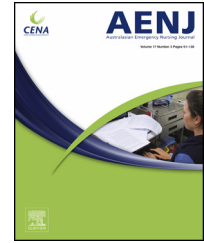




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RESEARCH PAPER

Impact of disaster on women in Iran and implication for emergency nurses volunteering to provide urgent humanitarian aid relief: A qualitative study



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KEYWORDS

Disaster;
Special groups;
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Summary

Background: Men and women are equally affected by disasters, but they experience disaster in different ways.

To provide new knowledge and promote women's involvement in all phases of the disaster management, we decided to capture the perspectives and experiences of the women themselves; and to explore the conditions affecting Iranian women after recent earthquake disasters.

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Methods: The study was designed as a qualitative content analysis. Twenty individuals were selected by purposeful sampling and data collected by in-depth, semi-structured interviews analysed qualitatively.

Results: Three main themes were evident reflecting women's status after disaster: individual impacts of disaster, women and family, and women in the community. Participants experienced the emotional impact of loss, disorganisation of livelihood and challenges due to physical injuries. Women experienced changes in family function due to separation and conflicts which created challenges and needed to be managed after the disaster. Their most urgent request was to be settled in their own permanent home. This motivated the women to help reconstruction efforts.

Conclusions: Clarification of women's need after a disaster can help to mainstream gender-sensitive approaches in planning response and recovery efforts.

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What is known

Individuals experience disasters in different ways. Disasters can affect women's health directly or indirectly, particularly in different settings and jurisdictions where there are different cultural context. It is important to come to understand the effect that disasters have on women and their health at the individual, community and population level for disaster response and recovery.

What this paper adds?

This study provides a thorough understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the women after a disaster in an Iranian culture. Clarification of women's individual need, women's problems in family and community after disasters is important for disaster recovery.

Introduction

Men and women are affected by disaster in different ways. The gender differences of perception, experience and behaviour of victims who are affected by stressful events have been mentioned in several studies.^{1–4} Regardless of whether men or women are more vulnerable in disastrous events, there are obvious differences between them in terms of socio-cultural and bio-psychological factors which may result from differences in risk factors, manifest reactions and recovery from traumatic events and disasters.^{1,2,5–8}

Women are often portrayed as the passive victims of disasters, although this may not necessarily be true.^{9,10} Disasters can affect women's health directly or indirectly through socio-economic deprivation by destruction of homes and businesses, and loss of employment opportunities, which also affects men. Some reports indicate gender ignorance and violation of women's rights in the aftermath of disasters.^{3,11–13}

In Iran as in other countries, there are differences in activities, interest and social expectations between men and

women. Historically, women are responsible for domestic chores, child rearing and caring for family members. The social norms may put women in a more exposed and vulnerable position with respect to some life-threatening events and also following extreme physical injury, women were less cared for and experienced worse situations with respect to family and social relations.^{11,14–17} It is important, therefore, to take social gender into account as a reasonable category in making up these differences. Women's specific needs during a disaster – in particular, in recovering from a disaster – have been less well researched.

Traditionally, emergency nurses have actively participated in disaster relief, in both the response to and recovery from disaster that have affected health care delivery in local, national and international contexts,^{18,19} but fundamentals that support nurses' roles in disasters are not well understood.¹⁸ Since having a disaster plan and being prepared in the workplace, knowing about it and having practiced, may influence in the participants' decision to attend work during a disaster, they need prerequisite knowledge in understanding the complexities forced on health of a community during and after a disaster.^{19–21}

In the context of this paper, what shapes our knowledge about women and disasters is based on studies that included gender as a variable that sometimes compared women to men.^{22–24} Few studies have examined the situation of women after disasters, especially in the recovery phase in Iran.

Since the roles and responsibilities of women stem from cultural, political and economic conditions, it needs to be understood the perspectives and experiences of women in each culture. For this study, researchers decided to capture women's own accounts to better understand how their everyday lives are shaped after a disaster, and to include this knowledge in all phases of the disaster cycle. The aim of this paper therefore is to explore this relatively unstudied area, i.e., the status of Iranian women following disaster.

Method

This study was conducted to understand what happened to women after disasters and how they experienced it. Therefore a qualitative study design incorporating content analysis, which is a suitable method when new areas are to

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