Perspectives of Disasters and Risk While in Interim Housing

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Perspectives of Disasters and Risk While in Interim Housing

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Abstract

This partnership between San José State University, the US Geological Survey, and Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment is part of a project to incorporate underrepresented perspectives into disaster risk assessments. By working with the residents of an interim housing facility to discuss the hazards and vulnerabilities that are important to their communities, we can not only confirm some of the vulnerabilities that are included in the HayWired Scenario created by the US Geological Survey, but also consider the severity of risk and real-life examples of how layered identities can change how hazards and vulnerabilities are felt.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Project Origin

For this project, I joined A.J. Faas's research team as one of several graduate researchers working on an overarching project with the United States Geological Survey (hereafter referred to as the USGS) to improve on how disaster assessments are created and what they include. Using the methods designed by Faas and previously used by Jhaid Parreno, I worked with residents at an interim housing site run by Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment (hereafter AGC) in East San José to discuss the hazards and vulnerabilities that are most salient in their lives and communities. Another graduate student researcher, Chyna Lee, developed the partnership with AGC, and we worked together to develop this project to include the perspectives of parents, Black women, people who are not native to San José or the East Bay, people who have experienced homelessness, and people who have struggled with addiction (themselves or with that of loved ones), because the majority of my partners were part of most, if not all, of these groups.

The HayWired Scenario was published by the USGS in 2018 (United States Geological Survey 2018). It is a large-scale assessment of the impact of a magnitude 7 earthquake on the Hayward Fault, which runs 72 miles along the East Bay, from Richmond to San José (Faas and Parreno 2024). It models physical risks like fire and landslides but it also models "human and socioeconomic risks," the depiction of which can potentially help when making decisions regarding disaster preparation and mitigation, as well as emergency response (Faas and Parreno 2024). Earthquakes are not only uncertain, but commonly lead to compound

disasters. We cannot know more than a few minutes in advance when an earthquake will happen, just that it will happen at some point, and when it does, it will lead to other disasters (fires, power outages, flooding, landslides, displacement, various resource shortages, etc.). The HayWired Scenario helps in predicting what we can so that disasters do not have to mean government organizations and individuals being caught entirely off guard (Faas and Parreno 2024).

After the HayWired Scenario was completed, Faas began working with the USGS to find how to facilitate reciprocal knowledge exchange about hazards and vulnerability between communities in the Bay Area and members of the HayWired Scenario team and to address any gaps this exchange identified. Faas designed a three-phase research approach to guide the work done by himself and graduate students going forward. Phase one is a series of four workshops done with community groups adjacent to the Hayward Fault that are underrepresented in risk assessments and/or science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) focused on identifying salient hazards and vulnerabilities and what is being done or should be done about them. Phase two is creative ways to try and bridge the gaps identified in phase one (for example, the tabletop exercises and community mapping that Rebecca Carmick and Jackson Benz completed). The plan for the last phase is to bring all of the information from phases one and two and the different organizations that we have and will work with together to see how it can all be used to improve future assessments like the HayWired Scenario.

Problem Statement

Disasters can be, very generally, defined as disruptions leading to "human, material, economic and environmental losses or impacts" (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction n.d.). Hazards alone are not the cause of disasters and do not occur in a vacuum, separate from other hazards and societal structures. Hazard-centric risk assessments and disaster planning can obscure or ignore the hazards and vulnerabilities that certain groups, underrepresented in risk assessments, are dealing with daily (Faas *In press*). This alternate perception of risk can lead to an experience of disaster preparation, response, and recovery that does not align with the assertions of hazard-based risk assessments. Personal interactions, existing relationships between individuals, and relationships between individuals and their communities can lead to experiencing disasters in a way that is not considered in hazard-centric analyses and predictions (Faas 2016). Using a community-based approach, this partnership between the USGS, the San José State University Anthropology Department, and community organizations that work with groups that are underrepresented in risk assessments and STEM living near the Hayward Fault (AGC in my case) allows community members to guide and participate in knowledge production about their communities and environments to obtain a clearer risk and vulnerability assessment (Faas, Parreno, and Wein n.d.). This community-based approach allowed us to look at disasters, hazards, and vulnerabilities more broadly, rather than focusing on earthquakes and the more obviously related disasters and hazards (wildfires, power outages, fault lines, physical infrastructure, etc.) and discuss the social nature of some of the concerns that make preparing for and recovering from disasters that much harder. Working with AGC and the residents of

an interim housing facility that only houses families allowed a greater variety of perspectives to be shared while still having the commonality of searching for permanent housing and caring for children. These perspectives on what it is about housing insecurity and caring for children is not only risky but, in their experience, unreasonably risky, is important for prioritizing risk management.

