



Emergency management response and recovery plans in relation to sexual and gender minorities in NEW South Wales, Australia



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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a systematic critical review through a ‘queer lens’ of the emergency management response and recovery plans in New South Wales, Australia, in order to determine how the needs of sexual and gender minorities (LGBTI people) are considered and met. We also document the outsourcing by the NSW government of emergency response and recovery arrangements to third party, faith-based Christian institutions and explore how those institutions have been exempted from anti-discrimination protections under Commonwealth (Australian) and State (NSW) law. This enables us to explore the potential implications for LGBTI people in relation to the concepts of vulnerability and resilience. We find the needs of LGBTI people should in practice be met. However, due to anti-discrimination exemptions permitted by law to faith-based Christian institutions, LGBTI people are not being treated equally. We find a ‘blindness to difference’ in relation to the needs of LGBTI individuals and families. As such, we principally conclude that in NSW, Australia, the needs of LGBTI people in post-disaster response and recovery arrangements are inadequately addressed. We recommend further research at the intersection of religion, sexuality and disaster risk reduction to better understand the experiences and needs of LGBTI people (including those of faith) and how faith-based institutions might support LGBTI inclusive response and recovery.

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1. Introduction

Everyone experiences disasters differently due to variable vulnerability and resilience associated with social differences within communities and places [1] and as a consequence of existing processes of social, political and material marginalisation [2]. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) contends that social difference be recognised and that “the needs and concerns of all social groups such as poor, rich, men, women, young, old, indigenous or non-indigenous must be necessarily integrated into the disaster reduction policies and measures because the level of vulnerability depends on these social aspects” [3].

Vulnerability and resilience studies are manifold and explore differences due to gender, race, ethnicity, income, class and age [4,5,6,7,8]. Women [9], ethnic and racial minorities [10,11], the poor [12], the old [13], the young [14] and those with disabilities [15] frequently exhibit higher vulnerability and lower resilience. However, this is not always the case [16,17]. Until recently, sexual and gender minorities have been largely absent from such research.

A rapidly increasing body of new research (see below and Table 1) argues that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people – groups consistently marginalised across many societies [43] – should be more widely encompassed in research and policy work. This is to (1) improve understanding of the specific experiences of LGBTI populations in disasters and to explore how vulnerability and resilience are manifest in disasters; and (2) achieve effective disaster risk reduction (DRR) that incorporates these groups as part of the whole population of a place [39]. Table 1 summarises the available work and notes the specific vulnerabilities based on existing social marginalisation that have emerged. These studies take in a range of sexual and gender minorities in both the Global North and the Global South. This scope is important to note as gender minorities in the Global South also include identities such as waria, bakla, aravani, natuwa and fa’afafine, *inter alia*, who embrace both masculine and feminine characteristics and are not always easily encompassed in the LGBTI nomenclature of the Global North. Nevertheless, the literature underscores common experiences of vulnerability and marginalisation across these sexual and gender minority groups, including:

- Heteronormative assumptions in government policies and NGO practices that exclude or marginalise same-sex families and

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Table 1
Summary of existing scholarship on the experiences of LGBTI and other sexual and gender minorities in disasters.

