

Disasters and social capital: Why poorest communities are hardest hit.

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Presentation outline



- Context
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Theoretical framework
- Five communities
- Three phases of the disaster cycle
 - Preparedness
 - Response
 - Recovery
- Conclusion

It does matter where you live

“The earthquakes which struck Canterbury in 2010 and 2011 were to demolish the centre of Christchurch and cause significant damage and disruption to surrounding suburbs and towns. While the earthquakes caused havoc in areas of affluence and disadvantage alike, the similarity stops there. A significant finding of this UNESCO/University of Auckland study was the difference between the ability of families living in different communities to respond and recover. The study provided marked contrast between those families who responded by evacuating to their holiday home in Wanaka and those who slept in their cars; between the children who were sent to school elsewhere in New Zealand and those who were taken in by the local marae because no-one came to collect them; between those who argued with EQC, their insurance company and their builder until their home was rebuilt and those who still live in damp, draughty, sub-standard red-zoned homes.” (Mutch, 2014)

Context



- Between 2010 and 2012 10,000+ earthquakes/aftershocks in Canterbury
- September 4 2010 earthquake 7.1 (Richter scale) centred in rural Darfield caused major building and infrastructure damage but no loss of life
- February 22 2011 (6.3) earthquake centred closer to city of Christchurch, devastated city centre killing 186 people
- Further aftershocks (many over 5) hampered recovery and rebuild process
- All communities were affected but some coped better than others

Literature review



- Common themes are: suddenness, unexpectedness, lack of preparedness, size of the event and ensuing damage, inability of existing systems to cope, large-scale death or dislocation, and often lack of immediate access to food, water, shelter and medical aid
- Recent disasters have highlighted that highly developed countries are just as prone to disasters as less developed countries and within all countries, less affluent communities have greater difficulty in recovering from disasters
- Disaster phases:
 - Shock and disorganisation.
 - Altruistic or heroic phase
 - High morale “honeymoon period”
 - Disillusionment
 - Reconstruction and hope.

Methodology



- Nested within a larger UNESCO/University of Auckland-funded study: “Christchurch schools tell their earthquake stories”
- Originally the focus was on school personnel (students, teachers, principals) but once each project got underway, parents, families and the wider communities asked to join.
- All stories were gathered ethically and sensitively.
- Stories were recorded on audio, video or in note form.
- While schools and people agreed to be identified for historical purposes, names are protected here to focus on the content not the location.

Theoretical framework



- **Social capital**
 - Bonding (where people have similarities in common)
 - Bridging (where people build links despite differences)
 - Linking (where people have links with others in different social strata or power positions)
- When communities are more alike, the connections are stronger but the focus can be inward looking and therefore not as helpful in longer term community recovery and rebuilding.
- Connections between people who are less similar may not be strong but in a disaster situation may have more useful longer term outcomes
- Lower socio-economic communities, especially, can be disadvantaged if they do not have the links to important wider social networks.

Five communities



- Hillview:
 - Affluent hill suburb
- Riverside:
 - Mid-SES small town outside city
- Beachlands
 - Mid-SES eastern suburbs
- Forest Park
 - Mid-Low SES eastern suburbs
- East Avenue
 - Low SES eastern suburbs

Preparedness



- All schools had emergency procedures for school-based disasters, such as fires, were familiar with Ministry trauma support and had communication and contact procedures but these often proved inadequate, especially in February.
- The September earthquake provided a good opportunity to update emergency procedures, information storage, disaster kits and communication alternatives.
- While no-one was prepared, communities, such as Riverside, with strong existing community networks mobilised quickly and became community hubs.
- The East Avenue principal reported her community had such low levels of resilience that they were left in a state of inertia and despair
- Hillview did not see themselves so much as a community as sets of families and neighbourhoods.

Response



- At Hillview, a common family response was “flight” – to holiday homes, sending children to relatives around the country or overseas. While it provided much needed respite, it often delayed the emotional processing of events. With a parental death, the school became a focus for the school community to seek emotional support.
- Riverside became an emergency shelter in September and a host school for students from Christchurch in February. Beachlands had only minor damage but supported its community through several large earthquakes and clean-ups.
- Forest Park sustained major damage in February but hosted a range of support services and facilities for their wider community. The community bonded strongly through their shared experience. The community felt “forgotten” on their side of town.
- East Avenue focused on basic needs and emotional support for those children and their families left at school and transient children.

Recovery



- Hillview has benefitted from the school as a focal point. Most houses repaired or rebuilt. Roads repaired. Area looks clean, tidy and prosperous.
- Riverside strengthened its place in the community through its shared experience and taking a manakitanga role for Christchurch evacuees.
- Beachlands is still dealing with the on-going and secondary stressors faced by the school and community.
- East Avenue changed principals but new principal became strong community advocate, especially when school was marked for closure. Closure overturned. Physical environment of community still in disrepair, especially in relation to infrastructure but rebuilding underway.
- Forest Park amalgamated with nearby school despite protest, leaving school feeling like “collateral damage.” Community mostly abandoned and in state of disrepair with graffiti and long grass. Community dispirited.

Conclusion



- The higher SES community did not see themselves so much as a community but as individuals with assets and resources. They had networks which promoted strong bridging and linking capital. The school played an important role in bonding capital and emotional processing.
- High-mid-SES communities with strong community identity showed most resilience with bonding, bridging and some linking capital. The school was an important resource.
- Mid-low SES communities had strong bonding capital but not enough bridging or linking capital to assist smooth recovery.
- The poorest community had lowest resilience and limited capital. Poverty and transience were exacerbated by their experiences.