Literature Review

Vulnerability, Risks, and Hazards

Labeling a group as vulnerable distracts attention from the factors, institutions, and people that are putting them in such a position (Marino and Faas 2020, 34; Hsu, Howitt, and Miller 2015). Additionally, not focusing on social factors that distribute risk makes reducing risk and vulnerability a nearly impossible task (Marino and Faas 2020). Risk cannot be entirely defined by scientific researchers alone because the way those interacting with hazards view their risk is important to determining the danger they face (Checker 2007). Scientific definitions of hazards tend to be very specific, focusing on things like fault lines and weather (Earthquake Hazards Program 2019; National Weather Service 2024). Some people who have lived through recurring disasters, like hurricanes or tornados, believe that their local knowledge is a tool that mitigates the amount of risk they face, and others believe that scientists do not take the risks seriously enough because they do not actually see the negative impacts and merely theorize about them (Baer, Weller, and Roberts 2019; Checker 2007). Considering vulnerability, risk, and hazards as aspects of disaster research that can be socially produced. and recovery as something flexible based on the wants and needs of communities and individuals, can help produce a more well-rounded view of what risk

mitigation and disaster preparation and response should look like (Barrios 2016; Faas and

Parreno 2024).

Community Knowledge of Disasters

If researchers, policy makers, and practitioners do not take the social production of those

dangers seriously, prevention, response, and recovery efforts are unlikely to be effective

(Spoon et al. 2015; Sun and Faas 2018). If the people contending with environmental, social,

and technological risk and hazards are not aware of, or do not believe the information they

are given about the hazards they interact with, mitigation efforts may not be effective even in

the short term (Checker 2007; Baer, Weller, and Roberts 2019). The people who have

experienced living through relevant disasters in the past and/or will be living through them in

the future understand their own interactions with vulnerabilities, risks, and hazards through a

different lens than scientists do and are therefore able to contribute to a more complete

picture of what disasters really are (Arney et al. 2011; Marchezini 2015; Sun and Faas 2018).

This requires not only including public input on response efforts but also in the process of

determining key risk factors (Checker 2007; Spoon et al. 2015).

Community Science

Including community members as partners rather than participants in research can

improve the quality of information we receive and the quality of analysis (Checker 2007;

Radonic, Cooper, and Omans 2020). Scientific research is not neutral and can be used to

further agendas that are counter to the needs of disaster impacted communities (Sun and Faas

2018). Trust and change (in communities and also among researchers) are more easily

created and sustained when stakeholders are part of the planning and execution of research

(Lebrato 2020; Sun and Faas 2018). More public participation in research can also help increase policymakers' awareness of community stances on changes that have been or could be made (Arney et al. 2011). Perception is based on a variety of factors including both education and personal experience, which precludes any one group from accurately stating they understand risk without outside input (Faas and Parreno 2024).

Methodology

When trying to find a partnering organization, I looked first for community organizations based on location (they needed to be located in the East Bay or parts of the South Bay that could be impacted by an earthquake on the Hayward fault), then looked at who these organizations serve and/or have as volunteers. I had limited success in partnering with organizations that I had little to no ties to, but fellow graduate student Chyna Lee was able to partner with AGC, an organization that serves San José residents in so many ways that she was able to conduct phase one with one group at the AGC main office and I was able to conduct it with another group at an interim housing site.

I used the methodology for phase one designed by Faas. This was four meetings done over two to four months with the first meeting being an introduction to the project, the next being a listing and discussion of the hazards that are important to their communities, the third meeting being a discussion of the vulnerabilities that impact their communities at different phases of disasters and, finally, a meeting comparing the HayWired Scenario to our discussions to see what the HayWired Scenario did well, what was potentially missing, and whether or not I was representing accurately what they shared with me. Because my partners were all actively looking for permanent housing and because we were rapidly approaching

the Winter holidays, all four meetings were held within two months, with the first three meetings taking place in successive weeks, and a four-week break before the last meeting. This allowed many of the same people to attend at least the first three meetings, and only one person at our last meeting had not been at the previous three.

