





FLOODING AND GENDERED IMPACTS

The Gender Dimensions
of the 2013 Alberta Floods



Christopher Lammiman
403-875-7082
cjlammiman@gmail.com

Presentation Overview

1. Topic Introduction
2. Overview of Gender and Disaster
3. Research Design and Conduct
4. Findings and Discussion
5. Recommendations
6. Conclusion
7. Questions and Dialogue

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

When half of the population is categorically more vulnerable
to natural disasters simply because of gender identity,
is resilience really possible?

OVERVIEW

Gender and Disaster

Relevant Literature

1. Gender and Disaster as Social Constructs
2. Gendered Impacts of Disasters
3. Gender and Disaster Management
4. Gender in Disaster Research
5. Gender and Flooding in Alberta***

Gender and Flooding in Alberta: Historical Context

Although huge advancements have been made in a relatively short period of time, in many ways women are still second-class citizens in Canada:

“Some of this status was the result of male control over women, father’s rights over children, husbands over wives, and male-dominated institutions over all women. Underlying these relationships was a patriarchal understanding of society, shared to a large extent by both sexes. That sense of the innate rights of men has not been overcome entirely, even by the multiple changes in laws and customs, but those changes indicate that the power of patriarchal ideas is diminished (Marsden, 2012; p. 236).”

The Alberta Advantage?

- 127,000 Calgarians considered low-income (9.7% of the population)
- \$124, 838 average household debt
- Racialized and gendered poverty
- High rent and utility costs
- Low vacancy rates for affordable housing
- Women represent 30% of the homeless population

The Alberta Advantage?

Socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes in Alberta also contribute to the marginalization and heightened vulnerability of some populations.

Alberta's history is full of human rights violations and inequalities from legal, social, and political arenas, and only since the 1970s has Alberta's human rights revolution begun to address these injustices.

Discrimination in Alberta against minorities and women has deep roots in social attitudes and legislation.

(Clement, 2013)

The Alberta Advantage?

- 80 years of right-leaning political governance (1935 - 2015)
- Politics and Culture intimately related to religious identity
- Evangelical Christian ethos marked by individualism and personal morality

This religious influence has also impacted political policy, as leaders' theological perspectives led towards antipathy and vilification of collectivism and socialism (Banack, 2014). There has also been a historical precedent in Alberta of human rights abuses including systematized racism, sexism, eugenics, homophobia, and anti-immigration movements, even in recent history (Clément, 2013).

The Flood Experience

June 19 – June 22, 2013:

300mm rain fell on the Bow and Elbow Watersheds, resulting in the largest ever disaster in Alberta.

- 100,000 homes evacuated
- 14,500 homes destroyed
- 5 lives lost
- \$6 billion in damages
- 2000 displaced from homeless shelters and treatment centres
- 287 highly vulnerable women and families displaced
- 30%-70% decrease in funding to service agencies
- 400% increase in demand for family shelters
- 800% increase in demand for NeighborLink services

The Flood Experience

Although both the City of Calgary and the Government of Alberta mention strengthening supports for vulnerable populations in their respective flood recovery frameworks, gender is never mentioned as an important consideration.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY



Central Research Question

How do those who work in gender-focused organizations and agencies
perceive the unique impacts of the 2013 floods on women, young
women, and girls?

Secondary Research Questions

- What unique challenges did women experience in Calgary and Southern Alberta before the flood?
- Beyond direct disaster assistance, was there a change in demand for social services and resources after the flood?
- What unique challenges did women experience as a result of the flood?
- Was there any gender lens placed on response and recovery activities?

Methodological Overview

- Generic or pragmatic qualitative study
- Within an inductive research framework
- Examination of the personal experiences of individuals who work in social service agencies with women

Data Collection

- Semi-structured one-on-one interviews
- In person or by phone.
- 20-45 minutes
- 11 participants
- Series of open ended questions based on the primary and secondary research questions
- Calgary and Area

Participants

- Participants from social service, community development or other social organization
- Based in Calgary, High River, and Bragg Creek

Participants

Participant	Participant Description
1	Volunteer for community outreach initiatives; Volunteered in flood response and recovery activities.
2	Employed at a women's resource organization.
3	Employed at a support agency for women in domestic violence.
4	Employed at a homeless shelter.
5	Employed at a women's resource organization.
6	Employed at a women's emergency shelter and transitional housing agency; Also a municipal employee of a rural flood-impacted town.
7	Employed as a mental health clinician.
8	Employed at a transitional housing agency.
9	Employed as a pastor of a community-focused church in a flood-impacted community.
10	Employed at a support agency for women in domestic violence.
11	Employed as president of the board of directors for a Community Association in a flood-impacted community.

FINDINGS

And Discussion

Findings

So, what were the gender dimensions of the 2013 Alberta Floods?

- 1) Alberta's gender landscape put women in a vulnerable position
- 2) The flood created economic and financial hardship for women, beyond the direct physical impacts of flood damage
- 3) Domestic violence against women increased
- 4) Household dynamics shifted and put added stress on women
- 5) Women suffered from unique mental health impacts
- 6) Women adopted important and unique roles in the recovery process
- 7) Response and recovery operations lacked a gender lens, reinforcing gendered inequity

1) Alberta's Gender Landscape

Cultural Attitudes

Participants felt that religious and political conservatism played a large part in heightening women's vulnerability

Socio-economic Vulnerability

Participants described women in Alberta as being more susceptible to poverty and income disparity

1) Alberta's Gender Landscape

"The Buckle of the Canadian Bible Belt"

"I definitely think that women face unique challenges. I don't think they are well understood; [Alberta is] pretty conservative. I don't think there's a lot of understanding or validation that women face unique challenges...I don't think there's a lot of acknowledgement of gender roles or challenges for women."

