

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Cumulative Effects of Successive Disasters

Working Group Description:

This Working Group is motivated by the belief that research can actively contribute to the reduction of unnecessary suffering during and after disasters. In enacting this research, our purpose will be to understand how successive disasters change awareness and capacities for people across various domains of life and work (such as their awareness of organizations, preparedness behaviors, resources, potential roadblocks, etc.). We will approach this overarching goal through an integrative, ethnographic methodology for studying past experiences of disaster and present experiences of COVID-19. Our research will focus on learning from survivors, civic actors, disaster response professionals, and other agents of recovery whose roles may overlap.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

We propose to address empirical gaps in disaster studies using a research framework organized around the investigation of (1) how changes in awareness are brought about by past disaster experiences; (2) how new awareness may or may not lead to new capacities, strategies, and skills; (3) how these new capacities, strategies, or skills do or do not translate into responses to the current pandemic; and (4) how civic actors, disaster response professionals, and other agents of recovery understand their own roles and are aware of the roles of other groups. The work will proceed in two phases, ultimately informing comparisons across communities, across cumulative disaster experiences, and across types of actors.

Phase One of our research agenda, therefore, involves generating a COVID-19 Question Bank and Research Protocols that will provide researchers with a well-considered path for investigating individuals' experiences with the pandemic in relation to their experiences with prior disasters. *Phase Two* involves data collection. We will interview participants using questions from the COVID-19 Question Bank in accordance with the associated Research Protocols (see Outcomes below).

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
<p>1. Experience of a prior disaster.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Research Question 1</u>: What are the challenges people recount? Did these challenges bring about any changes in their awareness, skills, or capacities generally? ● <u>Research Question 2</u>: What struggles and anxieties did people experience before the prior disaster? Did the prior disaster create new anxieties or struggles? ● <u>Research Question 3</u>: Did difficulties brought about by (or made worse by) the prior disaster or the recovery system itself compound the effect of the pandemic?
<p>2. The acquisition of new awareness in the form of new capacities, strategies, or skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Research Question 1</u>: Do people connect changes in awareness or insights gained through prior disaster experience to specific capacities, strategies, skills, etc.? ● <u>Research Question 2</u>: What kinds of new capacities, strategies, or skills learned from past disasters can be applied across disaster settings; what kinds are valuable only in specific types of disasters?
<p>3. The way that capacities, strategies, or skills gained from prior disaster experience enable or constrain adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Research Question 1</u>: Do people identify past disaster experiences as helpful, insightful, or useful in meeting current COVID-19 challenges? ● <u>Research Question 2</u>: Do people identify specific frustrations with or failures of the system from past disaster experiences? If so, does this impact how they cope with current COVID-19 challenges? ● <u>Research Question 3</u>: Does the experience of COVID-19 lead some people to reflect differently on their past disaster experiences?
<p>4. The way that civic actors, disaster response professionals, and other agents of recovery understand their roles and recognize the roles of other groups; the extent to which these groups may be interdependent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Research Question 1</u>: Can the roles of individuals in helping groups that emerge from a disaster be fluid? What degree of connective tissue characterizes their organizations in a given disaster setting in terms of their knowing about each other and relying on each other? ● <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do people's actions, perspectives, and concerns vary based on their subject positions? ● <u>Research Question 3</u>: What can we learn about disaster recovery experiences by mapping them across a continuum?

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

We have identified *ethical gaps* in both research and practice areas. There is overwhelming documentation of the disproportionate impact of disasters, most recently of COVID-19, on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Our research applies a social justice framework. As disaster researchers, we know that investigators from marginalized backgrounds and a range of cultural contexts are often excluded.

As disaster practitioners, we also know that informal networks of aid and assistance are commonly overlooked or undervalued by formal institutions, and their work is insufficiently cited and recognized.

As a matter of course, our COVID-19 project seeks colleagues who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as collaborators. Their leadership is of particular importance when research takes place in communities with which they have relationships or affinity. Together, as researchers, we will design, conduct, and share the work of people from marginalized backgrounds with affected communities as well as other researchers and practitioners. This commitment includes working with local communities to understand what questions the community wishes to see answered and what information they regard as most useful to their recovery efforts. Recognition and awareness combined with participatory research will help build trust where it doesn't exist, and thus enhance research accountability and improve recovery outcomes.

Our research topics and questions also address two *methodological gaps* in current research practice: (1) The need for more clarity about actors who occupy the disaster response and recovery landscape. First responders may also be survivors, and survivors may also participate in a mutual aid group, as examples. We ask researchers to join us in considering the fluidity of roles and identities of all actors in designing their research. (2) A second gap concerns the dearth of radically comparative research. We offer our COVID-19 Question Bank and Research Protocols so that the same methodological approaches and questions can produce data comparability across a wide range of researchers and settings.

Members of the Working Group:

This Working Group is composed of members of the Culture and Disaster Action Network (CADAN), a group of anthropologists, other social scientists, and practicing disaster professionals who aim to create change by increasing the integration of local knowledge into the practice of disaster. Our collective goal is to help communities build on existing capacities for resilience and to reduce unnecessary suffering.

The **outcome goals** for the research topics and questions and for this broader project include the following:

- Development of an open-access and downloadable **COVID-19 Question Bank and Research Protocols** for use in research with survivors, civic actors, disaster response professionals, and other formal or informal agents of recovery. This resource will be available July 15, 2020 at **Culture and Disaster Action Network: CADAN** (<http://cultureanddisaster.org>) for all disaster researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities. We encourage adoption of these research tools for helping build a global database of comparative research that can help assess the impacts of successive disasters on a wide range of communities.
- Completion of cross-cultural research studies during the pandemic with people who have survived prior disasters.
- Publication of research results from cross-cultural studies in peer-reviewed journals and public-facing social science venues, including publications in natural hazards centers and through listservs of these groups.
- Publication and presentation of research results in non-academic sites, including trade magazines, conferences, websites and listservs that reach emergency management and disaster professionals as well as local and federal government agencies. We will also submit our findings to major newspapers in those areas where we have completed research studies.

In laying out this research agenda, we hope to identify a path that leads to improved effectiveness of disaster response and recovery efforts and that reduces the suffering associated with COVID-19 and all future disasters.

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