

# Domestic Violence and Disasters: System Resiliency and Disaster Preparedness

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## Disasters and Violence

Violence increases in disaster settings - dominant masculinity response, sympathies that excuse violence, changes to family & community dynamics, secondary stressors:

- Indian Ocean tsunami - women in camps and shelters at increased risk of rape, sexual abuse, molestation (Fisher, 2010)
- 2005 Florida hurricanes - more days of exposure to disaster declaration associated with increased risk of assault (Gearhart et al., 2018)
- West Africa Ebola quarantines and school closures - increased risk for domestic violence, exploitation, and abuse (Onuango et al., 2019)



## Root Causes of Domestic Violence in Disasters

- Community Structures and Resource Allocation
  - *Disasters are not “natural” but a result of how communities are structured, and resources are allocated*
- Gendered health impacts of disasters (morbidity, mortality and more)
- Loss of access to safe housing; required to remain with family for funding assistance and disaster aid
- Women-led businesses hit hardest in crises
- Humanitarian responses most effective when involving women equitably

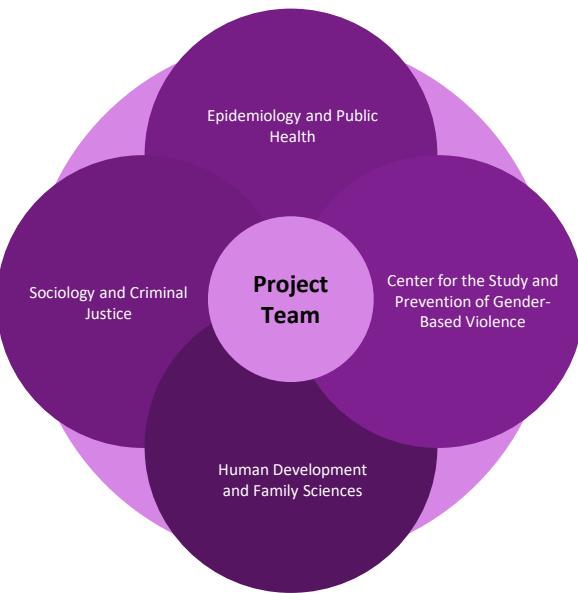


## The Shadow Pandemic

During the COVID pandemic:

- Overall reports of DV increased between 7.5% and 27% (Kourti et al., 2023)
- During COVID, the National Domestic Violence Hotline estimated:
  - *19% increase in online chat services*
  - *24% increase in hotline contact by victims identifying as Asian*
  - *40% increase in the need for protective orders*
- Reduced capacity of health services, shelters, and helplines





## Getting the Team Together

- Disaster Epidemiologist
- Former DV Coalition Staff
- Gender-Based Violence Researchers
- Current and Former DV Coalition Board Members
- Graduate and Undergraduate Students



## Acknowledgement

*Thank you to the Coalition Leaders and DV service providers who graciously shared their wisdom and expertise with us. The work presented today represents their experiences and perspectives. The Research Team appreciates the DV community's willingness to participate in this project and we offer our sincere gratitude for the tireless, and often unrecognized, work of DV coalitions, organizations, and advocates.*



# Project Overview

Key informant interviews with executive directors and leadership of State and Territorial Domestic Violence Coalitions

- Examine how were systems and services were impacted and how DV system responded

Based on interview themes, develop and administer a survey to domestic violence advocates and service providers

- Measure extent and nature of service disruption and impacts on the DV workforce

Design data-informed tools and resources to improve DV system and service preparedness and build system resiliency for future disasters