A lot of the themes and underlying concerns (homelessness, their children's safety, lack of useful aid from government agencies and nonprofits, etc.) became clear during meetings as we took notes on a whiteboard in the kitchen of the facility; we also recorded audio of the meetings. I referred back to these recordings and their AI transcripts during my analysis but chose to listen more often than read, not only because it is only about five hours of audio but because the tone and exact points of interruption in conversations helped me understand how much people agreed or disagreed on certain points.

Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment

AGC is a community organization based in Northeast San José with programs across the city to support people in need of help and/or community. They offer free citizenship classes and consultations with an immigration attorney, as well as inexpensive assistance with DACA, visa applications, translation of legal documents, etc. They have a program called Casitas that provides tiny homes for families that have been displaced until they are able to find permanent housing. Similarly, they have three interim housing facilities throughout the city, as well as several safe park sites where people who own a car or other similar vehicle can park overnight and not worry about being disturbed or in danger by police or neighbors. AGC also offers rental and deposit assistance for people trying to find permanent housing for themselves or their families. They are focused on serving anyone who needs the help they

can provide and were, unsurprisingly, happy to work with both Chyna and me to set up these separate meetings and recruit partners.

While they are a San José-based organization, their community (volunteers, employees, and clients) is not only San José natives and sometimes they only have AGC in common. The residents I partnered with at one of the interim housing sites were all from other countries, other parts of the United States, or other parts of California. They had various racial and ethnic identities, different educational backgrounds and work experience, and different philosophies on how to raise children. The most obvious traits they had in common were their housing insecurity and their status as parents.

Project Goals

I. Facilitate a reciprocal knowledge exchange between the HayWired project and individuals living adjacent to the Hayward Fault who are facing housing insecurity;

II. Test and evaluate methods of including community knowledge and experience in projections of disaster impacts;

III. Use community knowledge to assess the quality of the current HayWired Scenario from a non-scientific perspective; and

IV. Highlight some of the vulnerabilities created in attempts to be fair when providing aid.

Deliverables

Beyond the knowledge exchange this helps facilitate between the USGS and the communities its work both directly and indirectly impacts, this project helped to test the

format for conversations regarding hazards and vulnerabilities in the context of asking people for their input rather than telling them what they will experience or have experienced in the past. I created a PowerPoint presentation that compares the HayWired Scenario to the discussions my partners and I had, and produced this project report which discusses our findings, as well as how the research process could be improved in future iterations of phase one and some brief ideas for phase two. The lack of information regarding work and aid were constants in our conversations. How and where we disseminate information to individuals rather than larger organizations could be one focus for phase two. The comparison between the HayWired Scenario and our discussions was overwhelmingly positive and our format worked remarkably well but I certainly made mistakes that I would like to help others avoid.

Roadmap

This project report has three parts. The next chapter is an article for Practicing Anthropology that summarizes the primary hazards and vulnerabilities that my partners and I discussed and the solutions that they have proposed that could aid the USGS in future assessments, as well as local government and nonprofit protocols for delivering aid. The last chapter includes the parts of our discussions that I was not able to address in Chapter Two, the limitations and benefits of this project, and recommendations for future iterations of phase one and phase two of this project.

CHAPTER TWO

PERSPECTIVES OF DISASTERS AND RISK WHILE IN INTERIM HOUSING

Abstract

People living in interim housing have a perspective on the creation and impacts of disasters that many policymakers and those preparing for disasters have not experienced. Through a series of four workshops with residents of one interim housing site run by Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment, the residents explored how homelessness, school safety, and drug use are hazards that impact their daily lives and would make response to a disaster more difficult for them personally and for their communities. We also discussed the roles that bureaucracy and the necessity of identifying documentation play in making life harder in all phases of disasters. This community-based approach to hazard and vulnerability studies is working toward a better exchange of information between disaster researchers and those contending with disasters.

