

Handbook of Disaster Research. Havidán Rodríguez, Enrico L Quarantelli, Russell R Dynes, editors. New York: Springer. 2006. Hard cover, illustrated, 611 pages, \$249.

This **Handbook of Disaster Research** is a very different text and approaches disaster research uniquely as a social science phenomenon. The content of this book goes far beyond the usual approach of books dedicated to disaster research. Since September 11, 2001 (9/11), the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, terrorist attacks in London and Spain, and hurricane Katrina, along with many other global disasters, the social context of both disasters and disaster research has changed. Thus, the **Handbook of Disaster Research** is a timely and much needed contribution to the field of disasters and research. In this context of change, the editors of this handbook have brought together a comprehensive and interdisciplinary volume with a diverse and international group of contributors. This handbook is based on the principle that disasters are social constructions and that disasters can best be studied from a social science perspective.

This book, as the editors indicate, is best viewed as “a model of a library rather than a lengthy novel.” This handbook is indeed like a library of a wide variety of topics and perspectives related to disasters and disaster research that are not found in other books on disasters and disaster research. The editors have provided readers with a very comprehensive view of potential areas for disaster research, shaped from a social science perspective. One major focus of the book is the study of human behavior, in which adaptation, resilience, and innovation are revealed during times of disaster, versus normal times. Additionally, the editors focused on the impact of disasters on families, communities, organizations, and institutions, both from a “victim’s” perspective as well as a “problem-solving” perspective. As would be expected in a book on disaster research, there are chapters that address the usual topics related to community warnings, search and rescue, coordination, and institutional adaptation, including dealing with death, injury, and recovery.

Early in the text there is a heuristic approach to definitions/descriptions of disas-

ters—new and old set the stage for very different perspectives on disaster research. Conceptual and methodological issues are also emphasized early in the text, and the authors discuss the possible need for the development of a taxonomy. Meaningful classification systems can help with the categorization of themes running across certain types of disasters that are not common in other types of disasters. For example, empirical studies show that mental health issues are less common in floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes than in terrorist attacks. Failing the development of a classification, these authors indicate that disaster researchers will “continue to amass a disconnected collection of descriptive research that cannot be linked via existing conceptual models.”

A historical perspective of disaster and crisis research (after World War II) indicates that this is still a developing area of science, but the contributing authors highlight that the social context and types of disasters have changed in recent years, thus changing research agendas and approaches. Historical methodological issues related to timing, access, generalizability, and the need for triangulation continue to be relevant methodological issues; however, new technologies are making the work of disaster-related researchers easier, more efficient, and more effective. Geographic information systems and spatial decision support systems allow for mapping of hazards, management of resources, and can assist researchers with measurement of effectiveness of planning and risk management. (For the reader’s information, a geographic information system is a system that captures, stores, analyzes and manages data and associated attributes spatially referenced to the earth. It is basically a computer system that allows user-created searches, analysis of spatial-related information, the editing of data, maps, and presentation of results. Also, a spatial decision support system is an interactive, computer-based system that models decisions and supports users in achieving the most effective decision path when researchers are attempting to solve a semi-structured spatial problem.)

The book relates how the changes in context, because of situations such as 9/11,

not only contribute to methodological issues, but to conceptual issues and new themes as well. One author states, “It’s the same, only it’s different.” Other early chapters contain essays on the impact of disasters and research issues related to various types of inequalities/vulnerabilities, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, class, and gender.

Although there is no question about the local impact of disasters, the economic impact can be global. Three factors that are related to economic life and impact are globalization, the business cycle, and vulnerability. The book suggests that researchers explore economic localization vis à vis globalization and provides a chapter on each of the traditional disaster stages research, such as: preparedness, emergency management systems, warning and evacuation systems, search and rescue, coordination/communication, sustainable recovery, and sheltering and housing recovery following disasters. Unusual content in this handbook includes the vulnerability, impact, and recovery of businesses. Historically, businesses have not been a unit of analysis for disaster researchers; however, this handbook highlights issues related to businesses and adaptation of organizations/institutions to disaster situations.

In addition to adaptation, according to the authors, 2 other social science phenomena that can be studied in disasters are innovation and resilience. This handbook contains chapters on community innovation and resilience, and also development (forward-focused investment/actions to improve social and economic conditions). The relationship between disasters and development in Third World countries is characterized in the book by a disaster/development matrix, which emphasizes that development can increase (or decrease) vulnerability to disaster, and disasters can impede development and/or provide development opportunities. The authors make the case for an interchange of ideas between disaster and development researchers, with attention to themes related to fruitful conceptual/thematic frameworks such as: gender domains (most development workers and policymakers are male dominated and employ a gender lens), livelihood approaches (aimed at supporting economic development), and social capital (in rela-

tionship to other capitals). National-level systems are discussed in countries beyond the United States, including central government versus community perspectives, such as trust, response, risk management, and disaster mitigation.

