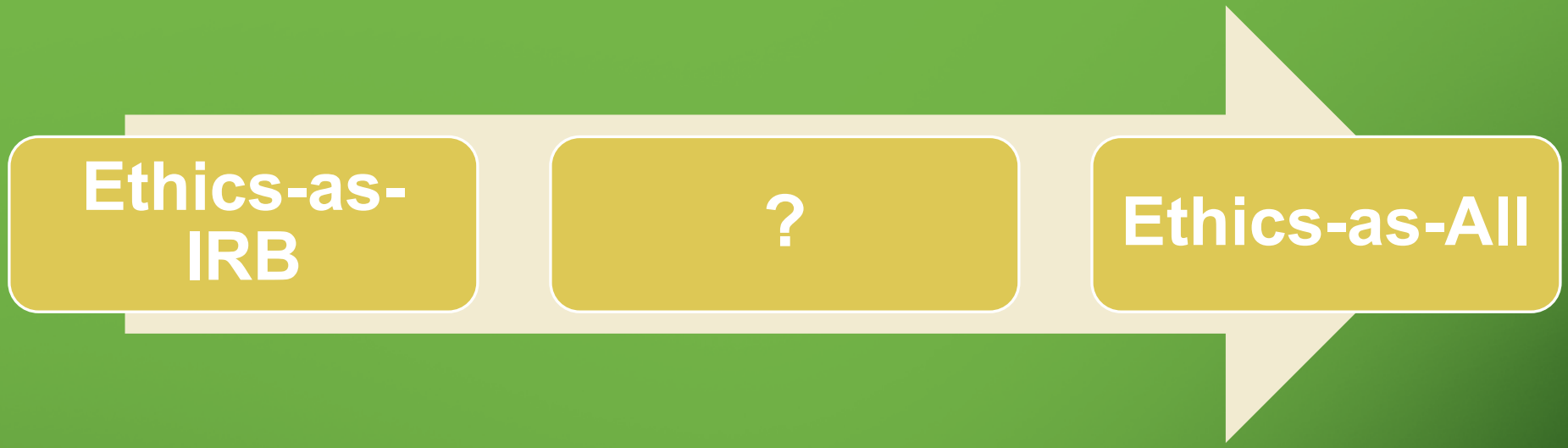
Research Ethics in Disasters

Lori Peek, Ph.D.
Director, Natural Hazards Center | hazards.colorado.edu
Professor, Department of Sociology
Principal Investigator, CONVERGE, SSEER, ISEEER | converge.colorado.edu
University of Colorado Boulder

JC Gaillard, Ph.D.
Professor of Geography, School of Environment, The University of Auckland
Extraordinary Professor, Unit for Environmental Sciences and Management, North-West University


ETHICS



Ethical clarity achieved through reliance on IRB; relaxing ethical radar after IRB approval is gained

Ethical clarity achieved through deliberate research design and shared research decisions with participants

Source: Browne, Katherine E. and Lori Peek. 2014. "Beyond the IRB: An Ethical Toolkit for Long-Term Disaster Research." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 32(1): 82-120.

Ethical clarity achieved through reliance on IRB; relaxing ethical radar after IRB approval is gained

Ethical uncertainty arises in the course of research; researcher acutely aware of their moral responsibilities to participants and fellow researchers

Ethical clarity achieved through deliberate research design and shared research decisions with participants

Source: Browne, Katherine E. and Lori Peek. 2014. "Beyond the IRB: An Ethical Toolkit for Long-Term Disaster Research." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 32(1): 82-120.

MORAL HAZARD

- There is no universal definition of ethical behavior and conduct for disaster researchers
- Only a handful of countries have guidelines for conducting ethical post-disaster research
- Many countries do not have IRB's

Comment

A collapsed building in the city of Palu in Sulawesi, Indonesia, after a magnitude-7.5 earthquake hit the region in September 2018.

Disaster-zone research needs a code of conduct

JC Gaillard & Lori Peek

Study the effects of earthquakes, floods and other natural hazards with sensitivity to ethical dilemmas and power imbalances.

A magnitude-7.0 earthquake rocked Anchorage, Alaska, in late November 2018. Roads buckled and chimneys tumbled from rooftops. Business operations were disrupted. Schools were damaged across the district. This was the largest earthquake to shake the region in a generation, and there was much to learn. What was the state of the infrastructure? Might further quakes occur? How did people respond? Teams of scientists and engineers from across the United States mobilized to conduct field reconnaissance in partnership with local researchers and practitioners. These efforts were coordinated through the clearing house set up by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute in Oakland, California, which provided daily in-person and online briefings, as well as a web portal for sharing data.