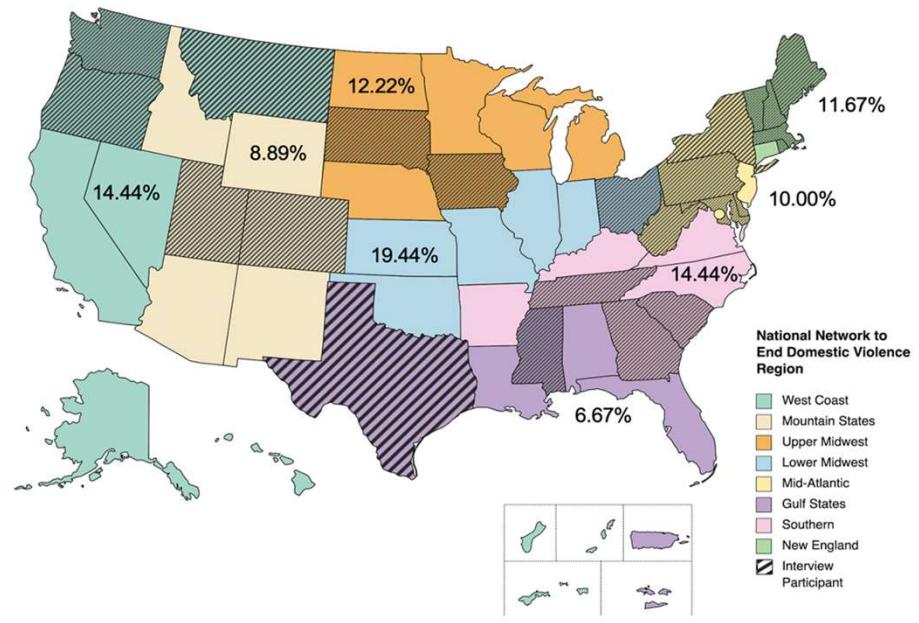


## Data Collection

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS	PROVIDER SURVEY
<p>Developed interview guide with input from local DV partners</p> <p>Each State and Territorial Domestic Violence Coalition executive director (N=56) invited via email to participate in an interview early 2022</p>	<p>Web-based survey distributed to contacts within the 1,341 local domestic violence programs/organizations across all NNEDV regions</p>
<p>Interviews conducted by Dr. Miller and Dr. Fleury-Steiner, both current or former Coalition Board Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recordings supplemented by interviewer notes and reflections</li> <li>• Double coded following grounded theory; constant comparison method</li> </ul>	<p>Survey items were developed from interview themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey included both closed and open-ended questions</li> <li>• Items focused on the impact of COVID on DV services, survivors, and the workforce</li> <li>• Also included measures specific to disaster preparedness</li> </ul>



## Combined Participation



Created using MapChart



## SYSTEM IMPACTS AND SYSTEM RESILIENCY

### Interview and Survey Themes



## System Impacts: Public Health Control Measures

### Stay At Home Orders and Travel Restrictions

- *Left victims isolated, often sheltering in place with abusers and cut off from support and resources*
- *Required staff to quickly pivot many services to remote and minimized availability of staff for coverage of 24-hour shifts*

### Mandates on Physical Distancing/Restrictions on Gathering

- *Reduced shelter capacity and required online programs and services*

### Isolation and Quarantine requirements for COVID illness and exposure

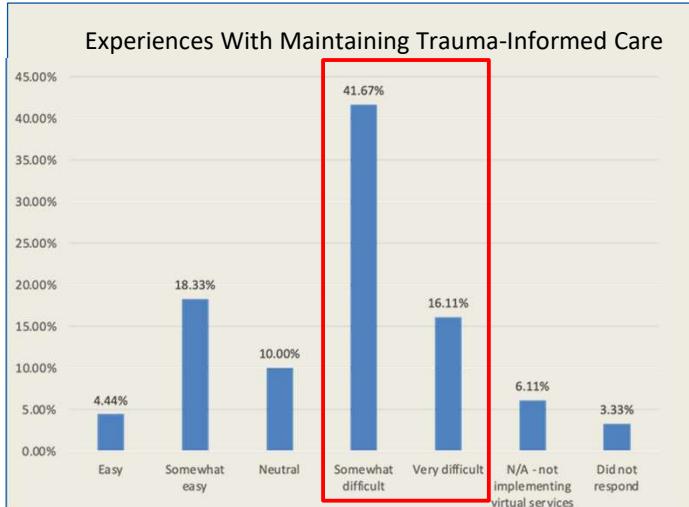


## Shifts in Service Delivery

- Pandemic-related shifts in service delivery:
  - *Shift to remote/online services and service delivery*
  - *Changes to shelter rules (physical distancing) reduced shelter capacity and increased use of alternative sheltering (hotels)*
- Service delivery changes led to issues with maintaining trauma-informed and empowerment-based approaches



## Service Delivery Shifts: Trauma Informed & Empowerment-Based Approaches



*"In our programs, they want to provide an empowering environment. But they also have to keep people safe. I think that was a barrier, and it's like, **how do we keep everybody safe and also how do we also know when to say 'I'm sorry?'** This is what we have to do, this is our trajectory, and if we don't do this we could be jeopardizing other people's lives and health... It's a hard conversation to have with people."*



## Reinforcing Inequities



*"[The pandemic] also all happened at a time where survivors and advocates of color were also watching everything going on in our country and calling on the coalition to not only address the pandemic but continue work around racial equity..."*

*"I think the biggest takeaway that we had was... looking at the **inequities that we've always known have been there within systems** and not going back to kind of pretending they don't exist..."*



# Impacts on DV Workforce

- Lack of essential worker status for domestic violence advocates
  - *DV advocates had less PPE access, less access to testing in shelters, and later access to the COVID-19 vaccine than other essential workers*
- Unsustainable levels of stress, fear, and exhaustion
- Accelerated rate of job turnover among both leadership and staff



Share your thoughts.....