Introduction

The causes and impacts of disasters can be both physical and social phenomena. What we see as disasters, hazards, vulnerabilities, and risks can be influenced by our prior experiences and who we are in a larger society. During workshops with the residents of an interim housing site in East San José run by Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment (hereafter, AGC), we discussed the hazards (homelessness, school safety, and drug use) and vulnerabilities (documentation and bureaucracy) that would make disaster preparation and response more difficult. These workshops are the first step in a larger project from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and San José State University to find

ways to include the perspectives of underrepresented communities in risk assessments like

the USGS's Hayward Earthquake Scenario (HayWired). Discussions of hazards and

vulnerabilities, when allowed to wander, can have very little to do with any impending

disaster that scientists are concerned about and everything to do with the routine disasters

people contend with. In parts of our discussions, groups of people were listed as hazards and

later included as groups that are most impacted by certain sociostructural vulnerabilities. This

overlap helps to highlight how hazards and vulnerabilities, for these individuals, are

primarily socially created rather than strictly technological, geophysical, meteorological, etc.

This community-based approach to research can help to more accurately identify and weigh

hazards and risk.

The hazards and vulnerabilities that are the most difficult for people to cope with when

experiencing and recovering from a disaster are the same hazards and vulnerabilities that can

make aspects of day-to-day life feel like an ongoing disaster. The USGS created the

HayWired Scenario in 2018 that depicts what would happen in the event of a magnitude 7

earthquake on the Hayward Fault which stretches from San José in the South through the

East Bay Hills and Richmond in the North (United States Geological Survey 2018;

University of California Berkeley Seismology Lab n.d.). San José State University

anthropologist A.J. Faas is working with the USGS to create a community science approach

to hazard and vulnerability assessment. In the past, Faas and Jhaid Parreno worked with Billy

De Frank LGBTQ+ Community Center and Japantown Prepared (both community-based

organizations in San José), and most recently, Chyna Lee and I have been working with

different parts of AGC (Faas and Parreno 2024). This project has three "phases": Phase one

involves working with groups of people (who I refer to as partners) who may help us understand what is missing from HayWired as it currently exists; phase two is an effort to learn how any gaps in HayWired can be filled; and phase three involves coming together with all our partners to present this information and share how it works together. The overall goal is to create ways for people who are disproportionately experiencing these disasters to contribute to HayWired and become part of a reciprocal knowledge exchange. Disasters of all kinds require both scientific and community knowledge to explain the difference between perceptions and official assessments of hazards, vulnerability, risk, etc. so that knowledge may be used to prevent, mitigate, or respond to harm (Checker 2007).

Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment

AGC is a nonprofit that works to meet a variety of San José's needs by helping new immigrants, providing educational resources and services, providing aid for housing for a variety of living situations, including safe park sites and interim housing, and many other services (Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment n.d.). I worked with AGC on phase one at an interim housing site in East San José, primarily with people who are not from the South Bay or the wider Bay Area. Most of the partners I worked with were mothers, and almost everyone was a parent.

We had four meetings to explain the project, discuss with the partners what hazards they see in their communities (however they define their communities) and what vulnerabilities they see, and then confirm that I was representing their perceptions of these hazards and vulnerabilities correctly. The hazards and vulnerabilities we identified were not exclusive to an earthquake or any sort of moment-based disaster but impact their daily lives.

Hazards

The definition we used for the term "hazards" was "phenomena in our environments and communities that present risks to life, physical well-being, property, and that can cause disasters with broader impacts to society, economy and to the environment" (Faas and Parreno 2024). The hazards we spent the most time discussing, and which were the most closely related, were homelessness, school and daycare safety, and drug use and access. The social nature of these hazards was not unexpected but provides a contrast to how hazards are typically thought of when discussing disasters. The USGS and the National Weather Service both clearly state the physical hazards, like ground shaking and wind speed, that they are focused on (Earthquake Hazards Program 2019; National Weather Service 2024). The Department of Health and Human Services' Medical Surge Capacity and Capability handbook provides a broad but explicitly physical definition for hazards, referring to a "force, physical condition, or agent" (Public Health Emergency 2012). These are all reasonable ways to think about hazards given the purposes of these organizations and tools but, as these organizations and tools are all meant to aid people, there is a benefit to allowing a broader definition of hazards.

One of the first concepts that my partners listed, for a variety of reasons, as a hazard they see affecting their community is homelessness. Homelessness is a hazard in San José and the Bay Area in general, but not only because people are without housing. Homelessness is a hazard because of the danger it puts children in when they are exposed to and/or associating with people who are unhoused and due to the relationship between homelessness and violence and suicide. My partners identified from their own experience, as well as from their

knowledge of the experiences of people they are close to, that being homeless or low-income puts people in "survival mode": they identified survival mode as a hazard, as well as its own disaster, because of its effect on mental health and because it can lead to violence in efforts to obtain resources.

