

Introduction

We rely on law enforcement every day to provide for the safety and security of our communities, and, during disasters, officers are the first on the scene to assist survivors. . . . It is also important to remember that during a disaster, police have the same concerns as all survivors: Is my family safe and what's the impact on my property? (Fugate 2013, pp. 100–101)

Few phenomena challenge the human spirit or social order of society quite like a disaster (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002). They can completely “overwhelm the coping capacity of the affected communities” (De Goyet, Marti, and Osorio 2013, ch. 61). The impacts of disasters extend beyond the headlines and news feeds on body counts and costs, striking at the core of a community's identity and daily activities. Often overlooked are the short- and long-term effects of these events on the people that society relies on in a disaster—the men and women who serve as first responders (police, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel). The needs of first responders are often neglected or underplayed in dialogues on disaster response and recovery efforts. Little thought goes into the factors that affect

Excerpt • Temple University Press

their ability to respond to emergencies or into how their disaster work may affect them personally and professionally.

This book provides important insights into the effects of disaster work on law-enforcement officers who served as first responders during some of the worst disasters in modern history. Law-enforcement officers were chosen over other first-responder agents as the focus of the book because they serve as critical actors in mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery endeavors before, during, and after disasters. They are most often the first to provide immediate assistance to the public, and their presence can serve as a visible deterrent against chaos and violence (Bono 2011).

Generally, first responders are expected to fulfill their duties during an emergency regardless of the magnitude of the disaster. This book provides a unique view into what happens to law-enforcement officers when they are personally affected by a disaster to which they respond professionally. Specifically, the book examines the impact of the disaster on the police departments and the professional and personal lives of officers during the response and recovery phases of a disaster. Doing so can improve understanding of their behaviors during extreme crises and improve the preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery policies of first responders and emergency managers.

The unprecedented number of natural and manmade disasters since 2005 highlights the need to closely analyze issues that affect disaster response and recovery efforts. It has been argued that society has become increasingly vulnerable to severe weather events (Kunkel, Pielke, and Changnon 1999), and the effects of climate change alone will lead to more extreme weather for the global community (Aalst 2006). Extreme weather may affect the distribution of natural resources, spawn conflict, and pose security threats (Nel and Righarts 2008). Each year since 1990, approximately 227 million people worldwide have been affected by natural disasters (Guha-Sapir et al. 2012). In addition, as terrorist organizations grow and enhance their capabilities, the United States continues to be under threat of manmade disasters (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2005). The risks of both natural and manmade disasters make it imperative that we

Excerpt • Temple University Press

focus on adequate preparation for future events; this requires a better understanding of the critical issues that affect the behavior of first responders.

The current U.S. homeland security era places its greater demands on the police to serve as first-responder agents (Oliver 2006; 2009). Events such as the terror attacks of September 11 and the Hurricane Katrina disaster brought to the forefront the importance of the role the police play during emergency response. This book—focusing on the nexus of the pertinent and timely issues of emergency response and disaster recovery—explores the seldom-discussed issues in first responder work at a time when the nation has become more aware of the threat of disasters.

Background: The Disasters

All the disasters examined in this book were of epic proportion: they were either large in scale or severely affected communities and the first-responder agencies that serve them. Additionally, the sites selected were chosen for the immense impact they had on affected communities and the potential threats each disaster posed on first responders both professionally and personally. The disasters examined are Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Gulfport, Mississippi (2005); the Tornado Super Outbreak in Tuscaloosa, Alabama (2011); and an earthquake and tsunami in Santiago and Constitución, Chile (2010).

All three disasters were large in scale, but each has its own spatial and temporal dynamics associated with both the unfolding and the duration of the effects on their communities. Each high-consequence event displays subtle differences that provide opportunities to examine the strengths and vulnerabilities of the policing agencies and the officers themselves. In addition, cultural differences between the agencies provide a chance to also add analysis of cultural components among the challenges faced by policing agencies and their officers during disasters, as well as best practices for overcoming these conditions.

Contributions to Theory and Practice

Currently there is a dearth of literature—textbooks or supplemental books—on the challenges faced by law-enforcement officers and law-enforcement agencies during disasters. Most of the existing textbooks focus on the operational functions, culture, and models of policing. Very little attention is given to examining the nuances of the challenges law-enforcement officers face in disaster conditions. This book fills this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the major challenges law-enforcement officers face in such times (i.e., concerns about loved ones, exposure to high fatality rates, inability to maintain normal operational protocols).

The book was inspired by the accounts of triumphs and tragedies shared by the first responders who participated in a research project supported by the National Center for the Study of Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response—Homeland Security Center of Excellence. The goal of the project was to gain insights from first responders who have firsthand knowledge of disaster work and examine their challenges during major natural disasters and the impact of disaster work on their professional and personal lives. The project sought knowledge from their personal stories.

