mobility.

Delica’s “Balancing Vulnerability and Capacity: Women and Children in the Philippines,” begins by outlining a familiar theme, that women (in this case in Philippine society) are disadvantaged at the outset and a disaster only makes their situation worse. The author provides some very reasonable and workable suggestions to reduce the pressures on Philippine women in disaster recovery situations, such as engaging older children in daycare and collective activities, noting that “empowering children empowers women” (p. 111). By making water, health, and sanitation - problems that are usually categorized as female concerns - a priority following a disaster, female stress will be reduced, leaving them with more energy to address other issues such as improving response to and management of disaster situations.

In the section’s final paper, “Domestic Violence After Disaster,” Wilson, Phillips, and Neal point out that increased instances of domestic violence following disaster are predicated on preexisting conditions of gender stratified social, economic, familial, and psychological oppression. In association with this finding, the authors also state that the way organizational personnel perceive the issue of domestic violence prior to a disaster will generally be retained following an event. While they were unable to empirically document the extent of post-disaster domestic violence in the three cities they studied, they advise that intervention programs need to be in place before an event, and their services uninterrupted and possibly increased following disaster in order to reduce the possibility of injury to and/or deaths of individuals who would

Reviews

otherwise not know where to turn for help.

The largest portion of the book resides in Part III - Case Studies of Women Responding to Disaster. Eleven contributions cover a range of disasters that occurred in Pakistan, Australia, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and the US. The data are presented in a variety of forms, from fairly conventional survey analysis concluding with bulleted lists of recommendations and tables of policy strategies to unpretentious first-person accounts concluding with thoughtful suggestions. While this leads to some inconsistency regarding how much "data" can be gleaned from individual chapters in this section, taken en toto one is struck by the consistency with which the authors' call for women to be included in all phases of disaster planning, response, and management, and for policy makers of all sorts to be aware of socioeconomic and cultural processes that create, recreate, and maintain female vulnerability.

The book's conclusion - Toward Gendered Disaster Policy, Practice, and Research - provides three "guideposts" the authors identify as common threads running throughout women's disaster experiences, as well as some thought-provoking ideas to develop new policy directions, new practices for disaster organizations, and new questions for disaster social science. It is here that I found the only noticeable shortcoming of this volume, for I was looking forward to learning how the volume's editors interpreted and summed up the preceding sections and chapters, in re what they stated as their goal in compiling the book. For example, I welcome Fothergill's expansion of the "preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation" mantra which, from the day I entered this field, struck me as rudimentary. There is also little doubt that historic methodologies guiding disaster research were often too simplistic and quantitatively based, so utilizing qualitative methods at least in conjunction with a quantitative approach is preferred. What is still troubling, and as Bolin et al. touch upon, is the notion that research structured by funding agencies does not encourage in-depth analyses of social inequalities. This is an issue that plagues researchers who desire to operationalize in-depth goals. The time constraints we work under in the US model of academic research appear to encourage rapid publication and/or presentation of preliminary results rather than emphasizing the long-term, in-depth analyses. As a case in point, few reading this review would argue, I believe, that the number of conferences we hold in this country are too few!

While the summation that does take place is too subtle and brief to satisfy my curiosity, it in no way detracts from the overall value of this book to the field of disaster literature. I learned a great deal, finding data that confirmed my intuitive, and therefore unexpressed, ideas regarding differences in the ways women and men experience, deal with, and recover from disaster. As a woman, a geographer, and a disaster researcher, I have long been silently intrigued with the issue of gender in association with disaster response. This book presents data that confirms that women suffer disproportionately during all phases of a disaster and that their vulnerability is largely socially contrived, like the goal of researchers, public policy makers, planners, managers, and responders is to positively and effectively impact as many people as possible through their efforts, it is only logical and fair that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. Consequently, professionals need to place women at the forefront of their efforts. This book will help them to begin the process.