When asked about the causes of homelessness, my partners pointed out that people are being forced out of their homes; evictions, and children getting kicked out by their parents or other family members. They noted that while some people may choose to remain unhoused, most do not; that homelessness is caused simply by not having the means to support yourself, even when absolute, best efforts have been made to do so.

School and daycare safety is a hazard because the campuses are too easily accessible to outsiders. Some high schools have an open policy where students can leave for lunch in the middle of the day, other schools have few or none of the physical barriers needed to keep unwanted people out. One mother spoke about a problem with her son's school, where her son was being dropped off at school, not going to class, and instead leaving campus. The school told her she needed to make sure he went to his classes; she argued that she had dropped him off in front of the school and watched him go inside, and they let him leave the school, and she asked the question, why is the school not responsible for keeping the child on campus? This mother's description illustrates an issue many partners expressed experiencing – schools not taking responsibility for students leaving campus. There were similar concerns regarding daycares. Multiple partners discussed not needing to prove they are their children's parents – even if the daycare workers have never met them. They are not only concerned about kidnapping risks, but also about the possibilities of what could happen when such little

effort is put into the most basic processes for keeping their children safe. This is an issue of bullying as well as an issue of stranger danger. One of the primary causes they identified for this is the quality and amount of staffing (which is also an issue of funding); they also identified that teachers and childcare workers need to be more fairly paid in order to encourage their investment in the care of their students and their work procedures, with the goal of encouraging more caring and invested teachers and childcare workers to enter the field.

Another aspect of this problem is that there is not enough parental influence. Although the route for input and feedback from parents exists in the form of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), not every parent has the time to dedicate to a PTA. There need to be accessible ways for parents to influence their children's safety. We noted this has been an issue for "years" because the security of schools has never been good. Even with recent improvements in some areas, there have not been improvements everywhere, because our schools are not treated equally. To reduce or eliminate this hazard they want more and better-paid staff, more physical structures around schools to keep unauthorized persons from entering and to keep children in, more communication between the schools and students, and the schools and families, to make expectations clear, as well as making all aware of students' whereabouts, and including cameras in and around the perimeters of schools as part of school security.

The last hazard we discussed was drug use and access. Drug use can be caused by stress, depression, and anxiety (these were listed as both causes for and results from drug use). Everyone agreed that this is a disaster by itself, but it also contributes to other disasters, such

as suicide and homelessness because of altered thinking and behavior. Drug use can change the way a person thinks, sees the world, and behaves, which in turn can harm their ability to be around others safely on a daily basis, which is where the concern regarding children's exposure to drug use begins. Drug use can create homelessness and perpetuate it and, conversely, homelessness often encourages drug use and perpetuates it. Additionally, drug use leads to a greater need for medical care, but in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic and/or when an individual has no medical insurance, medical care is hard to come by. Although this is at times a problem for everyone, it is particularly difficult for people with existing mental health issues, or people who are homeless because they are the more likely to lack the social support needed to get clean. To combat this, my partners said they want guidance and resources to help people to give up their addictions, and they want this from everyone – nonprofits, government agencies at all levels, and neighbors. At the beginning of our discussion on hazards, homelessness and drug use came up and it was discussed in a way that sounded as though many of those present blamed the drug user for the situation they were in and for their addiction, but when we dug into it more in our conversations, they opened up more about their own struggles with drug addiction and the struggles they've seen other people have. It has become clear that they do not blame anyone for drug addiction, but they do believe that everyone is responsible for helping prevent people from becoming addicted and helping people overcome their addictions.

Vulnerabilities

During our discussion of vulnerabilities, we explained vulnerability as "connections and disconnections between people and material/economic, political, and social resources" rather

than individuals or groups being vulnerable (Marino and Faas 2020; Faas and Parreno 2024). When vulnerability is considered an attribute of a person or community rather than a weakness in a system, the effect is being attributed to the people feeling it rather than the cause (Faas *In Press*). This separation opens up the potential for those who are not contending with specific vulnerabilities to attribute them to actions and perceived deficiencies of individuals or groups (Hsu, Howitt, and Miller 2015). Considering the vulnerability of systems rather than people helps to explain how vulnerabilities stack for different intersecting identities (Chen and Hulsbrink 2019).

