



Disaster & Emergency Preparedness and Response for the Gender-Based Violence Field

Fact Sheet



Gender-based violence (GBV) * is a critical issue facing communities affected by disasters.**

At the same time, disasters can also have a distinctly challenging impact on those individuals already traumatized by violence.

Available data underscore that women, girls, and gender-expansive folks become particularly vulnerable to sexual and domestic violence during and following a disaster.

- **Seventy percent** of women experience gender-based violence in humanitarian or crisis contexts, compared to the global average of 30 percent. In the aftermath of some climate emergencies, a **three-fold increase** in domestic violence cases has been reported (IDLO & GWI, 2022).

Many claimed, especially at the early stages of the pandemic, that COVID-19 was the “great equalizer” or that “we were all in this together.”

- The reality is that the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) brought to the forefront the **historical inequities** that have existed in the United States since its inception.
- Black Americans died of COVID-19 at **three times the rate** of white people (Reed, 2020).
- When COVID-19 vaccinations rolled out, Black Americans had **less access** to the vaccine as compared to white Americans (Recht & Weber, 2021).

Large-scale emergency situations often increase economic hardship and exacerbate GBV survivors’ financial instability, leaving them feeling trapped in unsafe environments and without basic necessities.

- A 2022 study found that **1 in 4 survivors** reported that the harm they had been subjected to started or got worse during Winter Storm Uri. In this sample, **25% of survivors** reported the winter storm led to increased economic abuse or threats of economic abuse. The main need reported by survivors affected by this disaster was access to **unrestricted cash** (FreeFrom).
- Research also shows that **survivors of color have been dramatically harmed by racism, economic inequity, and COVID-19.**
 - Black and Brown women survivors were at the greatest risk of being unable to pay their bills due to the financial impacts of COVID-19. Survivors who lack financial resources during the pandemic were at greater risk of going back to someone who harmed them (Ruíz, Ruvalcaba, Berenstein, & Fluegeman, 2020).
 - For girls, especially Black and Brown girls and gender-expansive youth, multiple factors including isolation, economic insecurity, increased caretaking responsibilities, and the prevalence of stress and anxiety during COVID-19 have destabilized their sense of safety and ability to thrive (Lu, Michelsen, & Cooper, 2021).

How can anti-violence advocates and organizations best prepare and respond to disaster and emergency situations?

1

Start by listening and leading with the experiences and voices of survivors.

From disaster/emergency preparedness to response and all phases in between, advocates and service providers must recognize the strengths of the communities we serve, how they are experts in their own realities and needs, and how they are able to leverage the strengths and resources that are available to them.

2

Bring visibility to and leverage communities' experiences of collective resilience and strength, including solidarity practices such as mutual aid.

Despite the many challenges that families and communities face in disaster situations, the role that they play in the rebuilding of their communities and in showing up for each other cannot be understated. Alongside fear, despair, and uncertainty during crisis situations, our communities also experience an abundance of connectedness, support, and hope.

“[Women] have been on the ground, from the very beginning, doing everything from trudging through the post-Katrina sludge, lending their sweat to the rescue and clean-up efforts, to organizing family, friends, and neighbors to push through seemingly impossible odds to make sure their communities were saved, and not erased from existence. They have done their part. They now deserve, at the very least, to have their voices heard, their needs addressed, and to be assured that future disasters will not replicate many of the horrors that they have in fact endured. Through their voices, we hope to learn, take those lessons to heart, and then properly plan for those disasters yet to come.” - Jones-DeWeever in [Women in the Wake of the Storm](#)

3

Creatively allocate new and existing funds to ensure that successful services and solutions adapted during emergency situations continue and even expand.

For example, adapted services and innovative practices launched or strengthened during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as [mobile advocacy](#), [telehealth services and virtual operations](#), have proven beneficial for survivors by eliminating barriers such as the need for transportation, extra time for transportation, and childcare.

4

Work to dismantle systems of oppression.

In the context of emergencies and disasters – and beyond – our work as advocates, service providers and social change agents involves understanding the connections between national and human-made crises and systems of oppression. And we must work to dismantle these systems through social change efforts that promote compassion, respect, equity, and peace.

5

Recognize advocates as essential workers.

Advocacy during a major crisis is extremely difficult. One key lesson from COVID-19 is that organizations in the gender-based violence field must [prioritize the health, safety and wellbeing of advocates](#) in order to adequately sustain support services during a public health emergency. And keep in mind that 1 in 2 service providers working in our movement is a survivor themselves. [This means that supporting service providers is supporting survivors.](#) See [#Care4Advocates: COVID-19 Resources to Support Advocates' Well-being](#).

“We’re on the frontline so we can keep our community members safe.” - Zakiya Bell-Rogers, advocate

What is #1Thing you are going to do today to disrupt oppressive systems before crisis strikes again?

For more information, see VAWnet's [Special Collection: Disaster and Emergency Preparedness and Response for the Gender-Based Violence Field](#), which highlights the disproportionate vulnerability of historically marginalized groups to gender-based violence in disaster and emergency situations. Included in this collection are selected materials and resources that can be used by domestic and sexual violence organizations to increase their preparedness for and response to major disasters and emergencies.

This fact sheet was developed by Patty Branco as a companion to the Special Collection, published by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence in May 2024.

References

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Endnotes

* "Gender-based violence" (GBV) includes sexual and physical violence, intimate partner violence, forced and/or coerced prostitution, child and/or forced marriage, and trafficking for sexual exploitation and/or forced/domestic labor. GBV impacts women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals (e.g., trans girls and women, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people) disproportionately.

** The terms "disaster" and "emergency" are being used broadly to refer to major traumatic events and crisis situations, including a global pandemic, that are either natural or human caused.

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