

Disaster Rape: Vulnerability of Women to Sexual Assaults During Hurricane Katrina

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The relative lack of status, power, and resources put many women at risk of being sexually assaulted during Hurricane Katrina. Controversy still remains regarding the actual incidence of rapes that took place and are still occurring. The “Katrina Disaster” represents a multi-impact series of catastrophes (i.e., Hurricane Katrina, several levee breeches, an oil spill, a chemical storage facility explosion, and Hurricane Rita) that together have produced cumulative disaster effects unlike any in the history of the United States. The complete breakdown of law and order during the early phases of the Katrina Disaster, when normal crime reporting mechanisms were non-existent, created an atmosphere for the emergence of rumors about rape and other crimes that were widely distributed in the media only to be later recanted. Even though many early reports were dismissed, sexual assaults did occur. This study examines official reports, victim self-reports, and narratives of first-responders and victim advocates regarding rapes and other sexual assaults that occurred during Katrina and its aftermath in New Orleans and other areas where storm victims evacuated. This paper contributes to disaster research by capturing the unique characteristics of the Katrina Disaster and identifying the special vulnerabilities of women during different phases of this multi-disaster event.

Singer and songwriter, Charmaine Neville, daughter of Charles Neville of the famous Neville Brothers rock and soul band, describes how she and others from New Orleans’ Ninth Ward sought shelter on the roof of a school after the waters started rising on the night of August 31, 2005, two days after Hurricane Katrina struck. An obviously distraught Neville tells her story of being raped in an impromptu meeting in an interview

with Archbishop Alfred Hughes of the Archdiocese of New Orleans on a local television station (Worrall 2005; Lauer 2005):

I had lain down and gone to sleep and somebody woke me up. They put their hand over my mouth, and a knife to my throat, and said....‘If you don’t do what I want, I’m gonna kill you and then I’ll do what I want to you anyway and throw your body over the side of the building.’

I found some police officers. I told them that a lot of us had been raped down there by guys who had come [into]...the neighborhood, where we were, that were helping us to save people. But the other men, they came and they started raping women...and they started killing them. And I don’t know who these people were. I’m not going to tell you I know who they were because I don’t. But what I want people to understand is that if we had not been left down there like the animals that they were treating us like, all of those things wouldn’t have happened.

Neville’s willingness to discuss her rape publicly has served several purposes. It shows that despite early dismissals of initial violent crime reports, including sexual assaults, taking place during the hurricane, which were later found to be exaggerated, such offenses did indeed occur. Neville’s self-report of rape has encouraged other disaster rape victims to report their sexual assaults to various self-help or counseling and rape crisis groups in the region. This at a minimum has produced some victimization statistics in the absence of early and even later official reports from law enforcement agencies. Neville also made several public service announcements in March and April 2006 in Louisiana and Texas urging rape victims to report their rapes to victim advocates. As self-reports and official reports of rapes of women emerge from Katrina, researchers will be in a better position to understand women’s heightened exposure to risk at each phase of the catastrophe.

The purpose of the present research is to examine qualitative accounts of women who have been reporting their sexual assaults, which have taken place during various phases of Katrina and related events. We cast these accounts within the framework of well-developed social research and literature, which emphasizes the “gendered nature” of disasters and the exposure of risks that some women experience as a result of factors such as gender inequality, lack of resources, lack of mobility, and loss of social support structures (Fothergill 1996). Although we utilize some victim narratives from official police reports of disaster-related rapes in this study, much of our data comes from rape victims’ self-reports obtained from victim advocate groups, faith-based counseling groups, domestic violence and other grass-roots community programs that arose in response to the storm to help rape victims.

Our intent in this research is not to try to provide some specific number, volume, or rate of storm-facilitated rapes that occurred (and are still occurring). This may be challenging, even under the best circumstances, because rape is a grossly underreported crime (Rennison 2002). Rather, we seek to gain insight into the circumstances and

situations that led to the sexual victimization of women who reported their rapes at some time during the disaster.

Due to the damage inflicted by the hurricane and other events that followed, and the subsequent non-operation and/or disruption of regular public health and safety services and emergency channels through which crimes are reported, statistics on all crimes, including rapes, are not available, especially in the early stages of the disaster. In many cases, after a rape occurred there was simply no one for the victim to report the incident. In a number of instances, as we have found, when a rape was reported to a first-responder such as a police officer, an official statement was not taken because of other life-threatening priorities. Some women tried reporting their rapes to various volunteers but, of course, these individuals were in no position to document the offense or otherwise offer help. We have also uncovered cases of women who were raped in the New Orleans area and later attempted to report their victimizations to law enforcement agencies in the towns and cities where they evacuated and were told that “courtesy reports” were not being taken. They were instructed to report their rapes to the respective law enforcement agencies where the assaults took place. Of course, for a substantial period of time, especially during the early phases of the disaster, this was impossible. Many of these evacuees have never returned to New Orleans. We also found that in some cases, female evacuees experienced their sexual assaults after evacuating to other cities in Louisiana or other states.

Preliminary results (based on the first six months) of a recently established Internet survey of sexual violence in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center indicate that 47 cases of sexual assault were reported. Findings show that 93% of the perpetrators were male with the remainder unspecified. Close to 40% of the perpetrators were strangers to the victims/survivors, 9% were family members, 9% were current or former intimate partners, 25% were acquaintances, and about 30% were unspecified or other. About 60% of the sexual assaults were reported to law enforcement agencies. Approximately 93% of the victims were female. The victims’ ages ranged as follows: 14% were age 14 and below, 36% were age 15 to 24, 30% were age 25 to 44, and 20% were age 45 and over. Ninety-five percent of the victims were “disaster victims,” 3% were members of host family households, with the remainder unspecified. About 45% of the victims/survivors were Caucasian, 33% African American, 11% Hispanic, 7% Native American, and the remainder unspecified. The location of the sexual assaults included evacuation sites or shelters (31%); victims’ homes (10%); hosts’ homes (13%), streets/open areas (13%); public buildings (other than shelters) (10%); and other places such as hotels, perpetrators’ homes, or cars (23%) (National Sexual Violence Resource Center 2006).

The crime of rape, perhaps more than any other violent offense, avails itself of the vast human vulnerabilities associated with natural and human-made disasters. Obviously the type of disaster, the degree of disaster preparedness and emergency planning, the efficiency level of social control agents’ operations, as well as the extent of communities’ disorganization and destruction and relative length of recovery time all have an influence on the nature of criminal opportunities associated with a specific disaster. What made the “Katrina Disaster” unique was the fact that it actually represented a multi-impact series of catastrophic events, comprised of the impact of Hurricane Katrina, the breach of several levees in the city and subsequent flooding, a major oil spill, a chemical storage facility explosion, a complete breakdown of law and

order for several days, the impact of Hurricane Rita followed by more flooding in the city, and nearly 100 tornados across the region. It may be that conditions that were conducive for crimes such as rape have not existed to this magnitude in modern times in America.