Rather than having a group discussion to determine what vulnerabilities people saw as important parts of their lives, especially in the context of a disaster, we used worksheets to address some of these questions in groups of two or three. These worksheets were meant to identify those most affected by social vulnerability in your community and how and where these vulnerabilities are produced. These worksheets were broken up into three parts: Anticipating and Preventing, Disaster Response, and Coping and Recovery. This linear breakdown, while important for our thinking when trying to prepare on a larger scale, seems to be less important based on the responses and discussions we had while filling out these worksheets, because the participants are all coming at it from a constant state of response and coping. There might be a new factor in whatever disaster is happening, but there is always a disaster. The vulnerabilities we identified as being the most impactful were the need for documentation and bureaucratic barriers which most significantly affect homeless individuals, immigrants, racial minorities, and people with a criminal history.

People need documentation is needed in all phases of disasters. We need multiple forms of identification to work, get housing, and get a credit card; identification is required to get a hotel room, a rental car, or medicine; identification is necessary to receive aid or to get a new job after you have been displaced or lost some of your basic needs and are trying to pick yourself up after a disaster. One group noted that this need for identification is particularly difficult for immigrants because, while their child might be eligible for various forms of I.D. in the U.S., even getting their child a birth certificate requires a parent have an acceptable form of I.D. This was also noted during our previous discussion on hazards as a difficult hurdle for homeless people because they may have lost, or never had, the documents needed for securing housing, aid, or work, and they may not be able to afford the fees necessary to obtain new or replacement documents. To make the need for documentation less burdensome, we do not need to remove demands for identification in all parts of our lives, but instead need an easing up on the requirements. One partner said that the paperwork received (in the process of getting a new I.D. from the DMV or new Social Security card) should be accepted while waiting for the official ones to arrive, and that not accepting that interim paperwork is just one of the barriers keeping people in bad situations.

Like documentation, bureaucratic barriers are harmful during all phases of disasters. Seeking government and nonprofit aid for housing, schooling, work, and other basic needs requires multiple rounds of paperwork, interviews, and waiting weeks, months, or years to hear about a decision or a next step. All the steps and requirements would be fine if nothing ever changed in our lives and we were all living relatively comfortable lives while we waited to hear back, but homeless people may not be able to stay in the same city or county while

they wait to hear about a housing or work program. Immigrants, too, may need to move for work or to care for family. Both groups may be without the prior knowledge or time needed to navigate any given program application process. A social network is needed to create stability in difficult situations, and as my partners pointed out, homeless people and immigrants might not have a robust enough social network.

Racial minorities also have trouble working through bureaucratic barriers – not necessarily due to a lack of time or connections, but because they are treated poorly when trying to get aid or housing. One partner expressed that she and other people she knows who are part of minority racial groups are not treated fairly and are sometimes made to wait longer than others. She said it feels like they (those who make decisions regarding access to aid on a person-to-person level) are "picking and choosing." Part of this assessment of how people are treated comes from the requirements for qualifying for different types of aid that can exclude, either overtly or by technicalities, people who are homeless, immigrants, racial minorities, and people with a criminal background.

These problems are not just for aid in response to and during the recovery from a disaster. Housing is of particular concern to these partners since they were all actively trying to find housing at the time of our discussions. One requirement causing problems for them and many others is background checks. Some of them said that they have committed felonies but that does not take away their need for housing. Jess, who had been staying at this facility for six months at the time of these meetings and who has been to prison and is trying to get housing with a felony on her record said this:

> Jess: "You got a background, you ain't getting' no place."
> Nina: "And it's not just a background it's credit."

Jess: "They'll work with you with the credit, but if you've got a felony?" Credit scores, number of children, work history, income, marital status, and many other small and difficult-to-change factors impact where, when, and what kind of housing people can qualify for, and that is before a background check is run, which can immediately disqualify them from the housing they are seeking. Maria, a mother from the Monterey Peninsula, put it like this: "Sometime in our life, we've all done something we are not proud of. Unfortunately, some of us got caught doing it. And if it's something 25, 30 years ago, you still don't hold that. I still can't get no housing." We, of course, discussed that there is a bit more nuance to whether a background check can disqualify you from housing, but that does not change the fact that they are prohibitive for some people despite housing being a necessity. Credit scores, rounds of paperwork, needing two to three specific forms of identification, interviews, and so many other requirements for getting help are prohibitive for many of the people who need the help these funds and programs are meant to serve.

