

Workshop Tasks

- Group 1 – Identify which disaster myths were documented most frequently by hazard researchers. Which were found less frequently?
- Group 2 – Describe four sources of disaster myths.
- Group 3 – Which aspects of Quarantelli's (1985) analysis of disaster myths were confirmed in the study by Mitchell et al. (2000)?
- Group 4 – Why is it important for emergency managers to understand the sources of disaster myths and the processes of perpetuation?

Disaster Myths: Hazards Researchers

- High Energy Events
- Large Scale Impacts
- Use of Death Tolls
- Unpredictability
- Technocratic Approach

Source: Adapted from Mitchell, Jerry T., Deborah S.K. Thomas, Arleen A. Hill and Susan L. Cutter. 2000. "Catastrophe in Reel Life versus Real Life: Perpetuating Disaster Myth through Hollywood Films." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 18:383-402.

Sources of Disaster Myths: Disaster Experience

- National Survey – Disaster Victimization
- Sample Procedure: Random selection of U.S.A. households with telephones
- Sample Size: 13,000
- Event Time Window: 1970 to 1980
- Disaster Experience Rates (Number per 1,000 households)
 - Household Fires – 4.8
 - Floods – 3.4
 - Hurricanes and Severe Tropical Storms – 3.4
 - Tornadoes and Severe Windstorms – 10.0
 - Earthquakes and Severe Tremors – 1.8
 - Any four natural hazards – 18.7

Source: Rossi, Peter H., James D. Wright, Eleanor Weber-Burdin and Joseph Pereira. 1983. *Victims of the Environment*. New York: Plenum Press.

Sources of Disaster Myths: Movies

Research Method: Content Analysis

Sample: 36 Disaster Films

Findings:

- Perpetuate Disaster Myths
- Most Common: Anti-Social Behavior; Panic Flight
- Disaster Agents Depicted Are Uncommon or Near Impossible
- Focus on Human Weaknesses
- Focus on Evil Persons
- Ignore Complex Mix of Social Factors, Conditions and Processes that put Populations at Risk

Source: Adapted from Quarantelli, E.L. 1985. "Realities and Mythologies in Disaster Films." *Communications* 11:31-44.

Sources of Disaster Myths: Print Media (Disaster Specific)

Research Method: Content Analysis

Sample: Print Media (n = 113 news stories following Hurricane Alicia; August, 1983)

Findings:

- 71% of local news stories did **NOT** contain disaster myths
- Most frequent myths
 - A. Looting – 11%
 - B. Increased Crime – 10%
 - C. Mass Evacuation – 8%
 - D. Mass Sheltering – 6%
 - E. Panic – 2%
 - F. Disaster Shock – 1%
- National magazines (2) and newspapers (3) reflected some elements of myth

Source: Adapted from Wenger, Dennis and Barbara Friedman. 1986. "Local and National Media Coverage of Disaster: A Content Analysis of the Print Media's Treatment of Disaster Myths." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 4:27-50.

Sources of Disaster Myths: Print Media (Multi-Disaster)

Research Method: Content Analysis

Sample: National News Magazine (n = 80 news stories; 1945 – 1985)

Findings:

- 50% contained at least one myth
- Most frequent myths
 - A. Mass Evacuations – 24%
 - B. Looting – 11%
 - C. Panic – 10%
 - D. Shock – 7%
 - E. Anti-Social Behavior – 7%

Source: Fischer, Henry W., III. 1998. *Response to Disaster: Fact versus Fiction and Its Perpetuation*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., pp. 44-46.

Emergency Management Implications

- Assess Personal Belief
- Sensitivity to Future Material
- Understand Public Response
- Understand Agency Executives
- Research Enhances Emergency Management

Session Summary

Disaster Myths Documented by Hazards Researchers

Sources of Disaster Myths

- A. Disaster Experience
- B. Peers
- C. Movies
- D. Media
- E. Books

Research Findings: Perpetuation by Movies

Relevance to Emergency Managers

- A. Assess Personal Belief
- B. Sensitivity to Future Material
- C. Understand Public Response
- D. Understand Agency Executives
- E. Research Enhances Emergency Management