Disaster Rape Literature Review

An extensive literature search on disaster-related rape or sexual assaults suggests that few studies in the United States have empirically examined rape during periods of disasters, thus making it difficult to speculate about the prevalence of this crime in relation to other disasters. One exception to this is a study in which researchers examined pre- and post-event rates of rape in a 1994 Northridge, California earthquake (Siegel, Bourque, and Shoaf 1999). Their findings suggest that there may be an increased risk of rape after an earthquake; however, their results have been subjected to other interpretations because of the small number of rapes reported. It has even been difficult to find media accounts of rapes taking place during or after event-specific disasters in the United States. Other than anecdotal references or occasional mention in historical or documentary accounts of disasters such as hurricanes prior to Katrina, rape has largely not been the focus of discussion in disaster literature. Domestic/intimate violence (e.g., battering and verbal “loss of control”), which purportedly increases after natural disasters in the U.S. and Canada (Norris 2006; Clemens and Hietala 1999; Godino and Coble 1995; Laudisio 1993; Centers for Disease Control 1992), has been treated by some scholars. However, empirical studies of disaster-related domestic/intimate battering are minimal (Fothergill 1999; Morrow and Enarson 1996). In her book, *Emergency Preparedness in British Columbia: Mitigating Violence Against Women in Disasters*, Elaine Enarson claims, “Violence against women has only very recently been examined in North American contexts. Social impact studies often consider such factors as alcohol abuse, looting, truancy, interpersonal conflict, and post traumatic stress, but they rarely investigate the incidence of gender violence after disasters” (1999b, 13).

An international literature search on disaster-related rape suggests there is documented evidence that women (and children) are victims of violent crimes, including rape and other sexual assaults, in countries around the world during times of natural and human-made disasters and catastrophes (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 1999, 37; Lentin 1997; and Rozario 1997). As Lin Chew and Kavita Ramadas of the Global Fund for Women observe, “In the chaos and social breakdown that accompany natural disasters, women become uniquely vulnerable to sexual abuse, including rape and gang rape” (2005, 2). Refugee emergencies stemming from disasters in particular are documented internationally as situations where there are increased opportunities for the rape of women and girls (UNHCR 2003; Vann 2002; Delaney and Shrader 2000, 27-28; and UNHCR 1995). Several causes or circumstances, which contribute to sexual violence perpetrated against females by males in refugee facilities or displaced person situations, have been reported: (1) male perpetrators’ power and domination over their female victims; (2) psychological strains of refugee life; (3) absence of communal support systems for the protection of vulnerable individuals; (4) crowded facilities—camps, shelters, etc; (5) lack of physical protection; (6) general lawlessness in camps and shelters; (7) alcohol and drug use and abuse; (8) politically motivated violence against displaced persons; and (9) single females separated from male

family members (New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault 2006; UNHCR 1995). Many of these phenomena are not unlike those associated with the conditions and circumstances that thousands of Katrina female evacuees faced in the various phases of the disaster, which, as we will discuss, resulted in numerous sexual assaults.

Several disaster researchers have argued that much disaster research has taken a gender-neutral stance or otherwise treated female and male differential responses and behaviors to disasters as “dichotomous survey variables in disaster research” (Enarson and Meyreles 2004; Fothergill 1998; and Fothergill 1996, 33). Early critiques of gender bias in disaster studies have focused on the clear omission of women’s special disaster-associated vulnerabilities (e.g., crime victimization patterns; domestic violence; obligations related to the care of children and elderly family members; evacuation and geographical displacement; economic, racial, and age disadvantages; psychological strain; and male dominance of law enforcement and other disaster management officials at upper and lower levels, etc.). Recent works have sought to remedy this problem. The issue of disaster-related vulnerabilities of women to violence has also stimulated interest in the more general field of social science research, which treats women not just as helpless victims of natural and human-made disasters, but rather as individuals who are at risk because of factors such as economic and political powerlessness, cultural gender discrimination, and other cultural perceptions of inferiority and superiority (Enarson and Meyreles 2004, 50; Enarson 199a; Wiest, Mocellin, and Motsisi 1994).

Research Methodology

This study is part of a larger ongoing research project, which began in September 2005 in New Orleans while the city and region were still dealing with the immediate impact of Hurricane Katrina. We embarked upon this research seeking to examine the media’s role in the social construction of reality regarding perceptions of crime, crime control, and public safety during and immediately following Katrina’s landfall. Initially we content-analyzed over 2,500 newspaper articles on crime during and after Katrina’s strike. We considered several research questions: (1) What are the sources of information regarding crimes during and after Katrina?; (2) How do media accounts compare with official accounts of crime?; and (3) How do official accounts of crime compare with unofficial (e.g., victim) accounts of crime? (Thornton and Voigt 2006).

Our interest in rape arose mainly because of the immense amount of false information that was initially disseminated about crimes reported in the media (some of the misinformation coming from public officials) and the general scarcity of empirical research on disaster-related rape.

Several sources of crime data inform this analysis, including: (1) over 300 mass media reports of rapes and sexual assaults using major search engines; (2) twenty-five daily journals of law enforcement officers working in New Orleans during the preparedness and impact stages of the disaster; (3) five victim advocates’ narratives of their views regarding the vulnerability of women and opportunities for rape during the disaster, which are based on their cases; (4) twenty-two victim self-reports of victimization (rape and other crimes) during various phases of the disaster; (5) over 120 official reports of criminal victimizations from law enforcement agencies, which involve disaster-related rapes (although it is noteworthy that official reports of crimes from local/regional law enforcement agencies are obviously not available in the earliest stages

of Katrina); and (6) forty completed surveys of attendees at a neighborhood meeting of concerned citizens.

In trying to capture the “voices of Katrina” for this paper, we chiefly employ the qualitative aspects of our initial research methodology, utilizing narratives and other accounts given to us by rape victims (i.e., taken from self-report narratives and official victim reports), first-responders’ daily logs, and interviews with law enforcement officers and victim advocates.

One of the advantages of this type of qualitative data is that the accounts given by respondents “are grounded in people’s actual experiences...[and]...the possibility of identifying new, relevant questions becomes more likely” (Phillips 2002, 203). An obvious methodological problem with the technique is the lack of generalizability of the findings to larger disaster rape populations in the U.S. or even rape populations in New Orleans. Given the unique nature of the Katrina Disaster and the surrounding complexities, generalizability may be impossible, even under the most rigorous sampling circumstances.