1) Alberta's Gender Landscape

“[Alberta] has the among highest rates of domestic violence in the country. And I think a huge part of that comes from ingrained values and beliefs about the role of women, and the role of family, and patriarchy, and all of that. And being someone who has lived in multiple other provinces, it is much more prevalent in Alberta than in any other place that I've lived.”

“I think in Calgary there is a willingness to look at and celebrate how far women have come, but less support for looking at how far we still have to go in terms of adequately supporting women.”

2) ECONOMIC IMPACTS

“I think the biggest impact was a higher demand for food...People in the flood zone lost power, and so they'd lost everything in their freezer. And when you're low income, everything in your freezer is important.”

2) Economic Impacts

- Lack of Housing and Increased Displacement
- Impacts to Social Supports

“I remember one woman, who was a single mother, coming in and telling me that she had called in to tell her work she couldn’t make it, because her childcare option was shut down for the day because of flooding so she had to stay home with her kids. Her job ended up firing her for not showing up, and then she was back scrambling to make financial ends meet.”

2) Economic Impacts

Impacts to Social Supports

“We had no electricity...At the time we had our server here, and no way to access it to let any of our clients know that we were shut down...It meant we couldn't get emails and our phones were totally down...I think we learnt a lot about having some way to manage from off-site – at least to get in touch with our clients to let them know. Because on top of all the other anxiety that clients are feeling, they don't need to feel like the agency they're relying on has disappeared.”

3) Increased Risk: Domestic Violence

Participants who worked with women experiencing domestic violence said that demand for services doubled immediately following the flood. This was the case both for individual peer support as well as demand for curriculum-based programming. They also noted that the doubled volume had not diminished since the time of the flood.

4) Shifting Household Dynamics

“Women who already disproportionately end up doing much of the care work in their families...were put under more pressure to do so.”

“She said that she felt like she was letting her family down because she could not be there for her kids, she had to work extra hours to make ends meet, she had to sort out insurance, her husband had to work...so it just put a lot of strain on this woman.”

4) Shifting Household Dynamics

“Some of our clients who were living below the poverty line and had been affected by the flood got those displaced flood dollars, so all of the sudden a family that’s never had money could have like four or five thousand dollars...Now you have an abusive partner, who has a different intention than to make the family whole again, who is spending that money. And so that exacerbates any tension that exists within the family...or you’re gambling to manage that stress... addictions to manage that stress, you know?”

5) MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS

“There was a huge mental health impact to people, myself included. Like, I still have difficulty talking about the flood without crying, and it’s been two and a half years, and I wasn’t flooded.”

5) Mental Health Impacts

“I had my own career ambitions that were big and was still trying to get everybody to four hockey practices a week and commute two hours a day and do most of the signing of permission slips and it’s, like, unmanageable. And I feel like I’m fighting for every rung on the ladder... So the flood for me was this cue that I couldn’t continue.”

6) Women's Capacity

- Not all of the impacts of the flood to women were negative, and this is an important point, because it would be a mistake to interpret these findings as meaning that women are helpless victims of disasters
- Much of the long-term recovery that is happening at grassroots levels in flood-impacted communities is being done mostly by women

7) GENDER-BLIND RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

“There wasn’t a gender focus.”

7) Gender-Blind Response and Recovery

“If you don’t put a gendered lens on a natural disaster...you’re never going to create equity...For women; for women with children; for aboriginal women. And so around the floods I would say there was no gender lens placed on it.”

“I highly doubt [any of the agencies] were approaching the response with a gender-consciousness. I think they were doing the best they could to respond in practical ways, but I don’t think that deeper conversation would be happening.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Disaster and Emergency Management

1) Apply a Gender Lens to Emergency Management Operations

- At all stages of the disaster cycle
- Provide specialized care for women
- Mainstream gender issues
- Empower women's perspectives in decision-making

2) Employ an Equity Model over an Equality Model

- Interagency collaboration
- Funnel resources toward existing organizations
- Focus on vulnerable populations

3) Provide for Women's Choice

- Provide women's-only spaces in shelters
- Offer gender-specific resources and support groups

4) Mainstream Mental Health Issues

- Destigmatize mental health needs, especially for men
- Expand care beyond primary impacts
- Build better partnerships with agencies in communities
- Provide gender-targeted information

5) Streamline Access to Assistance

- Fewer “hoops” to jump through
- Allocate resources for helping people navigate assistance
- Eliminate jargon
- Partner with existing supports services

6) Train Community Groups and Service Agencies

- Offer training, planning guides, and resources
- Build relationships and networks
- Mainstream gender issues and other special considerations

7) Continue the Journey

- Stay actively connected to the community
- Develop assessment and feedback processes
- Empower community groups

8) Focus on Capacities

- Work towards gender parity
- Empower women-led grassroots initiatives.

CONCLUSION

“I think it could be harder to be a woman in Alberta
than anywhere else [in Canada].”

A FINAL RECOMMENDATION

Practice “Small Acts of Humanity”

“To me, that’s the outcome I’m interested in...Can we react and respond to people in a way that honours their humanity and makes space for that among the chaos? I think gender is one of those things that for some people it’s maybe not that important, but for those people who do think its important it could be the difference between having more struggles and coming away from the experience feeling respected and valued as a human.”

QUESTIONS?

And Dialogue

