

The future is now for the inclusion of women in emergency management planning

Ms Mary Farrow

Emerald Community House

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The challenges for women in their everyday lives pose a threat to their wellbeing in disasters, coupled with domestic violence and financial disadvantage. Negative outcomes are compounded for women and those in their care when they experience physical, mental and emotional violence during and after disasters and are displaced from their homes. But the application of gender equity, empowerment and inclusion in planning, relief, response, recovery and resilience roles has the potential to improve the broader wellbeing outcomes for women, their children and their families.

Traditional roles and responsibilities present obstacles for women in participating in decision-making, skills development or gaining access to resources. Yet, women manage risks every day and connect through strong, respected social networks. So why is there a lack of women involved in emergency planning?

Women who work in the community sector are key interfaces for successful emergency management. The community at large can benefit from the wisdom and inclusion of local women as active decision makers on emergency management planning committees. Community development practitioners strengthen the community to absorb stresses and raise collective resilience overall to better manage adverse events in the short and long term according to the Australian Disaster Resilience Community Recovery Handbook (AIDR 2018). A majority of community caring roles are performed by women as employees and volunteers. Their inclusion and input have the power to improve survival outcomes and deliver on the goals of emergency management where they live and work.

As the director of the Centre of Resilience at Emerald Community House, Mary Farrow has used community development principles to empower women who live in high risk places. This presentation will expose the obstacles to equitable inclusion and identify strategies to gain a seat at the planning table.