Vulnerability of Women during Various Phases of the Katrina Disaster

For over 75 years, disaster researchers have attempted to study physical and social aspects of disasters in terms of the “phases of disasters” and have devised numerous approaches (Lystad 1995; Drabek 1986; National Governor’s Association 1979; Powell, Rayner, and Finesinger 1953; Carr 1932). For instance, Lewis Killian (2002) identifies four phases: warning, impact, emergency, and recovery, which are mainly determined by time factors. Some scholars, such as David Neal (1997) have argued that the demarcation points of the phases should not rest primarily on time factors, but should also include consideration for spatial distinctions (e.g., impact zone, fringe impact zones, or filter zone) and relative degree of damage to the city’s infrastructure (i.e., economic, political, and social systems). Neal notes that the phases are not mutually exclusive and that recovery rates are not linear. It is often hard to pinpoint the pace of recovery and reconstruction. The rates of recovery and restoration or reconstruction will vary depending on variables such as race, ethnicity, and social class of the residential and commercial populations (Neal 1997; Phillips, Garza, and Neal 1994). Despite continued controversy over the conceptual and theoretical clarification of these various categories (Richardson 2005; Neal 1997, 1984; Haas, Kates, and Bowden 1977), the employment of functional time phases and spatial zones for the study of disasters has been extremely useful in understanding individual and group behavior during the “life cycle” of a disaster (Stoddard 1968). Alice Fothergill, for example, has proposed a modified nine-stage typology to organize and discuss her research on gender risks and disasters, including the occurrence of domestic violence (1996).

The main problem that we see with the general disaster phase models is that they assume a single, short-term disaster with relatively clear-cut phases. As stated above, when we speak of the “Katrina Disaster,” we are actually referring to a multi- (and prolonged) impact disaster in which any one of the catastrophic components would constitute a major disaster in its own right (i.e., Impact I: Hurricane Katrina; Impact II: Levee Breaches and Flooding; Impact III: Explosion of Chemical Storage Facility; Impact IV: Murphy Oil Spill; Impact V: Hurricane Rita—all successively occurring within a relatively short time period). The outline below offers a brief summary of the

main stages of the Katrina Disaster (with only general estimates of time), which serves to demonstrate the complexities of its multi-impact nature:

- Warning (August 24–28, 2005)
- Impact I - Hurricane Katrina (August 29, 6:00 a.m.)
- Impact II - Levee Breaches (August 29, 8:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.)
- Emergency: Official and Non-official “Save and Rescue Missions” (August 30–September 25)
- Waiting for Federal Rescue Response - Anomie (Breakdown of Social Order) (August 30–31)
- Emergency: Restoration of Law and Order (September 2–3); Evacuation (September 1-6)
- Impact III - Explosion of Chemical Storage Facility (September 2, 4:35 a.m.)
- Impact IV - Murphy Oil Spill (September 4)
- Emergency: Levee Repair and Restoration of Water Pumps (September 4–30); City Closed Except to Official Personnel
- Impact V - Hurricane Rita (September 23)
- Pre-Recovery: Clean-up (September 4–30)
- Recovery: Clean-up and Restoration of Basic Services; Populations in Designated Areas Permitted to Enter City for Limited Duration to Inspect and Assess Property Damage; Informal Voluntary Assistance
- Organized Formal Voluntary Organizations and Official Relief Efforts
- Restoration/Normalization: Restoration of Physical, Political and Social Infrastructure; Populations Begin to Return (city officially opened on September 29); Formal and Informal Voluntary Relief Efforts Continue
- Reconstruction on All Levels Depending on Nature of Damage
- Longer-term Reconstruction Planning and Initiatives.

The overlapping consequences of the series of catastrophic events have produced many complexities associated with emergency responses as well as short and long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts. For example, the combined impacts of the various disasters along with the non-existent or minimally adequate disaster management plan created a situation in which the impact phase of the event(s) was extended for a relatively long period of time. With water rising at different levels throughout New Orleans and with thousands of people left in the city without adequate shelter, food or water, the emergency phase of the disaster did not begin for almost a week. Likewise, the recovery phase has been difficult to identify with various areas responding very differently. Certain areas of the city have recovered significantly faster than others, whereas the pace of recovery and reconstruction of some other communities will probably extend for years.

Our study of individual and collective or group criminal activity, including the incidence of sexual assaults during various phases of this multi-disaster event, has lent itself to a phase analysis, which helps to make sense of the nature and circumstances of the rapes that occurred and are still occurring. At each stage of the Katrina Disaster, the deficiencies or failures of the infrastructure, whether physical (e.g., devastation of commercial buildings, homes, and neighborhoods), social (e.g., lack of social support systems such as safe havens or advocacy support groups), or structural (e.g., breakdown in governmental leadership and operation of the criminal justice system), worked together to create increased criminal opportunities or otherwise facilitated conditions for the sexual assaults of women to occur.

Our case studies and data on rape victimizations suggest interesting differences in both the perpetrator and victim perspectives with respect to time sequences, spatial/geographical impacts of the Katrina Disaster, and social/structural conditions. Preliminary findings indicate, for example, that rapes appeared to be more brutal, often involving multiple offenders, during the disasters' earlier phases, whereas a year later, in the recovery stages, rapes seemed to resemble more typical fact patterns that are not specifically disaster-related. These different patterns of rapes during the various phases are, of course, speculative due to the inherent sampling limitations of our data. Despite their limitations, however, our data demonstrate that the vulnerability of women to sexual assaults may be associated with particular conditions, which prevailed during the different phases of this multi-disaster event.

Warning Phase

This is the "period during which information is available about a probable danger, but before the danger has become immediate, personally and physically perceivable" (Killan 2002, 51). By 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 28, 2005, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) in Miami had upgraded Hurricane Katrina to a Category 5 storm, "the highest rating on the Saffir-Simpson scale" (Hurricane Katrina 2005, 37). By 9:00 a.m., President George Bush had urged Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco to begin evacuation of New Orleans; and by 9:30 a.m., Mayor Ray Nagin and Governor Blanco had put the word out that citizens of New Orleans should leave the city. Nagin emphatically stated, "We're facing the storm most of us feared" (37). By 11:00 a.m. NHC officials warned, "Katrina's storm surge could overtop New Orleans' levees" (37). Close to 80% of New Orleans' 484,000 citizens evacuated from the city, but many others, particularly elderly, low-income African American residents, could not leave and, thus, remained in the city. Over 140,000 residents were estimated not to have cars. The Regional Transit Authority of New Orleans began transporting people from 12 locations to the Superdome, the largest of the city's 10 designated shelters. The Louisiana National Guard was stationed at the Superdome to provide security. By 9:00 p.m., food and water were distributed. Approximately 20,000 people were housed in a facility that was prepared to care for less than half that number and for only a three-day period (37).

Some disaster research shows that women are less likely than men to have the necessary resources and mobility to leave before a disaster strikes (Marshall 2005; Fothergill 1996). Disaster researchers also argue that because of a lack of status, power, money, and motor vehicles, minority women are usually at a greater disadvantage in leaving an area when warning of an impending disaster is announced, and they suffer

accordingly. This was certainly the case in New Orleans where large numbers of poor African-American women with their children, parents, and other family members were unable to leave the city and remained stranded. It is important to remember that African-Americans comprised over 67% of the city's pre-Katrina population (U.S. Census 2000) with a substantial proportion living below the poverty line.

