

Role of race and gender in emergency management



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Introduction

In any emergency, conflict arises within in any class structure; but it is when an unequal distribution of power takes place that struggle arises within the realm of emergency management. In any disaster, planning can become a struggle for local, state, and federal governments with varying populations. In the case of Puerto Rico and Hurricane Maria a variety of factors played a role in the crisis that took place on the island and race might have been one contributing factor but I am not completely convinced it was “ the” contributing factor.

Vulnerability

Conflict generally arises in populations where residents are under sourced and lack educational material on disaster planning. For example, the Puerto Rican or Latino community exhibit different barriers that affect the disaster planning process and can often become a hazard to government officials that are not a part of that community. According to Burke, Bethel &Britt, complications with disaster preparedness and conflict arises because there is a paucity of information available regarding the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the Latino population” (Burke, Bethel, & Britt, 2012). Language <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-race-and-gender-in-emergency-management/>

barriers and cultural beliefs tend to be the driving force behind literacy issues regarding disaster planning.

Race

Race comes into the picture when residents feel as if the local government is not prioritizing issues in their neighborhoods and by creating poor relations within the community and preventing essential resources from being received. The argument in Puerto Rico is that they are a part of the US and disaster preparedness planning should have occurred as it did in the US with other Hurricanes. Government resources were not made available quick enough and with the absence of Spanish material, Latinos were left wondering what to do during natural disasters such as Maria. What happened in Puerto Rico was a direct reflection of relationship problems with the US. President Donald Trump traveled to Texas and Florida, after just four days of Hurricane Harvey's landfall. However, it wasn't until thirteen days after Maria hit that he arrived in Puerto Rico. Race could have had a factor in the delayed recovery but relations between the two played a bigger factor in the response.

Race Impact

When looking at the slow response to Hurricane Maria the racial aspect shows some prospective as to why the current administration delayed responding to the needs of the community. With any incident officials must look at the culture's background of the affected area to determine what resources are needed to recover. Being that Puerto Rico is mostly Hispanic and the recent debate over illegal immigration proves that race played a role <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-race-and-gender-in-emergency-management/>

in the response and recovery phase of the incident. Even though Puerto Ricans have US citizenship and are able to legally work and live in the US, they were encompassed with all immigrants from other countries. For example in *Downes v. Bidweell*, Puerto Rico is described as an unincorporated territory “ belonging to, but not a part of the US”, suggesting that residents are equal but separate (Morales, 2018). According to the Washington Post, more attention was given to the fallout of Roseanne Barr from ABC than it was to the miscount of the death toll in Puerto Rico (Morales, 2018). Many in the area believed that there was a disenfranchisement and unequal distribution of resources delivered to the crisis. In fact, FEMA failed to deliver tarps to cover aid which caused an exposition to elements for months (Morales, 2018). The use of the term unincorporated territory has allowed the US to discriminate against Puerto Rico and deny much needed resources to aid in the reconstruction of its infrastructure.

Gender Impact

Women in the public and private workforce have made strides from being at home mothers to becoming CEOs of major corporations. When analyzing the relationship between US and Puerto Rico, gender tells the story of why US officials distrust the handling of the island affairs; it's simply because Puerto Rico's governor is a woman. With the history of the country and women not in leadership roles many believed that women are not capable of being in position of power and making decisions. In fact violence against women and women rights activists increased after Hurricane Maria. A report from

Refugees International found that protection for women in Puerto Rico was <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-race-and-gender-in-emergency-management/>

not included in disaster planning during emergency response (Walsh, 2018). Reports of “ key systems designed to prevent and respond to” violence against women were not restored even after communications were (Walsh, 2018). Some women reported higher numbers of domestic abuse and even the governor suffered verbal abuse from the President and some Senators. This incident exposed the continued disparity among men and women in the workplace as well as within cultures. As the recovery process continued in Puerto Rico improved relations and more women are being incorporated in the disaster planning process.

Conclusion

Race and gender has and always will continue to play a role in any disaster or crisis that occurs. With America being a melting pot and the mixture of cultures imbedded within society, disaster planning will continuously need improvement and adjustments that are tailored to the makeup of the area. To prevent the destruction of what happened in Puerto Rico, officials will need to incorporate and research culture, risks, and threats for improvements and understand what works best for that population. Often one’s heritage takes a first seat over any plan or policy which can posit a threat. Here collaboration is necessary in order to develop a solution to prevent a crisis from developing. Incorporating race and gender can mean positive re-enforcement and assurance that all backgrounds and nationalities are addressed and planned for in disaster planning.

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