

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND THE MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF DISASTERS

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DISASTER VULNERABILITY IS GROWING

- Increasing Number of Disasters / Victims
- New Species of Trouble
- Chronic Disasters on the Rise
- Larger Number of Fatalities

Globalization of Disasters

- Reduction in Cultural and Adaptive Heterogeneity
- Global Human Footprint (climate change)
- Increase in Complexity of Societies
- Increase in Global Interdependence

POPULATIONS VULNERABLE IN DISASTERS

- Low-income populations
- Less-developed Communities, Regions
- Children & Older Individuals
- Ethnic Groups, People of Color
- Seriously ill, Mentally ill, and People with Disabilities

DEFINITIONS OF VULNERABILITY

Social, political, and economic forces and practices channel and distribute disaster risk and susceptibility within a society, and this is the essence of vulnerability (Oliver-Smith, 2004).

Vulnerability is the degree of internal risk and susceptibility of societies, as well as the level of resistance and resilience to disasters (McEntire, 2004).

Environments

Physical
(natural, built,
technological)

Social Organizational
(psychological, cultural)

Environmental

Liabilities

Risk

Susceptibility

Attributes

VULNERABILITY

Capabilities

Resistance

Resilience

Adapted from McEntire (2004)

DESIGNING DISASTERS

- Physical and Environmental Hazards are Inevitable, but not Controllable.
- Social relationships of dominance, oppression, and poverty are inscribed in the natural environment, leading to an unequal distribution of resources, risk, and resistance to disaster (Oliver-Smith, 2004).
- Disaster Mitigation Can Only Take Place through Vulnerability Reduction.

Social Work and Vulnerability

- Vulnerability is when a population, such as an ethnic group, is unable to control adverse forces in their social and physical environments (Oliver-Smith, 2004).
- Populations vulnerable to disasters often vulnerable to anxiety, depression, crime, poor housing, other adverse events.

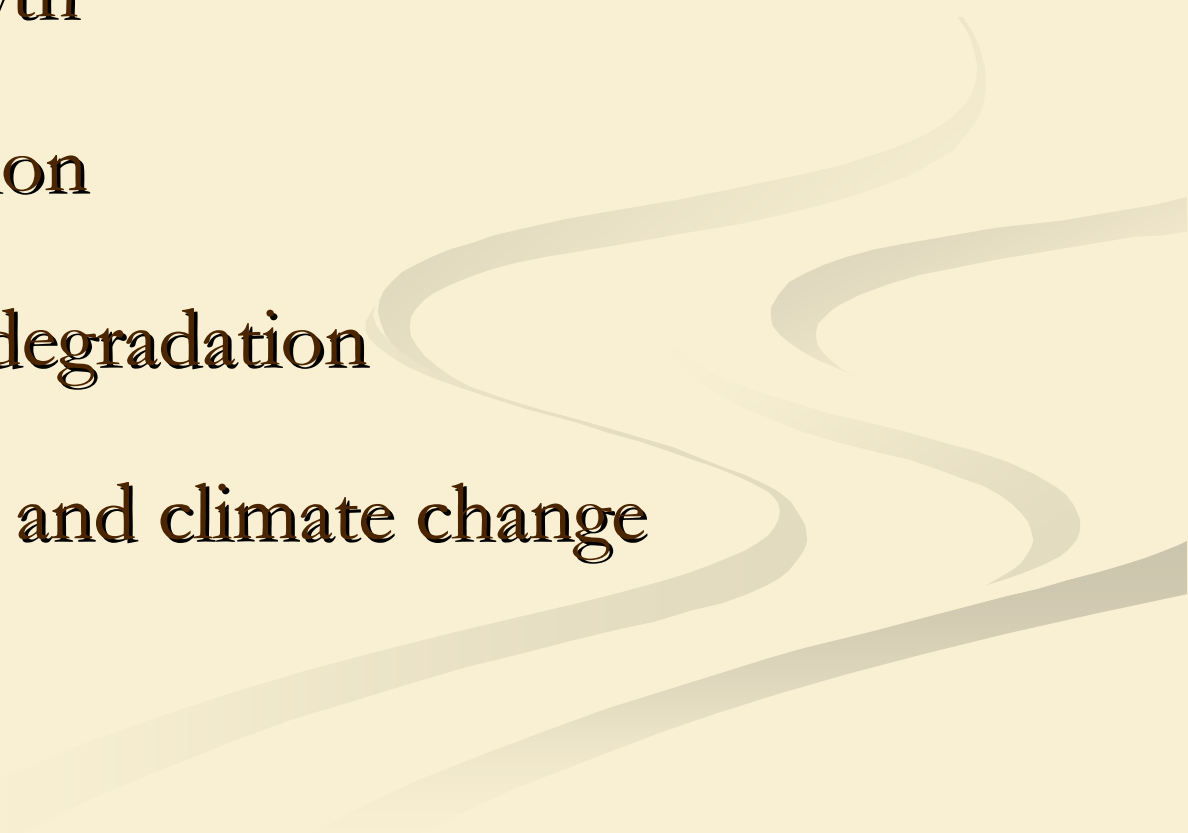
Societal Causes of Vulnerability

“In order to analyze vulnerability as part of wider societal patterns, we need to identify the deep-rooted and underlying causes of disaster vulnerability and the mechanisms and dynamic processes that transform these into insecure conditions”. (Cardona 2004, p. 49).