However, the stranded also included out-of-state students and visitors who, for various reasons, could not get out of the city. A victim advocate's case summary illustrates the vulnerability of some of these women, like the woman raped by strangers trying to get out of the city during the warning phase described below:

A twenty five year old Caucasian woman was raped when she accepted a ride to get out of town on Sunday, August 28, 2005 by two males who inferred that they were college students headed to Baton Rouge. The young woman reported that she was from Indiana and was visiting "friends of friends" who left her stranded in their apartment. The friends just took off when they heard that the storm was headed for New Orleans. The woman constructed a cardboard sign stating that she "needed a ride" and walked to Jefferson Highway where she was picked up [by] two Caucasian males in their twenties, who told her that they would take her to Baton Rouge where it would be safe. In route, the men pulled off of the interstate at a rest stop and forcibly raped her one at a time after they parked their Ford van in the parking area designated for commercial trucks... One punched her so she lost consciousness and then they threw her out of the vehicle. When she regained consciousness, she tried to get help. After being ignored by many motorists trying to evacuate and not wanting to get involved with someone who looked visibly disheveled, she finally obtained another ride to Baton Rouge, where she was taken to a hospital emergency room and later ended up in a shelter. She tried to report the rape in Baton Rouge, but was told it needed to be reported to police in New Orleans or to the state police....

Impact Phase

This stage usually refers to the specific catastrophic event, which is often a single, short-termed disaster with relatively clear-cut phases. As mentioned above, when we refer to the "Katrina Disaster," we are actually referring to a multi- or serial- (and prolonged) impact. On Monday, August 29 at the last minute, Hurricane Katrina made a sharp turn to the east, its winds reduced to 145 mph, and the storm made landfall in Buras, Louisiana, a small town southeast of New Orleans—the town was completely destroyed. With approximately 20,000–30,000 residents who could or did not evacuate sheltered in the Superdome, and with countless other residents who, for whatever reasons, also did not evacuate scattered citywide at other shelters and places, including their residences, it now appeared that New Orleans may have escaped the worst of Hurricane Katrina since the storm did not hit the city directly. However, by 8:14 a.m. on Monday, August 29, the resulting storm surges and high water breached the Industrial Canal levee protecting the Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish on the city's east side from

Lake Pontchartrain, and by 1:00 p.m. an estimated 40,000 homes were flooded with eight to 10 feet of water (*Hurricane Katrina* 2005, 39). Shortly after, by 2:00 p.m., a 200-foot stretch of the 17th Street Canal on the northwest side of New Orleans failed, and other parts of the city began filling up with water. At 4:00 p.m. two more levees along the London Avenue Canal failed, and within twelve hours 80% of New Orleans was under water (37-39). In reality, it is probably the breaches in the various levees and subsequent flooding of the city that most people think of when they refer to the “impact” stage of Katrina, and it is during this period that civil law and order began to break down. During the very first day of the storm, crimes were already taking place in parts of the city, including looting, armed robberies, and shootings, despite dismissals of early exaggerations and rumors of crime. By the second day, anarchy existed in parts of the city with a skeleton force of police officers trying to maintain order. The main police headquarters, district stations and cars had been flooded, and there was a complete breakdown of their central communications system.

Below, a personal narrative from a veteran police officer in New Orleans details what he and his partner saw beginning at about 11:00 a.m. on the first day of the storm, August 29. It was still possible for some officers to patrol various areas of New Orleans and they were still receiving dispatches of “calls for service” until severe flooding knocked out all the police department’s intra-agency communication. The officer’s descriptions suggest that almost immediately aspects of the storm during the impact phase facilitated the opportunities for property and violent crimes, including sexual assaults to occur:

Billy and I patrolled _____ Street and _____ Street where I observed my first band of looters attempting to get into a corner store. They were trying to take down heavy security doors with crowbars and shovels and any household items they could find. Remember, this is the day of the storm, nobody had been without food or water yet and no one starting to feel the pains of hunger or starvation. These people were attempting to loot only to get “free” liquor and cigarettes... The next scene we went to was at _____ and _____ Streets. A female had expired in the middle of the intersection from what first appeared to be a gunshot wound to the back of her head. It was later found out that an object had been pushed into her cranium during the storm and had killed her instantly. At approximately two o’clock in the afternoon Billy and I stopped a car at _____ Street. We had to fight the driver of the vehicle so we placed him under arrest. We were in route to central lockup...and for the first time we saw it, water. The whole northern side of the city had started to flood. We couldn’t bring [the suspect] to central lockup because it was under water. We brought the suspect to _____ Street and let him go.... As we headed back to the district, we were dispatched with a signal for an aggravated battery by shooting that occurred at [a clothing store on _____ Street.] We immediately headed in that direction. Once we arrived we observed approximately 1000 people running for their

lives exiting the clothing store. We went in right after them and observed a handful of people around a black male...who was shot several times, at least twice in the neck.

As several disaster researchers have noted, in the early stages of a disaster, many women have caretaking responsibilities for children, elderly parents, and relatives, which make it difficult for them to evacuate. Many of these women are young, poor, minority, and heads-of-households (Marshall 2005; Fothergill 1996; Morrow and Enarson 1996).

The self-reported incident of rape described below involves a young minority woman looking for food, water, and medicine for her sick elderly mother and her two children in a convenience store that was being looted by a group of young men. The case, which takes place in the same general area the police officer described above, accentuates similar conditions of lawlessness. We met the victim in a domestic violence group session for evacuees living in a shelter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana as she described her sexual assault to the group. She indicated that she did not try to report the crime to the police and probably never would:

I was in a [convenience store] with maybe fifty other people looking for medicine for my mama and for water or cokes or anything to drink and candy bars to take to my kids. There was almost nothing left in the store when I got there and I was kind of worried cause there was a lot of drunk young guys starting to tear the place up. They was working on a bank machine [ATM] but couldn't get in it and was getting madder and madder. Two of the older ones grabbed me and pulled me in the back of the store and tore my cloths off and raped me one at a time. One held me down in the cooler while the other went at it and then the other took his turn. When they finished the younger one kicked me in the stomach and said fuck you bitch.

The rape victim above expressed a sense of fate and resignation with respect to her sexual assault and a belief that reporting the offense to any official agents would serve no purpose. This, unfortunately, appears to be a common feeling among many rape victims even during non-disaster periods (Voigt et al. 1994, 299).

