Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Examine natural and man-made disasters and their associated risk to the community and responders.
   2.1 Discuss steps that can be taken to strengthen community and family resilience in coping with traumatic losses after a large-scale disaster.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 5:
Community Resilience in Disaster Response

Unit Lesson

During a catastrophe, the public is expecting leadership to take control of the situation and disseminate information quickly. On the other hand, it is not only up to leadership to take a role in the disaster management preparation. The community and general public should also become involved with training, education, and preparation for disasters. Leaders are the first line of defense against disasters and what may take place during the course of first-line impacts (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013). Leadership, political figures, and first responders should be willing to handle issues that impact the community prior to the initial event. It is not the complete responsibility of the government to handle disaster and emergency preparation. The local community stakeholders, multi-jurisdictional organizations, and effective collaboration amongst those agencies need to take place in an effort to work alongside one another for the many challenges that may arise (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013).

Natural disasters can cause a large number of deaths occurring within a short period of time. The overwhelming stress on leadership, community leaders, and society in general during this time is significant. The key to community resilience lies within the social capital and networking that have been established, community knowledge, communication, and having diverse economic resources all contribute to proper planning and preparation. The inability to manage a disaster will fall upon the leaders and the community perhaps not willing to prepare, train, and have hazard vulnerability ready in the event that there is a disaster (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013; Walsh, 2007). A government's responsibility in creating a culture of preparedness should include having a risk assessment, contingency plans, and a good communication system. One of the most significant challenges is bringing all the stakeholders to the table in an effort to discuss preparedness efforts for the community. Any kind of disaster response will have a significantly different type of response based on jurisdictional roles, differing perspectives, and logistically different areas to cover (Walsh, 2007).

In the midst of disaster, most families and persons seek assistance from family, social and informal networks, and other friends that may be nearby. Victims rarely seek assistance from public shelters, but choose to reside in hotels until the disaster has subsided. Media coverage of a disaster plays an integral role in the advent of either assisting the community in disaster preparedness and response or aiding the community leadership in determining possible safe locations. There is more of a likelihood of the media to be biased, not include most of the pertinent information, and also have a tendency to seek out unique events in the disaster rather than promote the “truth.” It will depend on the reporters and the immediate need for news at the time. One of the many myths that is portrayed during a disaster is regarding crime rates. It is considered one of the areas that appears to be at the forefront of the disaster, along with chaos and looting. Emergency managers need to prepare for responses to such events, but the likelihood of these events taking place is minimal (Walsh, 2007).
The emergency manager should be prepared to take on the challenge of involvement from the community and civic leaders working alongside one another in the event of an emergency. Civic leaders and community members play an integral role in the emergency management program’s planning, preparedness, and recovery efforts. Citizen emergency response teams (CERT) are involved in the disaster response program that educates people about possible hazards, disasters, and emergencies that may occur within the community (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013). CERTs receive the basic training in order to respond to a disaster, including, but not limited to fire suppression, search and rescue, medical response, and some basic disaster psychology. Even with the efforts from the CERTs within the community, there also needs to be disaster planning, mitigation, and recovery efforts made by government officials. The effectiveness of disaster response lies with the local government officials in planning for the challenges that may arise during a disaster. It is a collective effort and responsibility from the local, state, and federal governments to contribute prioritization of supplies, funds, and response and recovery in an effort to maintain stability (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013; Sumathipala, Siribodanna, & Perera, 2006; Walsh, 2007).

Capacity building is another key concept that impacts efforts for improvement in response and recovery efforts. This includes planning how to use resources and personnel, and facilitating policies and procedures needed for response and recovery in the event of the disaster. The use of preplanning, communication, interagency collaboration, and relationship building are other keys to successful capacity-building efforts for the community (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013). There are four factors that strengthen capacity building within the community: (a) community training and technical information dissemination, (b) the awareness of risks within the community, (c) having access to local capabilities and knowledge, and (d) the ability to mobilize community stakeholders. These factors not only allow for better preparation and response, but also assist in the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the disasters. The aforementioned CERT members are good examples of how a community’s capacity can be constructed through training and knowledge (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013; Sumathipala et al., 2006; Walsh, 2007).

Finally, some of the key elements in community capacity building not only include updated training efforts, but also having the ability to create a public awareness of moral and ethical decision-making efforts. These efforts can be included in CERT training, semi-annual community meetings, and other disaster–related meetings within the community. Creating an overall confidence-building effort for community involvement is imperative to the success of infrastructural planning and recovery. Without the proper preparedness for infrastructure, the return to normalcy is less likely to occur within a short time period. The use of human resources and capacity-building efforts, the involvement of political officials, stakeholder buy-in, and including cultural and religious acceptances will also strengthen the response and recovery efforts once they are necessitated (Kapucu & Özerdem, 2013).

References