*What system vulnerabilities do you think the pandemic exposed?*



## System Innovation and System Resiliency

Recognizing pandemic-induced innovations and documenting lessons learned to build system resiliency:

- 1) Availability of virtual supports and services increased access
- 2) Forging stronger connections with existing partners and new partners
- 3) Influx of funding from COVID stimulus (*temporary and restrictive*)
- 4) Refocused commitment to racial equity and social justice

*"One of the things that I observed, is that advocates in these organizations that are coming out of this situation, with a lot more confidence - in themselves and their ability to maintain services and access, despite the challenge. I think it's important for us to know that they respond to this with incredible creativity, I mean it's not surprising, but... sometimes we miss the opportunity to say wow we did a really good job."*



## Virtual Services and Remote Work

- After pandemic restrictions eased, staff members saw continued interest in, and benefit from, utilizing remote options.
  - *Advantages for staff (e.g. flexibility and reduced turnover)*
  - *Advantages for survivors (e.g., removing contact with their abuser in court settings; no need for childcare, transportation, or paying for parking fees)*
- System Resilience – Improving technology infrastructure, resources, and building capacity to maintain and expand virtual access to services and systems (e.g., court hearings)

*"I think the capacity building that happened, the technology capacity building that took place, I think, will be carried forward. The statewide court system is currently putting equipment in all our shelter programs so if a victim or survivor chooses, they can follow their court hearings. It can be held at the shelter; they don't have to go."*



## Strengthening and Expanding Partnerships

Coalitions reported that the DV system leaned on already existing partnerships with other sectors agencies (e.g., courts, social services, education) to navigate system impacts and shifts in delivery of services across sectors

*"At the coalition level we did a lot of outreach around **working with community partners** to you know put together a very detailed graphs of you know, food banks and food pantries and free food lines that we could get out to our programs and survivors, we were working closely. We were working closely with schools just you know figuring out, you know technology needs that were met, working with survivors trying to get them access points and different things that they needed..."*



### Share your thoughts.....

*What system strengths do you think the pandemic revealed?*



# Strategies for Building System Capacity

- Disasters create uniquely challenging environments in which to address root causes of violence
- Recognize lack of surge capacity and ever-present stressors



## CCRs and Disaster Resilience

Pre-existing CCR infrastructure is useful for supporting coordination during emergencies or disasters.

- However, CCRs rely on extensive cross-agency cooperation.
- Disasters and disaster response disrupt interorganizational coordination and service provision.
- Disasters threaten service continuity, diminish access to resources and support, and complicate maintaining a survivor-focused response.



## Opportunities for Resilience Building - CCRs

- Maintaining community infrastructure for service coordination
- Continuity of legal systems and law enforcement
- Maintenance of evidence-based practice
- Continuity of CCR networking, training, outreach



## Prolonged Maintenance of “Temporary” Conditions

- Physical dislocation or long-term need for “temporary” sheltering
- Community cohesion that occurs post-disaster may further isolate victims
- Impacts case management, victim empowerment, local partnerships



## Devaluing Services during Emergencies

- Rapidly shifting priorities for case management agencies
- Operating in new or altered environments
- Can new and existing partners come to the table for drills, exercises, and workshops for all “first responders”?



## Forging Connections for Emergency Preparedness

- Applying skills in responding to situational crises to preparation for **natural disasters or public health emergencies**
- Improved planning, training and evaluation activities around emergency preparedness are needed to support DV providers as first responders

*Similar to other professional groups studied, those most confident in their organization's ability to respond (OR = 8.79) and their personal knowledge of preparedness (OR = 4.12) were most likely to want more training and resources to improve readiness*



# Disaster-Related Barriers to Services and Support

- Continuity of victim services
  - *Housing, counseling, financial planning*
  - *Hoteling victims impacts case management, counseling*
- After multiple hurricanes impacted Florida in 2016 - 2018, case managers felt they were no longer “key actors”
  - Evidence-based practice: Exercise plans and responses to events together



# Disaster-Related Barriers to Services and Support

- Gaps in law enforcement response planning and protocols
  - Lack of training on enforcement of public health and other restrictions
  - Changes in crime patterns
  - Response obstacles
  - Other responsibilities (e.g., evacuation, emergency management, pre-hospital emergency care)
- Focus on overlapping missions



## Share your thoughts....

*What resources are  
needed for disaster  
preparedness?*



## Where do we go from here?

Improve understanding of the heightened risk of domestic violence in a disaster

*Disaster preparedness training for DV systems and services; trauma informed training and exercises for emergency responders*

Develop tools that increase disaster preparedness

*Emergency plan templates for shelters, offices, "whole communities," Coordinated Community Response (CCR) teams*

Understand applications to other "emergencies" like the recent politicization of services and government shutdown



## Understanding the “Storm on the Horizon”

- What about disasters and emergencies driven by policies?
  - Political will and interest in prioritizing and understanding domestic violence
- **Coming Soon:** Follow up survey and interviews to understand these impacts on services and systems over the last year



## Contact the Team!

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