Emergency Phase

This period generally refers to post-impact emergency relief efforts, including activities such as rescuing and conducting the emergency evacuation of people (e.g., infants, young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and the sick); administering first aid and emergency medical care; supplying food, water, and other life sustaining resources; performing other public health functions (e.g., removal of dead bodies) and other emergency management tasks; and restoring law and order. During the emergency phase of the Katrina Disaster, many "first-responders" including official (e.g., law enforcement agents and National Guard personnel) and unofficial workers (e.g., lay volunteers from all walks of life) engaged in various rescue operations (e.g., plucking people from rooftops, etc.) and continued evacuation. Even as late as Thursday, September 1, approximately 25,000 people were still stranded in the Morial Convention

Center. Chaos and general anomie were pervasive. New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Eddie Compass ordered 88 officers to the Convention Center, but they were unable to control the enormous crowds. Earlier, he had called his available police officers off the “search and rescue missions” in order to control looting and fires in the city. As a response to Department of Homeland Security Director Michael Chertoff, who claimed that the city was secure and under control, Mayor Ray Nagin, retorted live on CNN: “I keep hearing [help] is coming. This is coming. That is coming. My answer to that today is, b.s.! Where’s the beef? They’re spinning and people are dying down here” (*Hurricane Katrina* 2005, 45). Despite a series of explosions in the early morning hours at a chemical storage facility downriver, emergency efforts seemed to improve on Friday, September 2, when a thousand National Guard troops arrived in the city to help restore control and to assist in the evacuation of 8,000-10,000 people from the Superdome. Evacuees were bused to the Astrodome and the Reliant Center, an indoor convention center, in Houston, Texas (47). On Saturday, September 3, buses began the evacuation of the more than 25,000 people at the Morial Center. President Bush agreed to send 7,000 military troops to the Gulf Coast, and promised that 10,000 more National Guard troops would be sent to the city (49). By Sunday, September 4, it was estimated that approximately 250,000 Katrina evacuees were in Texas, and the Army Corps of Engineers had closed the 17th Street Canal breach. On Monday, September 5, Mayor Nagin called for mandatory evacuation of the flooded city and blamed all levels of government for the poor response and handling of the victims (51-53). The city was put under Marshall Order and subsequently closed until officials could declare that it was safe for residents to begin returning. On September 23, Hurricane Rita struck the coastal areas of Texas and western Louisiana. Once again, water surges overpowered New Orleans levees and parts of the city flooded for the second time (51-53).

Largely due to these multiple impacts, the Katrina Disaster’s emergency phase extended for a relatively long time in the city (and region). As a result, it is difficult to distinguish between the impact stage and emergency stage as precisely as in a single-impact disaster. However, despite the influx of large numbers of first-responders and various troops into the city, the social milieu of New Orleans, described by some as a “wild west” environment comprised largely of a male population, facilitated many opportunities for crimes, especially rapes, to occur. In addition, the dislocation and evacuation of over 200,000 citizens throughout 48 states across the country further increased the opportunities for women to be raped in other, sometimes “less than desirable,” locations. While a relative lack of status, power, resources, and options particularly place minority women at risk of endangerment during disasters, all women, representing all classes and backgrounds, are vulnerable to sexual assaults and other violent crimes during periods of uncertainty and anomie (Morrow and Enarson 1994).

A victim advocate from a local law enforcement agency discusses the conditions in general of some women in New Orleans during the emergency phase. Her observations are based on several rape cases that were later officially reported. She describes in particular a sadistic rape that occurred during the emergency phase, which was later reported to a law enforcement agency:

By the time people realized the magnitude of the storm, it was either too late to get out or you simply did not have the means to

do so. Many women did not have the economic means to evacuate, considering that about 40 percent of all female-headed households with children in New Orleans were living below the poverty line and had no cars. Keep in mind we are talking about August in New Orleans. It is hot and muggy 24 hours a day in the summer. So you have no electricity, water or phone service. The city is completely dark as you sit alone with your flashlight waiting for the morning sun to offer some light. You consider that as usual, the storm passed and the extent of the damage may be a few tree limbs down, which caused the electricity to go out. You know something is different though because you have no service on your cell phone. At this point you start to worry because your children have left with other family members and you can't get in touch with anyone because there is no phone service. As the daylight appears, you go outside of your apartment only to find your street is filling at a rapid pace with water. You now have no option but to stay in your apartment, which is slowly heating up to a high temperature. By noon, the heat is unbearable. You check outside again and now your street is completely under water. Your street is completely deserted of any form of life. By nightfall, you are panicked because you have no way to leave your apartment, no communication, and the heat is unbearable. But late that night you leave your apartment in an attempt to get some fresh air. A stairwell is your only refuge as you sit, drenched with sweat in the silence. At this point of desperation, you feel a knife to your throat with a man telling you not to scream. The man brutally rapes you, and leaves you for dead. What do you do now? There is no one to tell and no place to go for help. Your main fear is that the rapist will return and find you again. This was a legitimate fear considering that all traditional societal social support mechanisms had collapsed in New Orleans. Women who stayed in the city during Katrina were vulnerable due to being alone with no form of civilized protection such as law enforcement. It was a period of "anything goes," which predators took advantage of.

Other victim advocates have further observed that despite many good and kind people giving help during the storm, many opportunistic or lawless males took advantage of the social disorganization and this, coupled with the increased vulnerability of many women, especially poor and minority women, heightened the risk of sexual assaults as the following statement of a rape investigator in a local law enforcement agency attests:

Rapes most definitely did occur during and after Katrina. If rapes did not take place during Katrina then why was I contacted day after day to locate rape kits for hospitals? With New Orleans evacuees spread across the nation, it is next to impossible to ever investigate the rapes that occurred due to the lack of evidence. Another factor to consider is that evidence in rape cases can be

collected up to 72 hours after a rape. The majority of women that were raped were still left abandoned in New Orleans days after the rapes occurred. For the few that possibly did make it out of the city within the 72-hour window to collect evidence, they were told they would have to report the crime in New Orleans, where the crime took place. The problem is that for weeks, the city of New Orleans did not exist.

Thousands of women were relocated during the emergency phase of the Katrina Disaster and found themselves in other cities around the United States where they were temporarily housed in public and private shelters, good and bad, as well as an assortment of other places, including motels, hotels, low rent apartments, etc. While many of these women may have escaped the dangers of New Orleans during the disaster, they were sometimes thrust into environments that were nonetheless dangerous. Disaster researchers have noted that there are similarities between disaster relocation and refugee situations with respect to the circumstances and conditions facilitating sexual violence against women (e.g., Vann 2002; Wiest, Mocellin, and Motsisi 1994). For instance, according to an online reporting survey, of the 47 sexual assault cases reported during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, nearly a third (31%) of sexual assaults occurred at evacuation sites or other shelters, which represents more cases than in any other type of place (National Sexual Violence Resource Center 2006).

