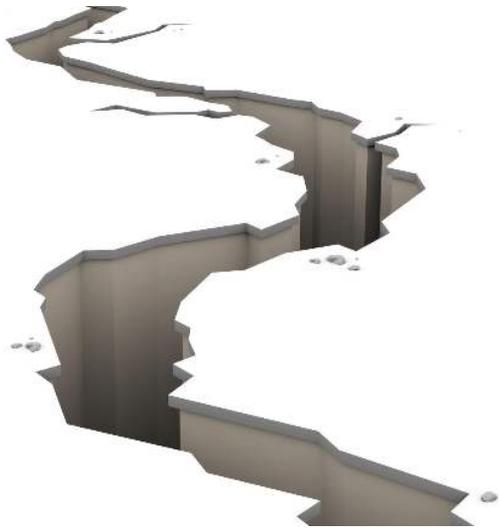


## WHEN DISASTERS STRIKE



### Reports from **LOMA PRITA EARTHQUAKE** Magnitude 6.9 Santa Cruz, California (1989)

#### Increased Incidence of Violence

- 300% increase in sexual violence
- 600% increase in domestic violence
- 50% increase in requests for restraining (protection) orders
- Increase in domestic homicide
- Increase in child abuse

#### Challenges for Service Providers

- Support services overwhelmed by responding to the immediate crisis
- Disaster relief funds not geared toward psychological impacts (fear, anger, stress) and associated violence
- Anti-violence organizations' resources redirected to address new needs (quake-related violence and re-traumatization)
- Agencies' efforts consumed by meeting clients' basic needs (food, shelter, etc.)
- Some agencies temporarily closed, others destroyed by earthquake

### DISASTERS CAN BE UNPREDICTABLE

In the aftermath of disaster, whether natural (e.g. fire, flood, earthquake) or human-made (e.g. blackout, explosion), community-based anti-violence organizations in the effected area are likely to face a unique set of challenges.

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE AFTERMATH OF DISASTER

North American case studies and first-hand accounts indicate that violence against women is likely to increase after a disaster. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2005) states that, during and after a disaster, women/girls are at increased risk of:

- Sexual assault and harassment
- Intimate-partner violence
- Early or forced marriage

Disasters can create a difficult set of circumstances for survivors of sexual and/or domestic violence. For example, women in transition houses may find themselves housed at the same evacuation centres as their abusers. Victims/survivors also face the possibility of being re-traumatized in the aftermath of a disaster, often due to renewed feelings of powerlessness and loss of control.

The resources lost through disasters (income, affordable housing, child care, etc.) can also limit the choices for survivors. It may be more difficult to leave an abusive relationship, or women may be coerced to return to an abusive relationship.

In the 1990s, after the Loma Prita earthquake, EVA BC did quite a bit of work linking gender-based violence and disasters. We convinced the Provincial Emergency Program to prioritize women's safety needs in their response, brought local emergency managers together with anti-violence workers for a special symposium, and developed an anti-violence agency workbook for Anti-Violence preparedness: *It Can Happen to Your Agency* <http://endingviolence.org/files/uploads/WomenInDisastersWorkbook.pdf>

– Tracy Porteous, EVA BC Executive Director

## PREPARING FOR DISASTER

For anti-violence response services, disasters have both immediate and on-going impacts. Women are a group especially at risk during and following disaster, particularly women who experience intersecting forms of oppression. Disaster planning *must* be gender-informed and gender-specific.

Anti-violence programs are likely to face unforeseen challenges in providing needed services, resulting from destruction of service infrastructure, lack of funding to address clients', and higher demand than the program is able to accommodate. Anti-violence programs' mandates must explicitly include responding to violence within the context of disasters, and that programs prepare as much as possible.

### Develop a Disaster Response Plan

- Collaborate with local emergency management systems prior to disaster
- Create agreements with other anti-violence programs to assist in the event of increased service demand
- Plan for survivors to have options re: reception centre location, confidential registration, expedited safety planning
- Prepare information regarding the psychological impacts of disasters
- Create back-up plans for service delivery, phone lines, etc.
- Consider how technology can help (e.g. Facebook's 'safety check')
- Increase the visibility of women's vulnerabilities and resources in disaster
- Educate government, community, etc. about social impact of disasters, including risk of increased violence against women



**By starting to think about disasters now,** your program can take measures to better ensure the safety of staff and clients, and enhance your capacity to meet the needs of survivors during and after a disaster.

## THE ROLE OF EVA BC

When disaster strikes, EVA BC can be an important resource and support for you, your staff, and your clients. Call EVA BC at **604.633.2506** or contact us on our toll-free, members-only line **1.877.633.2505**.

## Resources

It Can Happen to Your Agency (2001)  
<http://endingviolence.org/files/uploads/WomenInDisastersWorkbook.pdf>

Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery (Government of BC)  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery)

Get Prepared (Government of Canada)  
<http://www.getprepared.gc.ca/index-en.aspx>

Violence Against Women and Girls: Disaster Risk Management Brief (2015)  
<http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/386-vawg-resource-guide-disaster-risk-management-brief-april-2015.pdf>

Canadian Red Cross [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)