



E53 Interpersonal Violence (IPV) — The Disaster After the Disaster

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The goals of this presentation are to: (1) demonstrate the widespread prevalence of IPV following disasters; (2) describe the reasons IPV and sexual assault increase following a disaster; (3) discuss the impact of IPV citing exemplars from several disasters (Haiti, Hugo, Lo Prieta earthquake); and, (4) provide strategies to incorporate interventions that will improve safety and decrease violence after disasters/conflicts for populations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by acquainting the audience with the prevalence of IPV. Some of the causes, examples, and suggested interventions to prevent IPV will also be provided.

Thousands of disasters occur annually, and by the very definition are disruptive to communities. Vulnerable populations are even more susceptible when the structure of community is strained or collapses. No matter what the disaster, whether it is a natural event, a technological incident, or a combination of the two, there is the potential for an increase in IPV that must be recognized and addressed. Disasters are public health occurrences, at times life threatening, with a magnitude paralleling shortages of water, food, or vector-borne disease.

What happens following a disaster is a disruption of the normalcy of everyday life. The rate of gender-based violence (including sexual assault and domestic violence) in Mississippi rose from 4.6 per 100,000 per day, when Hurricane Katrina hit the state, to 16.3 per 100,000 per day a year later, when many women remained displaced from their homes and were living in temporary shelters and trailers. More recently, New Zealand police reported a 53% increase in callouts to domestic violence incidents over the weekend of the Canterbury earthquake in April 2010.

Factors contributing to sexual violence that can be resource deficient or of a cultural nature include: male perpetrator dominance over female victims, psychological and emotional abuse in refugee camps, absence of support systems for protection, and alcohol and drug abuse. Homelessness and unemployment are characteristic during the recovery period. Displaced populations also suffer from politically motivated violence against refugees because of a lack of physical protection; safety in these situations is absent. Disasters cause impoverishment, which can induce some people to adopt negative coping strategies, including transactional sex. There may be an increase in child/early marriages and trafficking in disasters. One agency, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), is proactively working to mitigate violence by developing guidelines to respond to sexual violence.

Social determinants may be categorized as individual, intimate relationship, community, and social. Victims seeking assistance encounter resistance by the reversal of the problem to the victim. Reports found the following: Is it right to deny or forgive men's violence? Resources to diffuse violence can be family, who may be ignored, accused of over-reacting, and blamed for not caring well enough for their men; and lack of adequate response from health professionals and appropriate referrals. Poor awareness of trauma-informed care and the prevalence of IPV by responders hinders victim interventions and the development of mechanisms for collecting data, training staff, and developing policies.

Several notable references were documented in which marginalized communities were the sites of widespread violence. The occurrence of violence is a global problem. There was nearly triple the number of child abuse allegations in the first three months following Hurricane Hugo in 1989; after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the rate



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of intimate partner violence increased to three times the national average. One year following the earthquake in Haiti, every one of the women and girls interviewed had been directly involved or had witnessed transactional sex (i.e., providing sex for food, security, or other necessities). Following the Black Saturday bushfires in Australia in 2009, reports of domestic violence were directly related to the bushfires. New Zealand police reported a 53% rise in domestic violence after the Canterbury earthquake.

Humanitarian aid and civil protection are priorities following any Mass Casualty Incident (MCI); disasters can become focal points to leverage upgrades within populations. Effective planning must ensure processes to prevent IPV, to identify and provide safety for everyone, and sufficient resources. Sustainable development is possible if leadership establishes mechanisms for communication between the community and the government. The outcome is to have an environment without violence.

IPV, Sexual Assault, Disaster