



Hazard Reduction & Recovery Center

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“Assessing Community Impacts of Natural Disasters.”

Michael K. Lindell & Carla S. Prater. 2003

A natural disaster occurs when an extreme geological, meteorological, or hydrological event goes beyond a community's management ability. The research on community influence of natural disasters has provided many different findings, but still no unified model of how hazard characteristics make physical and social impacts. The most important parts for looking at a disaster's impacts are its speed of onset and availability of perceptual cues. These cues are wind, rain, or ground movement, the intensity, scope, and duration of impact and the probability of occurrence.

Findings

This article summarizes the principal features of the process of how hazards have physical and social impacts. It also describes the ways that hazard reduction and emergency preparedness practices can limit the physical impacts and the ways in which community recovery resources and extra-community assistance can reduce social impacts. Natural disasters have no measurable long-term impacts on the overall operational ability of communities in the United States. Resources for recovery go to impacted communities that are strongly geographically connected to resources in the remainder of the country. Even so, some parts of these communities are both or either unevenly affected by disaster impacts or poorly mixed into the recovery networks. The research finds that the community benefits when businesses involved with hazard reduction continue their involvement even after they have achieved protection for their own buildings and contents.

Implications

There has been meaningful progress over the past 25 years in developing an understanding of the complexities involved in recovering from and avoiding the community impacts of disasters. The recovery problems were decided more by organizational obstacles than by not being able to access resources. Lower income households, which are usually lead by females and racial and ethnic minorities, face even more problems. They're more likely to experience destruction of their homes because of locational risk, especially true in developing countries like Guatemala. The article identifies that research will find it important to look at the ways in which the similarity in the levels of hazard mitigation, emergency preparedness, community recovery resources, and access to extra-community assistance influence the dynamics of hazard vulnerability.