While there is relatively scant data on the vulnerability of evacuees of hurricanes or other disasters to sexual assaults in the United States, there is an extensive literature pointing to the vulnerability of women, especially to sexual violence, in refugee situations around the world. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released a report in May 2003 entitled, *Sexual Violence Against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response*, which highlights different causes and conditions that provide the opportunity for rape and sexual assaults to occur in refugee camps, shelters, and other places of refuge for asylum seekers and other displaced persons. While sexual and other gender based violence can occur at any phase of the “refugee cycle”—prior to flight, during flight, at the point of asylum, during “repatriation,” and during reintegration, there appears to be enhanced vulnerability for victimization in refugee camps. In particular, the destruction of common support, loss of security, disrespectful attitudes of men towards women, psychological strain, alcohol and drug abuse, crowded living conditions, and general lawlessness in camps are factors which facilitate sexual attacks (20-22). Likewise, in many refugee situations where men are in charge of basic necessities, they can use these things to subject women to sexual exploitation. An earlier UN report emphasized, “Experience shows that unaccompanied women and lone female heads of households are at the greatest risk of being subjected to sexual violence” (UNHCR 1995, Chapter 1, 1.1). Many of our cases reflect similar conditions in the post-Katrina evacuation centers and emergency situations, which led to women’s increased vulnerability to sexual assaults. The following victim’s account of rape in a hurricane relief shelter illustrates this problem:

I was staying in a hurricane relief shelter because of the loss of my family’s home. I became separated from my husband and so I was

alone. [She was 18 years old.] I awoke in bed to find a male in bed with his pants and underwear down. My pants and underwear were also down. He said that he would suffocate me if I made even a slight noise. He then raped me multiple times. He said that he would kill me if I said anything to anyone. I did not report the rape to the police until much later when I left the shelter.

Evidence from disaster research also indicates that women are more likely than men to seek assistance following natural disasters, and that “women are more likely than men to receive help from strangers” (Fothergill 1996, 44). During an emergency state, when communal support is lacking, women who may find themselves helpless and isolated in certain situations often have to rely on others for emergency assistance. Unfortunately, an offer of help from some men during disasters can be used as a pretense for sexual victimization. We have identified numerous cases of sexual assaults, especially during the emergency phase, by men offering assistance to women seeking or accepting aid, in the form of giving rides, or offering of things such as food, furniture, and refuge. Rapes occurred at various times during the “aid” encounter.

The following is an account of a rape victim who was seeking help. The victim, left homeless by the storm and living in her car, was offered a place to stay by a male co-worker. The young woman had known the perpetrator for some time and accepted his offer; however, he used the situation to take advantage of her vulnerable state:

I was raped in the early morning hours. I had been living with this guy that I knew from work for two days. He came into the den, where I was sleeping. He came in without clothes on, at which point he forced me to have sex with him. He left me in kitchen area after the rape. My whole family lost everything in the storm—houses, cars, clothes, and jobs. Because of Katrina, I was homeless, living in my car. If Hurricane Katrina did not hit the area, I would not have been put in the situation of living out of my car and I would not have had to accept an invitation to stay with this guy who raped me.

Recovery Phase

This is the phase that begins after the crisis or emergency period has passed and progress is made toward restoring essential infrastructures, such as inter-organizational communication, electrical service, potable water supplies, public transportation, homes, businesses, and city services—things that will allow individuals to reoccupy a disaster area and eventually begin eventual longer term reconstruction. Likewise, the pace of reopening public (and private) schools in the city has a significant impact on population growth in the city from new and previously displaced citizens. The re-establishment of health facilities and services, including mental health services, is also among the critical factors of recovery.

Different communities “recover” from disasters sooner than others based on variables such as the degree of physical destruction, the degree of social disruption, and the degree of financial assistance needed to repopulate commercial and residential areas of the city (Drabek 1986, 234-242). In the case of New Orleans, it may take many years

for recovery/reconstruction to be fully realized, and the footprint of the city may be much different than before Katrina. Physical damage, loss of clients and customers, high commercial insurance rates, lack of affordable housing for remaining and future employees, and fear of future storms, may prevent many small and large businesses from rebuilding in the area, thus making recovery all the more difficult. Additionally, thousands of lost residences that comprised physical neighborhoods as well as cultural milieus may never be replaced because of lack of resources, residents' inability to obtain or afford homeowners insurance, and the displacement of individuals who established themselves in other cities and do not wish to return.

Another factor impeding recovery in New Orleans, possibly unique in the annals of disaster research in the United States, is the return of a serious crime problem during this stage when many citizens are living in FEMA trailers or makeshift homes in varying degrees of repair in areas with reduced police protection. Slowly but surely violent crime and property crime volumes and rates have been creeping up in Orleans and adjoining parishes since June 2006, when a series of teenage shootings attracted national attention. Because of low numbers of officers in the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD), Louisiana State Police and the National Guard returned to the city in that summer to aid in crime prevention and control, particularly in outlying areas of the city. In defense of the NOPD, the department experienced a significant reduction in personnel post-Katrina, and its main headquarters and several district stations, still unrepaired since the storm, forced many officers to operate out of trailers. Officers were thinly spread over the city and, despite record numbers of arrests, a broken criminal justice system simply cannot process and house that many perpetrators. Even nine months following the storm, the criminal courts were shut down, and by June 2006 there was a backlog of 5,000 cases.

Elaine Enarson, who has written extensively on the gendered affects of disasters, noted that, "Because violence against women is endemic to disasters, it is not unlikely to be present in any community before and after disaster. But does violence increase because of the effects of disasters? Barriers to reporting complicate the investigation of personal violence and other law enforcement issues....Lack of transportation or communication, closed courtrooms and police stations, non-functional crisis lines, and other factors may deter women from reporting violence or seeking protection" (1999b, 13). Enarson further elaborates that "Disasters are multi-dimensional and long lasting social events with diverse and complex effects on such factors as local employment rates, various types of criminal behavior, divorce, mental and physical health, school achievement, business decisions, labor migration and household mobility" (13). Enarson also points out that the risk of sexual assault may be greater in temporary housing sites such as trailer camps/parks, which are often located in remote and isolated areas of devastated communities without adequate access control, physical security, and lighting (Enarson 1999b; and Enarson 1999c). For example, in addition to fearing for their personal safety, women in trailer camps in Miami after Hurricane Andrew "were often isolated, lacked mental and reproductive health services and reliable transportation and were unable to access needed community services" (Enarson 1999c, 48). In another example, during the aftermath of Hurricane Charley in 1992, residents of FEMA trailer parks located in Punta Gorda, Florida reported concern over "security, especially safety for their children from a child molester, incidences of theft, and wariness of their neighbors" (Tobin, Bell, Whiteford, and Montz 2006, 94-95).

As the recovery period in New Orleans continues, conditions in the city and region remain particularly susceptible for sexual assaults to occur under a variety of circumstances and in various environments—for example, FEMA trailer parks. Women have self-reported several attempted rapes in these trailer parks in New Orleans. In the case below, a woman and her two children had waited several months for a FEMA trailer, and since the neighborhood where her flooded house was located did not have water and electricity, she could not park her trailer on her home-site. She was also afraid of remaining in the abandoned area because of roving groups of men seen during the day and night stripping materials off of abandoned houses. In subsequent temporary housing in a FEMA trailer parker, the woman experienced an attempted rape and gave the following account:

We are all squeezed in these tiny trailers and the trailers are all squeezed into a field off the side of road. It was okay during the day, but when it got dark, me and my kids were afraid to go out at night even though we have some good friends living in other trailers. It was really pitch-black dark even though there were some lights on poles around the grounds. One night in February my kids were staying at a friend's house and I was coming back to the trailer after work. When I drove in I looked all around like I always do—there are always strangers hanging around visiting I guess. I got my key ready, looked around again and went up the steps to the door. Almost from nowhere a guy grabbed me from behind, put one hand over my mouth and the other on my private parts and said something like, “Don't fight me bitch, I don't want your purse, I want you.” I bit his hand hard enough to make it bleed and yelled at the top of my lungs. People on both sides of my trailer came out and the man took off.

