

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A queer take on disaster response

Dr Andrew Gorman-Murray, from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology, is leading an investigation into how sexual minorities fared during recent natural disasters in Australia and New Zealand. The project, which is supported by the Australian Research Council, will examine the vulnerability and resilience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) communities.

'Disasters adversely affect society and seriously disrupt its physical and human fabric, including infrastructure, communities and social relations,' says Dr Gorman-Murray. 'Impacts are rarely evenly distributed, with different social groups exhibiting varying experiences of vulnerability and resilience and LGBTI people are especially vulnerable due to assumptions about the meaning of family.'

Research shows there are disparities by gender, ethnicity/race, class/income, disability and age during the impact and recovery phases of disasters. However, almost nothing is known about the experience of sexual minorities. The little work that has been done relates to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, in 2005; revelations included demonisation of LGBTI people by certain religious groups who see disasters as divine retribution; same-sex couples being resettled in different cities; and difficulties with insurance claims. However, there was also evidence of resilience and creativity in the use of friendship and community networks.

Dr Gorman-Murray's project will examine the experiences of LGBTI people during four disasters in early 2011: floods in Brisbane, Queensland; floods and bushfires in regional Victoria; category 5 tropical cyclone Yasi in Far North Queensland; and the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand. All places are recognised as having significant LGBTI populations.



The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction stipulates that social difference be recognised and integrated into all policies. Given there is no body of work that might inform that process in Australia and New Zealand, this is significant research that will provide a knowledge base for use in improving response and recovery strategies for future disasters.

Project Title: Queering disasters in the Antipodes: investigating the experiences of LGBTI people in natural disasters

Funding has been set at: \$325,183

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