But researchers are not always so welcome in disaster zones. After the deadly Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami on 26 December 2004, hundreds of academics from countries including Japan, Russia, France and the United States rushed to the region to collect perishable data. This influx of foreign scientists angered and fatigued some locals; many declined researchers' requests for interviews. The former governor of Aceh province, Indonesia, where more than 128,000 people died, described foreign researchers as "guerrillas applying hit-and-run tactics"[1].

A Call for an Ethical Code of Conduct in Disaster-Zone Research

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03534-z

TOWARDS A CODE OF CONDUCT

- Researchers should be equipped with an 'ethical toolkit' (Browne and Peek, 2014) before conducting disaster research that considers three principles:
  1. Have a clear purpose.
  2. Respect local voices.
  3. Coordinate locals and outsiders.

1. HAVE A CLEAR PURPOSE

- Collectively identify knowledge gaps
- Partner with affected communities to establish research priorities
- A code could help redress power imbalances through ensuring that research priorities align with the *needs and priorities* of the communities being studied.

2. RESPECT LOCAL VOICES

- Wealthy countries account for most disaster scholarship and funding
- Outside researchers are positioned to seek funding and might overlook local partners
- Understanding local languages, policies, and practices can help improve response and speed up recovery (consider ‘culture brokers’)
- More discussion between disaster researchers *within and outside* of affected areas

3. COORDINATE LOCALS AND OUTSIDERS

- Projects that are uncoordinated can be costly and redundant and can overwhelm local people and responders
- Local researchers in affected areas should be identified quickly as well as outsiders with local expertise; this can help ensure that outside researchers conduct research that takes the local context into consideration

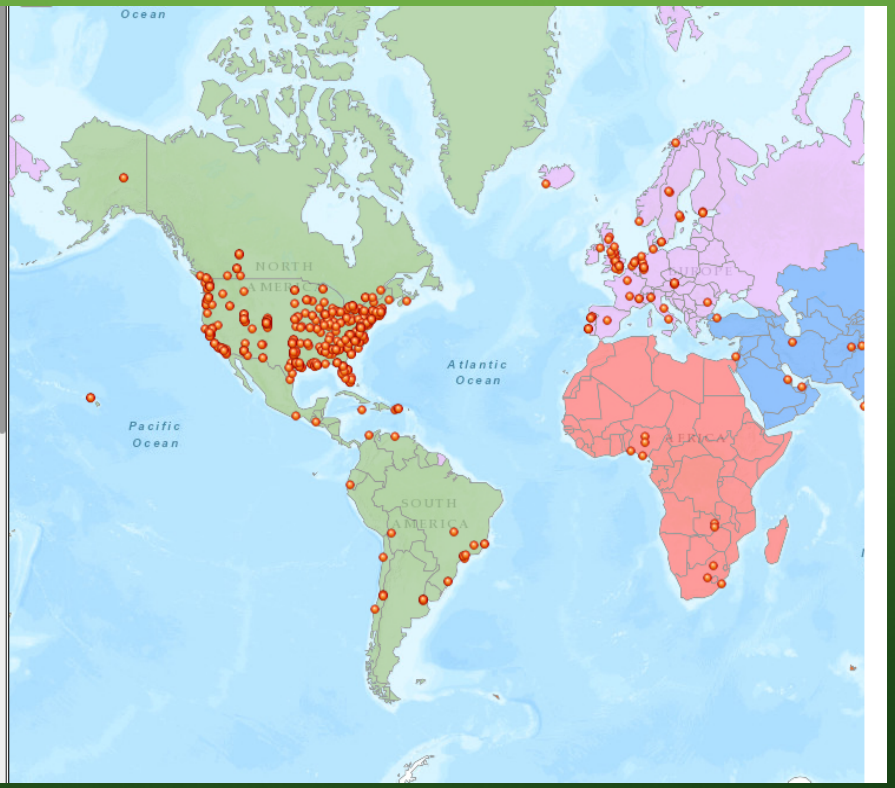
Some First Steps and Next Steps

SSEER
SOCIAL SCIENCE EXTREME EVENTS RESEARCH

Welcome to the Social Science Extreme Events Research (SSEER) web map, which is an initiative of the CONVERGE project headquartered at the Natural Hazards Center.