Specific Causes

- **Poverty**
- **Low Levels of Development**
- **Concentration of Pops. In Disaster Areas**
- **Lack of Provision of Basic Needs**
- **Social Exclusion or Marginality**

MECHANISMS TRANSFORMING CAUSES INTO VULNERABILITY

- Population growth
 - Rapid urbanization
 - Environmental degradation
 - Global warming and climate change
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FACTORS INCREASING RESILIENCE

- Social Development
- Adequate Coordination of Disaster Mgmt.
- Accessible Disaster Services
- High Capacity of Civil Society for EM
- Political Stability
- A Robust Economy
- Organizational Base to Improve Consensus and Voice for Local People

DISASTER AND EVERYDAY VULNERABILITY

- **Global vulnerability** is combination of disaster vulnerability and everyday vulnerability
- **Long-term state of disaster** for Poor populations living at subsistence level
- **Minor hazard** can be enough to push people below the absolute poverty level and threaten their survival.
- **Disaster resistant communities:** Impoverished populations have reduced access to resources to promote mitigation

RESEARCH ON USA COMMUNITY AND VULNERABILITY

- **73 Organizations** Provide Disaster Services
- **67 Respond** to Questionnaire (92% return)
- **Disaster Scenario** (Category 3 Hurricane)
- **Questionnaire Items** (1) Organizational Characteristics, (2) Preparedness, (3) Disaster Services Capacity, and (4) Network Interaction in Disasters

VULNERABILITY OF POPULATIONS

- **Older Individuals (75+), Low HH Wealth, African-American, Female Headed HH with Young Children (< 5)**
- **Limited Access to Disaster Services With Higher Capacities: Well-managed Volunteers, Volunteer Participation, Staff and Organizational Experience in Disasters, # Trained Volunteers, # Disaster Mental Health Volunteers, agency Preparedness, Service Capacity, Services for Special Populations**

Evacuation and Vulnerability

- **Older Population** (> 75 years old) had lowest access to Evacuation Services
- **Organizational Evacuation Capacity** is (a) **Org. Able to Receive Referrals** for Evacuation, and (b) **Transportation** for Special Populations
- **Number of Different Types** of Agencies Linked to the Focal Agency, and **Client- and Relationship-Centered Service Delivery** Best Predictors of Evacuation Capacity

New Theory Content for Social Work Education

- **Distributive Injustice** (Soliman & Rogge, 2002),
Market Exclusion as Vulnerability
- **Conceptual Understanding** of Vulnerability
- **Components of Vulnerability:** Risk, Susceptibility, Resistance, and Resilience Strengths Perspective:
Vulnerability is Buffered by Resilience of Populations
- **Biopsychosocial Perspective:** Vulnerability (e.g. illness) and Disaster Management (multiple levels of disaster impact and intervention)

Practice Strategies and Vulnerability

- **Organizational:** Larger Service Range, Client-Centered Service Delivery, Location Proximate to Clients, Use of GIS,
- **Network and Community:** Greater Different Types of Linked Orgs, Inclusion of Less-Formal Orgs., Coordination of Network, Promote Volunteerism

Effects of Education and Training

- Creating a common purpose for coordination
- Joint training increases cooperative links
- Number of different types of linked organizations, and evacuation capacity, increase
- Informal organizations serve vulnerable populations

New Theory and Vulnerable Populations

- **Poverty and Social Exclusion** are Primary Causes of Vulnerability, Reduce Resilience
- **Community Theory:** Highly Functioning Local Government, Strong Disaster Agency Base, Coordinated System, Mitigation Projects Reduce Vulnerability
- **Human Ecology:** Segregation / Concentration in Inner City, Older Infrastructures, Lower Social Capital, Support Network Impoverished

Social Worker Uniquely Qualified

- Historical Mission Serving Vulnerable Populations (Minahan & Pincus, 1977)
- Advocates for Poor, Isolated Populations
- Biopsychosocial Perspective Needed: Disasters Affect Each Component
- Micro to Macro Integration Needed Because Disaster Affects Many Systems
- Social Workers Expert Communicators, Relationship Builders, for Integration and Coordination