

Using Space to Mitigate Gender-based Violence Against Women In Emergency Shelters

Poster Showcase

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#IAEM22

Question: Can spatial programming in emergency shelters, that considers gendered experiences of space, decrease women's and girls' exposure to potential incidences of gender-based violence?

Why: Emergency Management best practices for providing shelter cite specific minimum requirements to meet to provide the bare necessities to support individuals' needs in a time of crisis. There is little guidance built into these requirements that outlines how those needs for men and women may differ and what that would look like when implemented (Marsh et al., 2006; UN Women, 2017; Vall, 2020; Saito, 2014; Martino et al., 2020; Sweet & Ortiz Escalante, 2015).

Methods: Instrumental Case Study using an interdisciplinary approach, with a feminist and social-constructivism lenses.

Cases: 2 cases

1. Southern Alberta Floods (2013) – Calgary, AB, CAN
2. Hurricane Katrina (2005) – New Orleans, LA, USA

Data Sources:

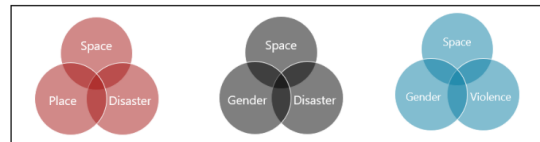
1. Peer-reviewed & Grey Literature
2. Interviews (Practitioners)

Current Situation

Key Literature highlights...

1. Modern architectural practices recognize that "a city or building can thus be literally 'read' as a map of aspects of a society, its social structures and values" (Boys, 1998, p. 206).
2. Gender-based violence tends to occur in specific locations in shelters, such as bathrooms and other spaces linked with more privacy (Juran, 2012; Pain, 2001; Farmer et al., 2018).
3. Broken and unstable public spaces lead to private spaces becoming less secure; "under such circumstances, gender-based prejudices, patriarchal values, and behavior patterns are likely to gain new vigor and scope" (Acar & Ege, 2001, see also Villarreal & Meyer, 2019, p. 286).

Figure 1
Intersections of the Literature Review



Physical Space: When focusing on gender-specific needs, elements such as locked doors, surveillance, and privacy that highlighted bathrooms and sleeping spaces as a vulnerable point became front of mind. There was an association of smaller-scale spaces with an increased sense of safety, due to temperature, reduced numbers of strangers, noise, lack of privacy, and a general sense of overwhelm.

Perceived Space: There is another type of space built and influenced for individuals in an emergency shelter, a psychological space built based on individuals' unique perception and experience. Rebuilding that social container creates a sense of structure, of stability, of place, with was a notable gap identified as known but not implemented

Understanding Space & GBV: The need for shelters to build in micro-spatial supports for stress management for all individuals and developing social capital opportunities so that those occupying the shelters can leverage each other's capacities to navigate their next steps.



Findings

Practice

There are micro-spatial elements of space that can, if considered strategically, reduce the likelihood of gender-based violence against women. By changing how we consider space to include an integrated approach to emergency shelters that support the "whole woman," emergency shelters can support the catalyst of change that disruption makes way for; recognizing women "as subjects, protagonists or social agents with power" (Sweet & Ortiz-Escalante, 2015, p. 1829) and empowering women through spatial awareness to shift the dynamics.

- Play & Constructive outlets for stress
- Foster opportunities for connection
- Who is at the table? Ensure diversity
- Function, sense of scale, lighting & warmth
- Communication tools that are discrete & respect personal agency
- Training, increasing awareness & curiosity
- Bolster gender-equity for women in laws and society

Problem



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Advisory Committee: Tim Haney & Jean Slick
Ethical Approval: Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board