Although there is evidence suggesting that women and children tend to suffer more emotional problems than men following a disaster, it has been found that men are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs (Enarson 1998). Men are also more apt to use relief funds on alcohol, airplane tickets, and entertainment, leaving little or no money for their wives and children (Morrow and Enarson 1994). In several of our self-reported cases taken from sexual assault groups, particularly during the recovery stage of the Katrina Disaster, women described abusive husbands and boyfriends who spent what money they had on excessive drinking and gambling in casinos, especially as these establishments began to reopen in New Orleans and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Several cases of domestic/intimate partner rape surfaced from our interviews. The interview notes below are from a case history of a 33 year-old Caucasian female who sought help from a faith-based domestic violence group associated with a church. She and her boyfriend lost their apartment in the storm and lived in Arkansas with relatives before moving back to the New Orleans region in January 2006. The following account attests to the role of alcohol and gambling in intimate partner rape:

Tom and I have been living together for six years in an “on again and off again” relationship. We lost everything in the storm. We

lived for a while with my relatives, which was very hard because they were barely making it. So we found a place of our own. But things have been tough. Tom has a good heart and I love him, but when he drinks his whole personality changes and he hits me and forces sex on me whether I want it or not. He is a welder and makes good money whenever he needs a job. Since the storm, Tom has been drinking a lot more than usual and has also started gambling, something he never used to do. There never seems to be enough money now and everything I make from my little job pays for gas, lights, and rent. It's so unfair. He uses all of his money mostly on liquor and to gamble. He is also much more demanding now about sex and he forces me to have sex with him no matter whether I'm tired from work or whatever...which I could deal with but I'm tired of being hurt. But I don't want to be alone either... I don't know what to do. I needed help and was told about these wonderful people at church...

While there is some debate regarding the long-term psychological effects of disasters, there is evidence suggesting that disaster victims who experience life-threatening situations frequently suffer certain symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) including depression, anxiety, and hostility for relatively long periods after the events (Norris, Perilla, Riad, Kaniasty, Kand and Lavizzo 1999; Norris and Uhl 1993). The victim advocate's account below indicates a case of stress-related intimate partner sexual assault:

The victim reported that she and her boyfriend had not been getting along very well since the storm. He was very depressed and often woke up shaking saying that he had nightmares of the storm. He lost his job and was having trouble finding another job and the bills were piling up. They were arguing one night and the boyfriend started hitting, punching, and kicking her and she told him that she had had enough and that she was going to leave him. He indicated to her that he "was going to have it one more time." She was subsequently sexually assaulted multiple times and held against her will until the next morning. The next morning after he left, her friend came and she left the house and reported the incident to the police.

Although we did not uncover any discussions in the disaster literature regarding the sexual victimization of volunteers who have aided in various recovery projects in disaster areas, our case studies include several cases of volunteers, both younger and older women, who were raped during their extended stays in New Orleans during the recovery phase. We also have cases of sexual assaults against female "migrant" workers (many of Hispanic heritage) who came to the region because of a shortage of labor and higher paying jobs in various industries. Similarly, Enarson and Morrow (1997), in their studies of Hurricane Andrew, reported that poor and marginalized women with limited English

skills, including migrant workers, “[felt] at risk of male violence during the lengthy reconstruction period in disrupted neighborhoods and temporary camps” (Enarson and Morrow 1998a, 6). The following is victim advocate’s account of a volunteer worker who was raped in abandoned housing site:

The young woman was a college student from out-of-state, who was volunteering in the city with a group that was engaged in Katrina-related community services. Her companions went to various work sites from a central location early in the morning and she was assigned to a house gutting site deep in one of the severely flooded areas of the city. She worked later than usual at the site and did not ride back to her motel with her regular crew of volunteers that she knew. Instead, she accepted a ride with two males who she assumed were volunteer workers based on how they were dressed and their general appearance. Once in the car, the males took the woman to an abandoned public housing site where she was raped in her vagina and anus.

Below is a summary of a case involving a migrant worker who was raped by a stranger:

The victim was a migrant worker from _____ working to make some money for her family. She had several cleaning jobs. Late one night after she finished cleaning she took out the trash to a dumpster out in the street. She spotted a man coming toward her and she began to run, but he caught up and grabbed her and pulled her back around the side of the dumpster. He proceeded to orally and vaginally assault her. She began to choke and then threw up, which made him mad, so he got up and kicked her in the face.

Reconstruction Phase

This phase involves long-term recovery planning and activities, including massive rebuilding projects (e.g., commercial and government buildings and planned communities of single and multi-dwelling housing, which meet respective disaster building standards); stabilization of the ecological components of the built and natural environment to mitigate certain future disasters (e.g., the construction of New Orleans’ levee and floodgate system, and the enhancement of buffer space between natural bodies of water and human occupied spaces); and the stabilization and augmentation of economic (business and industrial) and governmental infrastructures. In addition to re-engineering the built environment, this period also focuses on key aspects of the social infrastructure, ensuring that less represented citizens, like those previously living in pre-disaster public-assisted housing, are included in reconstruction policies and plans (USAID 2006).

However, as Fothergill notes, low-income women in disaster regions often “fare poorly in the reconstruction phase. The poor, of which women are the majority, have less insurance, less savings, and thus less likelihood of a full, long-term recovery” (1996, 47; also see Bolin and Bolton 1986). Morrow and Enarson report, for example, that even two years after Hurricane Andrew struck Miami in 1992, thousands of families were still

living in crowded and substandard temporary housing and many of the inhabitants were poor minority women (1994, 8).

Unfortunately, the establishment of temporary residences after the destruction of thousands of homes is associated with enhanced opportunities for sexual assaults to occur in the affected region. Many people are living in less than ideal environments. In an effort to rebuild residences and commercial establishments in the later recovery and reconstruction phases, large numbers of outside laborers are brought into the disaster area to live and work. Most of these construction workers are male, often young men, who appreciably increase the population of the area. While most of them are no doubt honest, hard workers, some disaster research has reported the exploitation of women, particularly poor women, by contractors and laborers in the reconstruction of their homes (Enarson and Morrow 1997). In addition, groups of individuals, often disguised as work crews and reconstruction contractors (popularly referred to as “scrappers”), come to disaster sites with the specific intent to pilfer vacant homes and otherwise victimize—including sexually assaulting—vulnerable residents. Large areas of vacant and abandoned residences become refuges for various criminals, drug dealers, and juvenile gangs, a situation which creates unprecedented challenges for law enforcement officials.

