

PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN DISASTERS

	<p>What is a disaster and what does it have to do with sexual violence?</p>		
<p>A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impact that exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.¹</p>			

 	<p>This includes natural disasters and human-caused disasters.²</p>
------	--

	<p>The conditions created by disasters and public health emergencies increase risk factors of sexual violence. Those who use violence will often take advantage of the vulnerabilities created by disasters.³</p>
--	--

<p>We can prepare for the challenges disasters create. We can increase connective factors, strengthen our communities, and be ready to provide help when needed.</p>		
--	--	--

	<p>Disasters do not affect everyone in the same way, because many of our systems make things worse for some people more than others. For example, people who are already experiencing housing security will experience hardships during a disaster.⁴</p>
--	---

	<p>When an entire system, including the laws, policies, and practices of that system, make things worse for some people and better for others, that is called oppression. This inequity means that the systems we rely on during disasters might not help everyone equally. This puts entire groups of people more at risk when disasters happen.</p>

<p>Our current systems are shaped by the past, and impact us today. Historically, legal practices in the United States allowed slavery and encouraged destroying Indigenous communities and their homes, languages, and cultural practices and structures.⁵</p>	
--	------

<p>Currently, some states have made it difficult or illegal to access safe and accessible reproductive healthcare, which is a necessity for sexual violence survivors. Some states have made it illegal to support transgender people, who are at greater risk of sexual violence because of transphobia.</p>		
---	--	--

	<p>This legislation even applies to educators and doctors. Some states have made it illegal to provide transportation to a person who is undocumented, a group that is already shut out of many support systems.</p>
--	--

	<p>There are even disasters that are ongoing but not taken seriously by our laws and systems, like COVID-19. In addition to so many forms of violence that erase various Indigenous cultural knowledge and practices, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused many Indigenous communities to lose the wisdom of elders who have died from COVID.^{6,7}</p>
--	---

<p>Also, many people who are immunocompromised are no longer able to access support services now that measures to protect against COVID have been discarded.⁸</p>
--

<p>What does this mean for disaster planning?</p> <p><i>Take oppression into account.</i> This is vital for those working to prevent sexual violence, because oppression is a systemic root cause of sexual violence.⁹ Oppression can show up in our policies or practices and we may not even notice it. This is because many things that are considered normal in the United States uphold oppression, even if they don't reflect our personal values.¹⁰</p>	
---	----------

<p>Change our work. Working to prevent sexual violence by doing what we can to remove inequities and end oppression might mean that our organization and our work become very different, and that is okay. Here are some questions we can ask to learn how we can change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have we done to make sure everyone has easy, reliable, and private ways to get help from us? This includes ensuring access to the internet or the ability to get online. • Are our services offered in the languages and cultural practices that people need? • How do we make sure our resources and services will remain available during disasters? Do we have many ways of funding our work, so we are dependable and flexible? • What needs do people have before they can focus on healing from sexual violence? And how can we help make sure that people have what they need, whether that is housing, money, internet access, or social connection? These needs are always important, and they become essential during disasters. 	
---	------

	<p>Build Community. Community connectedness is a protective factor which may lessen the likelihood of sexual violence perpetration or victimization. Building a connected community can help prevent sexual violence during disasters. We can create communities that exist outside of harmful systems, where safety comes from each other.</p>
--	--

 	<p>These communities can be places where people are helping each other out, making sure people have what they need, as well as building positive connections and enjoying being in community together. We can learn from communities that are already doing this.</p>
------	---

<p>Currently, the needs of the few determine social and political policy. We need to envision a way of life where all have access to resources that are equitably shared across all races and cultures and construct the structures that will support that.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A note:¹¹ The idea that each field is separate from each other is called "siloeing." The movement to end sexual violence is connected to other movements - like environmental justice, labor organizing, reproductive justice, and economic justice. This means that we must break down the silos that keep our work separate, diversifying and building our funding so we can be flexible when needed. Recognizing these connections can make it easier to work together to end oppression and make our communities thriving spaces that are prepared for disasters. 	
--	--------------

	<p>What do we need in our movements to end sexual violence?</p> <p>We can learn from past disasters to know how to move forward. We may learn that our own work has contributed to harm. We can be accountable to each other about our individual and collective history and answer honestly whether we are learning lessons or recreating harm in our work. From here, we can make the changes we need.</p>
--	---

<p>It is important to learn lessons from past disasters. What went right and was helpful for people, and what went wrong and was not helpful? We can listen to the people who were most hurt by disaster responses. We can pay attention to people most impacted who are talking about the disasters we are living through right now.</p>	
---	----------

	<p>We are stronger when we work together. There is no better time than right now. We can work together toward dismantling oppression and build systems that prioritize everyone's well-being. We can make the big changes that are needed.</p>
--	--

<p>Have courage to influence the systems and policies to ensure resources are equitably shared, and that racial and gender-based violence is eliminated in all its forms.</p>	
---	--

	<p>For more information, visit the NSVRC's Sexual Violence in Disasters Resource page: www.nsvrc.org/sexual-violence-disasters</p>
--	---

References

- ¹ United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. (2009). *2009 UNISDR Terminology on disaster risk reduction*. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. <https://www.undrr.org/publication/2009-unisdr-terminology-disaster-risk-reduction>
- ² National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2021). *Sexual violence in disasters*. <https://www.nsvrc.org/resource/2500/sexual-violence-disasters>
- ³ Klein, A. (2008). *Sexual violence in disasters: A planning guide for prevention and response*. Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault & National Sexual Violence Resource Center. <https://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications/sexual-violence-disasters-planning-guide-prevention-and-response>
- ⁴ Sexual Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2017). Greater impact: How disasters affect people of low socioeconomic status. *Supplemental Research Bulletin*. https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/srb-low-ses_2.pdf
- ⁵ McCoy, M. (Producer). (n.d.). Inseparable separations: Slavery and Indian removal (Episode 13, Season 2) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Teaching Hard History*. Southern Poverty Law Center, Learning for Justice. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/podcasts/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/inseparable-separations-slavery-and-indian-removal>
- ⁶ Healy, J. (2021, January 12). Tribal elders are dying from the pandemic, causing a cultural crisis for American Indians. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/12/us/tribal-elders-native-americans-coronavirus.html>
- ⁷ Chatterjee, R. (2021, November 24). Hit hard by COVID, Native Americans come together to protect families and elders. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/11/24/1058675230/hit-hard-by-covid-native-americans-come-together-to-protect-families-and-elders>
- ⁸ McNamee, K., & Brown, A. (2023, May 11). End of COVID public health emergency brings uncertainty for immunocompromised people. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/11/1175609455/end-of-covid-public-health-emergency-brings-uncertainty-for-immunocompromised-pe>
- ⁹ Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect. (n.d.). *Oppression & sexual violence* [Webpage]. <https://pcar.org/about-sexual-violence/oppression-sexual-violence>
- ¹⁰ Okun, T. (2021). *White supremacy culture characteristics*. White Supremacy Culture. <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>
- ¹¹ Guy, L. (2006, Fall). Re-visioning the sexual violence continuum. *Partners in Social Change*. Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. <https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/re-visioning-the-sexual-violence-continuum.pdf>