Several other chapters focus on disasters and research issues in an international context. The presentation of commonalities and peculiarities of disaster and crisis management in transitional societies such as the Soviet Union, eastern Europe, the Baltic states, and even China highlight the impact of unstable and changing governmental structures. The relationship of differing political, institutional, sociocultural features, in addition to the impact of possible conflict between public and governmental values and norms create both challenges and opportunities for disaster-related research. Also on a global level, this handbook has an enlightening discussion of terrorism as disaster, with an interesting discussion on the 15 scenarios that are central to the Department of Homeland Security Council's planning for disasters. Although terrorist disasters can closely resemble natural disasters, there are differences and they may take many forms. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of 12 future research efforts related to this topic and governmental planning/response, including Homeland Security. The book includes a detailed discussion of Homeland Security policies specifically related to 9/11 and hurricane Katrina.

In the last 9 chapters this handbook provides some very interesting and different perspectives on disasters and disaster research, including a healthy discussion about the role of mass media in emergencies, the evolution of a popular culture of disaster (including movies, television stories, makeshift memorials, and even jokes and humor). Several chapters detail application of the research process to practice, including the relevance of research to emergency management, research application in the classroom, and application of research in science and technology to warnings, risk, and disaster information. An extraordinary amount of federal and state funds have been allocated to the advancement of science and technology, with the intent to improve warnings and reduce risk; however, the authors point out that, again, gender, race, ethnicity, and class may still have higher levels of risk despite these investments. One of the last chapters is devoted to a discussion on the

paradigm shift in crisis management from local to global since 9/11. Some of the paradigm shifts discussed include: the empowerment of the citizen on the front line with the 9/11 commission; the impact of fear and the development of a crisis culture; the need for new, creative initiatives for citizens, governments, and industries; and engaging partnerships, locally and globally. The book concludes with a thought-provoking chapter on the "growth of a market of fear" and an analysis of United States vulnerabilities, with some important research and policy questions related to reducing this vulnerability in the context of the changing nature of disasters in the 21st century.

The **Handbook of Disaster Research** brings together chapters written by a variety of interdisciplinary authors and provides valuable information and perspectives for social scientists, including public health specialties, nurse scientists, and some physician groups, and educators of a wide variety of provider groups, including technicians, economists, and political scientists. The authors are clear that the book is written with these disciplines in mind; however, the book would also be valuable to health service researchers who are interested in health disparities, care of a number of vulnerable populations, and the implication of policy on practice, and it provides an interdisciplinary and international approach to disasters with theoretical, methodological, and practical applications.

For individuals interested in disasters and emergency response, this book provides some new and different perspectives on disasters and disaster research that would be valuable to practitioners, including technicians, nurses, and physicians. Additionally, for educators of all types of providers who are interested in boosting curricular content and including more information related to disasters and emergency management, this book provides thoughtful new perspectives on the content that educators need to consider.

For researchers and scientists across disciplines, this handbook provides not only new and different perspectives on disasters, but many chapters include future research agendas. One of the most important contributions of this handbook is the belief that future research priorities and possibilities would "generate the beginnings of an agenda for a new generation of disaster research-

ers." With the material and thought-provoking discussions in this handbook, the new generation of researchers would look far beyond the historical approaches to disaster research.

This book is well-written by a very diverse list of contributors who bring valuable and differing perspectives to the topic. Generally speaking, the writing style is clear, concise, and readable; the print however, is a bit small. Though this is a future-oriented book, it has a great deal of facts and references that provide sound background and evidence for the conclusions provided by the authors.

The reference section, and the literature review seemed very complete. The reference section itself would be very helpful to students, scholars, scientists, and policymakers from many disciplines. The authors took care to identify 3 areas of literature used in the book to support and provide evidence on the background for each chapter. These areas of literature review are popular literature (such as media), official literature (from governmental, quasi-governmental, and nonprofit assistance agencies), and professional and scientific literature from a variety of disciplines, including "geography, psychology, economic, political science, communications, operations research, decision theory, public administration, anthropology, and others somewhat difficult to classify by discipline." The index is both useful and comprehensive. Overall, this is a very helpful book in both content and style.

Additionally, although there were not many illustrations, those provided were clear and helpful. In order to break some of the intensity of the reading, a few more illustrations might have been used; however, some of the content did not lend itself to illustrations and tables. If there is a down side to the book, it is that it is so large, has so much detail, and is so comprehensive. However, the down side is also one of its major strengths.

Patricia A Hinton Walker PhD RN

Graduate School of Nursing
Uniformed Services University of the
Health Sciences
Bethesda, Maryland

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