

NOTES

SEARCH AND RESCUE ACTIONS FOLLOWING LARGE-SCALE NATURAL DISASTERS:

A Sociological Research Project

Despite a great increase in the quality and quantity of research on human system responses to natural disasters, search and rescue (SAR) activities have remained relatively unstudied by sociologists. Indeed, we lack a single published study by a professional social scientist wherein the post-disaster SAR response was the primary research focus. Following those disasters which require extended SAR work, many diverse groups – with varying degrees of technical and specialized training – become involved. Despite the frequency, we have not even identified a published study by a sociologist focused on the interorganizational networks which have emerged in response to SAR demands in wilderness settings.

Some evidence suggests that the demands for wilderness SAR missions have and will continue to increase. But to date no study has been reported wherein researchers have sought to systematically and comprehensively assess the level of SAR demand within any state, although several types of data have been collected by various groups.

This research project constitutes a rigorous and systematic effort to provide an initial, empirical knowledge base in these previously neglected areas. It is the first large-scale effort to attempt to bridge the gap between academic and theoretically oriented field research and analysis and information needs of SAR policy makers and practitioners. Hopefully, it will establish a new model of

cooperation and interchange whereby improved academic research will be initiated that will be more relevant to the needs of the SAR community.

The project has three specific research objectives: (1) seven detailed field studies of emergent interorganizational SAR networks will be conducted – five following large natural disasters and two within wilderness settings; (2) an assessment of SAR demand and capacity levels will be made in two different states; (3) a vigorous dissemination effort will be made so as to maximize the utilization of findings by several potential user groups with varying domains of responsibility, including organizations with national spheres of authority and focus.

The proposed research will provide an initial empirical data-base relevant to numerous policy issues. Furthermore, beyond empirical data obtained, especially through publications and the state conferences, the project will serve as a catalyst to encourage representatives from a wide variety of organizations to discuss various policy options as viewed from their perspective. Among these policy issues are: (1) What should be the roles and responsibilities of varying governmental and non-governmental organizations who seek to become involved in post-disaster SAR activities? (2) In what ways should SAR planning and activity within wilderness settings serve to increase the effectiveness of post-disaster SAR responses?

(3) What types of data systems should be established to aid officials in evaluating the probable impacts of alternative SAR related policy options? (4) What alternatives exist to reduce the level of demand for SAR missions, e.g., what are the potential impacts of "preventative education" programs, legal sanctions, or increased "use restrictions"? (5) What information and advice should be disseminated to the general public regarding SAR related actions by local citizens (non-professional) following natural disasters?

The study has been designed to be conducted over a 30-month period, effective from September, 1977. This study has been funded through a grant awarded to Dr. Thomas E. Drabek (chairperson, Department of Sociology, University of Denver) by the National Science Foundation, Research Applied to National Needs (RANN). For further information contact Dr. Drabek at the Department of Sociology, University of Denver, Colorado 80208, U.S.A., (phone 303-753-3459).

NATIONAL EMS EVALUATION SYMPOSIUM

Beginning on July 11, 1978 the National EMS Evaluation Symposium will convene in Seattle, Washington for a 3-day meeting. The focus of this gathering will be the impact of systematized emergency medical care as it affects patient outcome, i.e. death and disability for specific tracer groups within a defined population. The symposium is sponsored in part by the Department of Social and Health Services and the U.S. Public Health Service, Region IX. For registration information contact: Jack Cvitanovic, Program Director, DSHS, EMS Section, Olympia, Washington 98504, c/o Mail Stop LC-11B.

For further information concerning the program, contact: Lee Shuck, Division of Emergency Medical Services, 6525 Belcrest Road, 11th Floor, Hyattsville, Maryland, 20782, U.S.A.

EARTHQUAKE DISASTER RESEARCH

The National Science Foundation (RANN) has awarded a three-year grant for a longitudinal study of the social and economic consequences of the Guatemalan earthquake of February 4, 1976. The research focuses on measuring progress in the recovery process and on measuring social and economic change resulting from the disaster and the mitigation processes associated with it. In particular, it will examine how cross-cultural differences between the victim community and relief and rehabilitation agencies entered into the relief and rehabilitation process and how such differences are related to recovery and change. It will also examine how the earthquake and the assistance received from outside sources have affected on-going human development programs and projects.

The design for the research involves the taking of successive measures on socio-economic and cultural variables at four points in time: (1) before impact, (2) just after impact, (3) 18 months after impact, and (4) 30–36 months after impact. Baseline data available from recent studies will furnish a method of measuring before-impact baseline variables. Samples will be drawn in twenty-five communities or urban neighborhoods, representing Indian and Ladino subcultures. A control sample will also be employed for purposes of differentiating changes in variables which are unassociated with the earthquake.

The research project is headed by Professor Frederick L. Bates of the University of Georgia along with Dr. JoAnn Glittenberg of the University of Colorado School of Nursing and Dr. Timothy Farrell of the Instituto de Nutricion de Centro America y Panama, Guatemala City. Further information about the project can be obtained from Professor Bates, Department of Sociology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602, U.S.A.

NEW STUDY ON CHEMICAL DISASTERS

In the last 20 years, considerable research has been done on how people behave and groups react to natural disasters such as tornadoes, floods, hurricanes and earthquakes. These studies by social scientists have led to improved disaster planning and better recovery from such extreme mass emergencies. Research is now being started on another general class of disasters, those brought about by technological failures or accidents. As in the case of natural disasters, studies have been initiated into sudden technological disasters so improvements can be made in preparations for and responses to this kind of threat and danger.

In line with this new interest in technological disasters, the Disaster Research Center (DRC) at The Ohio State University was awarded a grant in September 1977 from the Scientific and Engineering Applications Directorate of the National Science Foundation to undertake a three year study of disasters resulting from chemical agents. The focus of the research is on organizational and community preparations for, responses to

and recovery from relatively sudden chemical disasters. Extensive studies in the field will be undertaken, including intensive interviewing in police and fire departments, civil defense offices, hospitals, relief agencies, mass media units, organizations involved in the producing, transporting, storing and using of dangerous chemical substances, and in all other groups that would be involved in dealing with sudden mass emergencies.

There are three phases to the study. In the first, the DRC focus will be on the planning and preparations for disasters involving chemical agents. The second phase of the study will focus on actual incidents involving chemical hazards. The third phase of the research will concentrate on the longer run consequences of any sudden chemical disaster. An effort will be made to trace out over a period of time the effects of such a disaster on organizational and community planning for mass emergencies.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Clark Lawrence, Project Manager, Disaster Research Center, The Ohio State University, 127-129 West 10th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43201, U.S.A.