The ineluctable threat of future natural and manmade disasters makes it imperative that we advance our understanding of the key issues that first responders face and develop meaningful strategies for preparing them for disaster response. This book provides timely insights that advance theoretical understanding of first-responder behaviors and disaster management issues during crises. The book's reliance on the insights provided by police officers who have served during some of the worst disasters in modern history for its analysis contributes significantly to the field of disaster management.

The conflicts between professional and personal responsibilities that first responders may face in responding to a catastrophic event can be considered a distinctive feature of a catastrophic event. The data presented in this book reveal both challenges

Excerpt • Temple University Press

and best practices in responses to some unique and unprecedentedly widespread disasters. Planners and emergency program managers will be able to use the findings from the book for self-assessment and improvements in their planning.

Description of Study Design and Methods

The work included in this book is a collection of both qualitative and quantitative research, including personal interviews, focus groups, and surveys. We gained access to the study participants through announced requests for volunteers from the departments under examination. The study participants answered questions related to their experiences during the height of the disaster and their experiences afterward. All study participants were assured of their anonymity, explaining that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time. For the qualitative component, researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with approximately one hundred study participants as well as three focus groups, during which participants spoke freely about their experiences with the presence and support of other police personnel. For the quantitative component, researchers collected close to nine hundred completed self-administered surveys from additional participants. The survey instrument collected data from each study participant on a range of information, including demographic characteristics, work history, measures of stress, coping strategies, and other work-related questions. It allowed the research team to collect information that would provide an illustration of the challenges that the officers faced and the degree to which their roles as first responders were affected by the disaster.

The qualitative data derived from these instruments provided a nuanced understanding of the nature of the officers' experiences and their ability or inability to process their experiences in order to cope with the stress of disaster work and respond to the crisis and those in need. The face-to-face interviews were designed to obtain contextual information on the study participants' experiences during the disasters. Officers answered

Excerpt • Temple University Press

questions on their roles as first responders during the disaster and about their actions, sentiments, and thoughts while working as first responders during the crisis. Each officer answered the same set of questions, but the open-ended nature of the interviews allowed the officers to discuss a variety of topics related to the study and how their experiences affected their ability or inability to respond to and cope with the challenges of disaster work. This resulted in the collection of a rich, detailed, in-depth body of information on their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions during the disaster. All uncited quotes in this book came from the interviews and focus groups conducted in the study. With the exception of senior officers in the police force and other public officials, pseudonyms were used, where necessary, to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

The common thread that weaves throughout the data reported in this book is the humanity of the people who put themselves in harm's way to protect others and the enduring aftereffects of the disaster on their lives. And while some officers engaged in behavior inconsistent with their role as law-enforcement officers, most upheld their pledge to serve and protect the public. This sense of loyalty was found in participants irrespective of gender, culture, rank, and personal background.

It is important to highlight that some of the respondents were reticent to share details of their experiences, and understandably so. But the vast majority of the participants were willing to share information about their journey through the disaster and were extremely open and frank about the harsh realities they faced during that time. The accounts of their experiences demonstrate the complexities associated with the heroic roles they play, the stress they encounter, and the overall challenges they face in the midst of the disaster. For some, the disaster was over when the recovery plans got underway, but for most the disaster lingered and continued to stay with them for years after the event. This book tells their stories.

While the data provide valuable information, there were some limitations, as with any study of this magnitude and importance. Although the sample collected is representative of the diversity

Excerpt • Temple University Press

of the police departments examined, a much larger, randomized sample may have provided further insights that could not be obtained from the samples used. In addition, the responses provided by the study participants were based on their memories of past events; hence, some of their recollection of their experiences may not be exact. Despite the study's limitations, the data provide a significant view into the coping practices that fostered resilience among a group of first responders during some of the worst natural disasters in recorded history.

Book Contents and Road Map

This book was guided by the following research questions: (1) How do disasters challenge the typical operational protocols of law enforcement? (2) What are the organizational expectations of law-enforcement officers during times of crisis? (3) How does police culture affect the actions and reaction of law-enforcement officers during disasters? (4) What are the adaptive (e.g., protective and altruistic) and maladaptive behavioral responses that law-enforcement personnel exhibit during a disaster? (5) How does stress affect a law-enforcement officers' ability to function during disasters? (6) What are some of the key challenges law-enforcement officers face after a disaster and how does the disaster experience affect their professional and personal lives? (7) What factors aid law-enforcement officers in reconstructing their lives after a disaster and what protocols can law-enforcement agencies put into place to mitigate the negative impacts of disasters on the well-being of their personnel? (8) What are the similarities and differences in the disaster work experience of law-enforcement officers in different cultural contexts? (9) What can law-enforcement agencies do to train officers to be more resilient during disasters?

Each chapter in this book systematically explores the guiding research questions and introduces the reader to key concepts and phenomena. Together, they provide insights that transform the manner in which crisis and disaster response efforts are conceptualized, specifically when considering the role of law enforcement.

