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The Tierney article discusses how disaster preparedness and response vary with psychosocial and experiential factors, and with disaster type. Capability refers to prior disaster experience and risk perception. Economic resources, gender, ethnicity, age, and social capital comprise sociologic/sociocultural factors involved in recovery. The type and nature of disaster must also be considered during the planning and recovery phases, since the societal and individual response varies by disaster. Natural disasters are more easily understood and often easier to recover from than man-made disasters. Hazards, vulnerability, response, and social factors are inextricably related.

More study is needed to understand these psychosocial factors, in order to best support vulnerable communities and enhance resilience. I found this issue interesting from both a relief and planning perspective. Often the humanitarian community focuses on immediate relief with no clear exit strategy and without considering root causes. The world wants to help the Tsunami victims...but we will help rebuild structures in the same location as the ones destroyed. Little attention is given to social networks. In fact, establishing large camps and feeding centers discourage the very types of social networks and other social factors that have been effective in coping with pre-CNN disasters. What is the incentive of neighbor helping neighbor when there is free food available in a camp? As disaster-stricken communities are rebuilt by “caring” NGOs and donor governments, reconstruction is often done based on western ideals. Psychosocial factors, community cohesion, and planning around social networks and their roles in disaster response and recovery are largely ignored. Unintentionally ignoring social factors in the planning process is good business for NGOs; it almost guarantees reliance on external aid when the next disaster strikes.

Blaikie introduces the PAR model (Pressure and Release). This model validates previous readings this semester by breaking down the cause of disasters into two main categories – vulnerability and hazards. Hazards are the actual (usually natural) event, while vulnerability is defined by underlying root causes (poverty, urbanization, etc.). The PAR model is criticized for not integrating the human factor into disaster planning and response, and the more complex Access model is discussed. Lack of access to resources is a key factor in determining vulnerability vs. resilience. This ties in with my comments on the Tierney readings. Although immediate relief is important (creating access to shelter, food, clean water, and medical care), it is almost equally important for aid and development agencies should focus on return to livelihoods. More importantly, these organizations would do better service to populations at risk if they could improve sustainable livelihoods and strategies to reduce factors that made the population vulnerable in the first place.

The Morrow article discussed the importance of family bonds in disaster response and recovery. These family bonds are “stretched”, stressed, and sometimes destroyed during or after times of extreme stress. Kinship networks are the focus of Morrow’s focus on families instead of households. Minority groups may be (especially in her Hurricane Andrew example) more likely to live with several families in one home. She also discussed the effect of feeling marginalized in the recovery process, and inequalities in access to Federal assistance for nontraditional families. These inequalities and their effects on parts of the community erode trust in the community and diminish social capital and overall coping mechanisms.