Disaster event	Study location	Sexual and gender minorities	Issues and experiences discussed	Reference
2004 Tsunami (Indian Ocean)	Tamil Nadu, India	Aravanis ('third gender' group)	Issues facing gender minorities; access to emergency shelters; marginalisation; access to food and other services	[18,19]
2005 Hurricane (Katrina)	New Orleans, USA	LGBTI individuals, families and communities	Issues facing sexual and gender minorities; marginalisation; religious stigmatisation; inequitable access to financial resources and housing; exclusion from support based on definition of family unit; material impacts of heteronormative assumptions	[20–24]
2008 Floods	Southern Nepal	Metis; natuwas ('third gender' groups)	Marginalisation; sexual and gendered violence; lack of access to resources; forced migration	[25]
2010 Earthquake	Haiti	LGBTI individuals, families and communities	Issues facing sexual and gender minorities; sexual and gender violence directed at lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and trans/intersex persons; religious retribution; loss of safe spaces (individual and communal)	[26]
2010 Volcanic eruption	Java, Indonesia	Warias ('third gender' groups)	Issues facing gender minorities; access to emergency shelters; marginalisation; resilience	[27]
2010 Floods and extreme weather events	The Philippines	Baklas ('third gender' groups)	Issues facing gender minorities; access to emergency shelters; marginalisation; resilience	[28,29]
2011 Earthquake and tsunami	Japan	Trans and intersex individuals	Issues facing gender minorities; discrimination in emergency shelters; verbal violence	[30,31]
2011 Floods	Queensland, Australia (especially Brisbane)	LGBTI individuals, families and communities	Issues facing sexual and gender minorities; access to emergency shelters; access to support services; gay male privilege in LGBTI communities; relations between LGBTI communities and mainstream emergency services; occlusion in mainstream media and policies	[32–36]
2011 Earthquake	Christchurch, New Zealand	LGBTI individuals, families and communities	Issues facing sexual and gender minorities; gay male privilege in LGBTI communities; occlusion in mainstream media and policies	[32,37]
2013 Bushfires	Blue Mountains, NSW, Australia	LGBTI individuals, families and communities	Issues facing sexual and gender minorities; access to emergency shelters; access to support services	[33,37]
Multiple events and places	All of the events listed above	All (or most) of the above	As detailed above	[38,39,40,41,42]

LGBTI individuals in disaster response and recovery arrangements.

- Loss of safe personal and communal spaces, exposing LGBTI people to harassment; a related issue of
- Verbal and physical abuse in the confined spaces of emergency shelters; and
- Religious stigmatisation and abuse associated with concepts of divine retribution.

In order to contribute to this developing work, we explore how sexual and gender minorities are considered within disaster response and recovery plans. We do this through a focused analysis of the emergency management response and recovery plans in the State of New South Wales (NSW) Australia – a place regularly affected by disasters and in which broader legislation generally affords equal rights and treatment to LGBTI people. Further, we focus on NSW since it has the largest LGBTI population among Australian jurisdictions (at least through the proxy measure of same-sex couple families, recorded in the Census), with specific localities also showing some of the highest concentrations in the country, including metropolitan (e.g. Inner Sydney), peri-urban (e.g. Blue Mountains) and regional (e.g. the North Coast) areas [44,45,46].

Our aims are to:

- 1) Conduct an author driven expert systematic critical review through a 'queer lens' – that is, a perspective attentive to non-normative sexuality and gender – of the NSW emergency management response and recovery plans in order to determine how the needs of LGBTI people are considered and met in light of the particular experiences of LGBTI people in disasters documented above; and to
- 2) Document the outsourcing by the NSW government of emergency response and recovery arrangements to third party, faith-based Christian institutions and how those institutions have been exempted from anti-discrimination protections under Commonwealth (Australian) and State (NSW) law. This enables us to explore the potential implications for LGBTI people in relation to the concepts of vulnerability and resilience.

We begin by providing an overview of the location of our study noting recent trends in disasters that affect NSW communities – including LGBTI people – and provide a short summary of the legislative context of LGBTI rights and approved anti-discrimination exemptions. This sets the scene for understanding how and where the needs of LGBTI people are considered and met within existing emergency management response and recovery plans in NSW. We then explore the concepts of vulnerability and resilience since these provide a conceptual framework to guide our analysis. Further, we highlight research that examines and complicates the relationship between religion and sexual and gender minorities. This acknowledges that there is an increased interest in the intersection of religion and sexuality from a geographical perspective and our work advances that through the sphere of disaster and policy. We provide this overview as later we show how faith-based Christian institutions have been engaged by government to provide services to community (including LGBTI people) in post-disaster response and recovery arrangements.

2. Setting the context

2.1. NSW and its recent disaster history

NSW is located in the southeast of the country. NSW is regularly affected by events resulting in *Disaster Declarations* [47] and

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