Excerpt • Temple University Press

Chapter 1, *A Close-up View of the Disasters, the Police Departments, and the Impact of the Disasters on Police Operations*, introduces the context for the book and reviews departmental expectations of officers, formal and informal elements of police culture, and the ethos associated with law enforcement. In addition, it provides details on the history and operations of the related police departments that are relevant to understanding their policing practices during disaster events.

Chapter 2, *Unusual Circumstances and Unusual Challenges*, highlights the challenges law-enforcement officers face in the line of duty. The discussion examines the emotional and behavioral conditions that occur when officers confront extreme challenges. The chapter reviews the literature on police officer responses and discusses the differences between adaptive and maladaptive responses. In addition, the chapter reviews research on stress and post-traumatic stress syndrome among police officers. It examines elements of stress, with a focus on the stress induced by disasters, as well as the resulting post-traumatic stress that often ensues thereafter. Case studies are used to provide examples of the concepts discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 3, *Dilemmas with Responding to the Call of Duty*, addresses a topic seldom discussed in the literature and highlights challenges and frustrations that occasionally lead to role strain or role conflict among officers, particularly during disasters. These matters are explored using case studies to provide illustrations of the concepts the chapter discusses. The chapter compares the law-enforcement agencies that are a focus of the book to deepen understanding and to widen the lens of perspective.

Chapter 4, *Missing and Out of Action*, discusses factors that contribute to abandonment of posts of duty, including the issue of abandonment of duty among law-enforcement officers as a response to the extreme stress they experience during disasters. Case studies in the chapter illustrate some of the concepts discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 5, *When Police Become the Criminals*, explores what happens when law-enforcement officers engage in police misconduct and criminal activities during disasters. Case stud-

Excerpt • Temple University Press

ies in the chapter illustrate the impact of these events on police organizations.

Chapter 6, *Resilience in the Face of It All*, in an effort to provide insights into what fosters resilience among law-enforcement officers, uses case studies to highlight resilience and the adaptive responses law-enforcement officers exhibit in response to their exposure to disasters.

Chapter 7, *Picking Up the Pieces*, picks up where Chapter 3 leaves off and uses survey data and case studies to highlight the ways in which law-enforcement officers attempt to reassemble their lives after a disaster.

Chapter 8, *Moving Forward*, explores the lessons the first responder community can learn from the experiences of the police officers examined in this book and the ways in which law-enforcement agencies can help alleviate some of the negative impacts of disasters on law-enforcement officers. The chapter explores the topic with data collected from interviews with executives in policing agencies, emergency managers, and psychologists, some of whom have worked with law-enforcement officers during and after disasters.

Acknowledgment

This book was made possible in part by funds provided by the National Center for Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response, Department of Homeland Security Emeritus Center of Excellence. We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the students who provided invaluable assistance on research projects that led to the creation of this book, with a special thank you extended to Jesse Card, Michelle Dovil, Mila Turner, and Nissan Battle.

REFERENCES

- Aalst, Maarten. K. 2006. "The Impacts of Climate Change on the Risk of Natural Disasters." *Disasters* 30 (1): 5–18.
- Bono, James. 2011. "Police Departments." In *Encyclopedia of Disaster Relief*, edited by K. B. Penuel and M. Statler, 487–488. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Excerpt • Temple University Press

- DeGoyet, Claude, Ricardo Z. Marti, and Claudio Osorio. 2013. *Natural Disaster Mitigation and Relief—Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries*, 2nd ed. NCBI Bookshelf. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK11792/>.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency. 2005. *Decision Making and Problem Solving Independent Study Program*. <https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/downloads/is241.pdf>.
- Fugate, W. Craig. 2013. "From the Administrator: Law Enforcement's Role in Responding to Disasters." *Police Chief* 80 (August): 100–101.
- Guha-Sapir, Debby, Femke Vos, Reginia Below, and Sylvain Ponserre. 2012. *Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2011: The Numbers and Trends*. Brussels: Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters.
- Hoffman, Susanna M., and Anthony Oliver-Smith. 2002. *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Kunkel, Kenneth E., Roger A. Pielke Jr, and Stanley A. Changnon. 1999. "Temporal Fluctuations in Weather and Climate Extremes That Cause Economic and Human Health Impacts: A Review." *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 80 (6): 1077–1098.
- Nel, Philip, and Marjolein Righarts. 2008. "Natural Disasters and the Risk of Violent Civil Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 52:159–185.
- Oliver, Willard. M. 2006. "The Fourth Era of Policing: Homeland Security." *International Review of Law Computers and Technology* 20(1–2): 49–62.
- . 2009. "Policing for Homeland Security." *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 20(3): 253–260.
- World Bank. 2005. *Hazards of Nature, Risks to Development*. <http://www.worldbank.org/ieg/naturaldisasters/>.