Some of our cases involve construction workers or other itinerant groups of men who have sexually exploited or assaulted women. The following cases offer illustrations of such incidents. The first is a victim advocate’s general description of rapes committed by construction workers:

Another unfortunate fact is that women continue to deal with societal changes due to Hurricane Katrina. The fortunate women that still have a home in New Orleans now live in a “different world” as we now call it. Due to the influx of construction workers, women are now being intimidated by workers staring, following, stalking, attacking, and, unfortunately, raping. One of our victims was threatened with a sheetrock knife, another went back after the storm to check on her house and a man offered to assist her with renovations. After a brief exchange, he raped her.

This second case is a victim’s account of rape after a group of men in a truck followed her car and caused an accident:

I was driving home when a truck began to follow me and beeping its horn. Then the truck came up beside my car. The guys were yelling things to me and throwing kisses with their hands. I think there were three, maybe four men. They were drinking and having a time for themselves. I tried to turn off to another street hoping to lose them, but it turned out to be the dark side of town. There were still no streetlights or traffic lights, or any sign of life in the houses—most were still abandoned. I was really scared driving in the total darkness, except the dim lights of the car behind me. Then all of a sudden (and I don’t know if this was an accident or on purpose) the truck hit the side of my car. I lost control and ran up

the sidewalk into the steps of an abandoned building. The guys came running; I thought for a minute to check on me, but that was not it. They pulled me out and dragged me into the empty building and gang raped me. At some point I guess I passed out. When I woke up there was blood all around. I found some of my clothes and luckily remembered my cell phone in my car. I called a friend who came and got me and took me to a hospital.

The feeling of intimidation created by some construction workers' sexually explicit behavior has been a common theme expressed by female respondents to a survey randomly administered to attendees of a concerned citizens meeting in a relatively affluent neighborhood where major reconstruction of homes has been taking place. The following quotations capture surveyed residents' commonly expressed views:

- I no longer feel safe in my own neighborhood. When I leave to bring my kids to school in the morning, construction workers stare and make comments at me. I tell my children to ignore them, but it is difficult. It is scary for me to come home alone after bringing my kids to school.
- It is getting so bad with construction workers. I live alone, so I now put a pair of men's boots at my door so they will think a man lives here.
- A few weeks ago, I went to Home Depot. There were several workers that followed me around and would not leave me alone. Every department that I walked to, they would follow me. One kept asking me if I needed help with anything. I ignored them and finally left my basket and walked out. When I got to my car, they were directly behind me. I was petrified. I took off as fast as I could. I now carry a Glock 17, which I recently received training on using.
- New Orleans is now an entirely different world for women in our city. Ask any woman what is the main difference that they notice post-Katrina? Most women will answer that it is the 100s of construction workers. Every neighborhood has damaged homes, so every neighborhood has workers.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Katrina Disaster is uniquely different when compared to other disasters in the United States in modern times. It is actually a multi-impact catastrophe which destroyed over 500,000 houses and displaced more than half of New Orleans' population, far surpassing any other recent disasters (see Brinkley 2006). Additionally, because of poor leadership and inadequate disaster response planning and implementation at the local, state, and federal levels, the Katrina Disaster turned the city into a vast refugee camp for thousands of citizens, including a disproportionate number of poor and minority

populations. Large numbers of individuals, including women and their children, the sick, and the elderly, were virtually stranded in a submerged city without food, water, shelter or protection for several days before emergency relief efforts arrived.

Each phase of the Katrina Disaster, ranging from the warning phase to the reconstruction phase, created conditions and opportunities for the victimization, particularly the sexual assaults, of women. In the earlier phases of the Katrina Disaster, certain unique aspects of the disaster, such as the breakdown of social control agencies, loss of power, anonymity of collective groups of males, and dangerousness of disaster shelters and other temporary housing, facilitated assaults on women, many of whom were left alone with their children. While later phases lent themselves to more typical patterns of sexual assaults, earlier phases nonetheless possessed disaster-related characteristics associated with sexual assaults. Even in the more recent recovery/reconstruction phases, there is evidence of disaster-related opportunities for rape; for instance, there are still women living in vulnerable conditions such as FEMA trailer camps or other isolated residences, and there are still large numbers of male construction workers operating throughout the city. We have uncovered cases that embody different types of women's vulnerability present through each of the disaster phases. Although there are a number of conceptual and methodological problems associated with phase analysis of disasters, we believe that the phases provide an excellent framework for examining the violent and non-violent crimes that occur during disasters.

At this juncture, the sociology of disaster literature (including works by criminologists and disaster researchers) generally offers little empirical evidence on the sexual victimization of women during catastrophes. The dearth of evidence on this phenomenon impedes the development of key policies related to emergency preparedness and planning, which recognize women's vulnerabilities and serve to protect them against violence and sexual assaults. For example, Elaine Enarson's report on emergency preparedness in British Columbia to mitigate disaster-related violence against women concludes, "[W]omen experiencing violence are not identified as a special-needs population with life safety concerns" (1999b, 4). Although Enarson's report addresses the needs of women in Canada, her critique certainly applies to the victimization of women in the U.S. She discusses five critical service gaps suggesting strategic changes that are necessary to mitigate violence against women during disasters. These are:

- (1) **Lack of a mandate for addressing violence against women as a risk factor in disasters.** Existing emergency statutes, regulations, and procedures and guidelines do not identify abused and sexually assaulted women as a highly vulnerable population with special needs during emergencies... Key planning groups...and key responders...are not mandated to identify risks in existing systems, which endanger the life safety of women.
- (2) **Lack of knowledge about the link between violence against women and emergency preparedness.** Violence against women as a concern in disasters has not been integrated into the training of emergency responders or women's services staff. Violence against women is also not communicated to the public as a health concern in disasters...

- (3) **Lack of priority attention to the emergency needs of transition homes and related women's services.** No provisions are currently in place to support the role of women's services, such as residential shelters or critical care facilities, in emergencies.
- (4) **Lack of an integrated emergency preparedness system fully engaging women's services and emergency managers.** The ability of anti-violence women's services to continue functioning or quickly recover from the effects of a major community disaster must be enhanced on a priority basis.
- (5) **Lack of emergency planning in anti-violence women's services.** The critical services provided by women's anti-violence agencies to women whose safety and well-being is at heightened risk during emergencies make effective organization disaster planning essential. Yet, few concrete measures have been taken serving highly vulnerable populations located in or near known hazards (Enarson 1999b, 3-7).

In conclusion, perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects regarding needed policy changes in the protection of women from criminal victimization during disasters is to include women in pre- and post-disaster planning at the local, state, national, and international levels and to bring them into all decision-making processes for short and long-term reconstruction plans (Chew and Ramdas 2005, 4).

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