SSEER is a National Science Foundation-supported network for social science hazards and disaster researchers. The purpose of SSEER is to identify and connect social science researchers to one another, to interdisciplinary teams, and to communities at risk to and affected by hazards and disasters.

The SSEER Researchers interactive web map highlights the location of SSEER researchers and includes information about them, including their organizational affiliations, job titles, disciplinary foci, methodological expertise, the types of hazards and disasters they study, the events they have researched, and other information.



converge.colorado.edu

TOWARDS A SHARED CODE OF CONDUCT

- NOT calling for bureaucracy, regulatory oversight, or another version of the IRB
- ARE calling for a conversation to advance a shared set of moral and ethical principles to help guide what we study, who we study, how we conduct studies, and who is involved in the research process itself
- Collaborative disaster-research initiatives worldwide could help to initiate the development of a shared code of conduct through:
  - Utilizing existing structures for information sharing and coordination
  - Building on disaster-response initiatives from other fields
  - Upcoming meetings
    https://hazards.colorado.edu/workshop/2020/researchers-meeting/overview

Gratitude, Response, and Discussion

Setting the agenda in research

Comment

A collapsed building in the city of Palu in Sulawesi, Indonesia, after a magnitude-7.5 earthquake hit the region in September 2018.

Disaster-zone research needs a code of conduct

JC Gaillard & Lori Peek

Study the effects of earthquakes, floods and other natural hazards with sensitivity to ethical dilemmas and power imbalances.

A magnitude-7.0 earthquake rocked Anchorage, Alaska, in late November 2018. Roads buckled and chimneys tumbled from rooftops. Business operations were disrupted. Schools were damaged across the district. This was the largest earthquake to shake the region in a generation, and there was much to learn. What was the state of the infrastructure? Might further quakes occur? How did people respond? Teams of scientists and engineers from across the United States mobilized to conduct field reconnaissance in partnership with local researchers and practitioners. These efforts were coordinated through the clearing house set up by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute in Oakland, California, which provided daily in-person and online briefings, as well as a web portal for sharing data.

But researchers are not always so welcome in disaster zones. After the deadly Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami on 26 December 2004, hundreds of academics from countries including Japan, Russia, France and the United States rushed to the region to collect perishable data. This influx of foreign scientists angered and fatigued some locals; many declined researchers' requests for interviews. The former governor of Aceh province, Indonesia, where more than 128,000 people died, described foreign researchers as "guerrillas applying hit-and-run tactics"[1].

JC Gaillard

jc.gaillard@auckland.ac.nz

Lori Peek

lori.peek@colorado.edu

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03534-z

Further Readings

- Browne, Katherine E. and Lori Peek. 2014. “Beyond the IRB: An Ethical Toolkit for Long-Term Disaster Research.” *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 32(1): 82-120.
- Fothergill, Alice and Lori Peek. 2015. *Children of Katrina*. Appendix B – On Methods and Ethics. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gaillard, JC. 2019. “Disaster Studies Inside Out.” *Disasters* 43:S7-S17 10.1111/disa.12323.
- Gaillard, JC and Christopher Gomez. 2015. “Post-Disaster Research: Is There Gold Worth the Rush?. *Jàmbá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 7(1):10.4102/jamba.v7i1.120.
- Gaillard, JC and Lori Peek. 2019 “Disaster-Zone Research Needs a Code of Conduct.” *Nature* 575: 440-442, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03534-z.
- Moezzi, Mithra and Lori Peek. 2019. “Stories for Interdisciplinary Disaster Research Collaboration.” *Risk Analysis: An International Journal,* https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.13424.
- Pardee, Jessica, Alice Fothergill, Lynn Weber, and Lori Peek. “The Collective Method: Collaborative Social Science Research and Scholarly Accountability.” *Qualitative Research* 18(6): 671-688.
- Peek, Lori, Jennifer Tobin, John van de Lindt, and Anne Andrews. 2020. “Getting Interdisciplinary Teams into the Field: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval and Institutional Agreements for Rapid Response Disaster Research.” Forthcoming in *Risk Analysis.*
- Wilson, Rick, Nathan Wood, Laura Kong, Mike Shulters, Kevin Richards, Paula Dunbar, Gen Tamura, and Ed Young. 2015. “A Protocol for Coordinating Post-Tsunami Field Reconnaissance Efforts in the USA.” *Natural Hazards* 75: 2153-2165.
- Others? Please send to Lori.Peek@colorado.edu.