Conclusion

It is not a small ask to invite people to spend six to eight hours of their lives, spread out over two to four months, telling someone who is all but a stranger, things it seems they should already know and, in some cases, bringing up painful realities. My partners expressed that they do not feel people with political power and influence understand them, not because they have not been exposed to people who are middle or low-income, but because they are not "experiencing the shelter life, the homeless life." Every meeting included a conversation about whether speaking to me was actually going to have an impact because they feel the

people who can change things for the better are not suffering from a lack of information, but from a lack of caring.

This information that they have shared about their concerns and experiences regarding hazards and disasters can help to inform how future risk assessments done by the USGS and other organizations weigh the severity of each risk (which are not all equal simply by being present) but has the potential to influence discussions and practice regarding aid. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, it is generally agreed that those most affected (often based on geography) need to be helped first or most but, the required proof to get aid may be preventing nonprofits and government agencies from helping those who need it. In the short term, their input can help us steer how phase two of this project is planned so that new ways of bridging gaps in risk assessment and emergency planning can be tested.

The hazards we identified are constant problems that disasters exacerbate. (It should be noted that we did agree that these hazards could be considered their own disasters, making these conversations instead about compound disasters.) Homelessness is a hazard because of the behaviors it fosters. Not only can it lead to people becoming combative and violent, but it can lead to people becoming suicidal or entering a headspace that is not conducive to improving their situation. Schools and daycares lack the physical structures and policies needed to keep children safe. Not only is it too easy for children to leave some of these campuses but the institutions are not holding themselves properly accountable for the students and children in their care. Drug use and access are too common and hard to avoid for users and non-users, adults and children living in San José. Like homelessness, drug use is both caused by, and causes, a variety of mental health issues that negatively impact users,

their loved ones, and potentially anyone in their communities. All of this is present in our daily lives, and all of this can also make preparing for a disaster difficult or impossible.

The vulnerabilities we discussed are the systems and protocols used to run our daily lives that are already impractical for many people and become a barrier to safety and recovery in disaster situations. The fact that so many kinds of identification and documentation are needed to have basic needs met is harmful when you do not have those documents, cannot afford to obtain those documents, or lose those documents because of a disaster. Even with all the necessary documentation, the hoops people are expected to jump through and qualifications they must have to get help, or housing, or work, are unreasonable and for some, impossible. My partners made it clear that they do not want the aid or housing they apply for to just be handed to them, but it should be easier to get. Tanya, a resident who works ninety minutes away from the interim housing site using public transit to provide for herself and her children, explained the disconnect between what is offered and what is needed like this:

> "When you got people who's not experiencing that, they don't have that compassion of saying, you know what, let me put this out there for you. Let me give this resource. If you are not starving every day, if you're not minimizing – eating pork chops and steaks every day and going down to sandwiches or tuna sandwiches or peanut butter jelly sandwiches, you are not going to know what it feels like."

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reflect on the aspects of our discussions and findings that were not addressed in Chapter Two. I also explain the limitations and benefits of how this research was executed and end with recommendations for what should be included in future assessments like the HayWired Scenario, how these methods can be modified for future iterations of phase one, and a possibility for phase two.

Further Findings

We started our discussion of hazards by listing all of the hazards my partners consider salient for themselves and their communities. We then narrowed the list down to the five hazards that they considered the most important to address. In addition to homelessness, school and daycare safety, and drug use and access, we discussed access to information regarding jobs and the resources to get them, as well as the cost of living.

The lack of access to information and resources regarding finding work is a hazard in part because my partners identified homelessness as both a hazard and a disaster. When finding work is difficult in a high-cost-of-living area like San José, people are in greater danger of becoming homeless and/or being unable to adequately care for their families. When we discussed this, what they specifically referred to was the lack of support in finding work. Since there is no required instruction, anyone receives on how to find a job, many have to rely on what has given them success in the past, which may no longer be what brings success. They pointed out that many jobs call for a bachelor's degree and that without a degree, finding a job that pays well enough to meet their needs can be difficult. This affects

people with limited access to or knowledge of technology the most. Even once people apply for jobs and are successful in getting interviews, they do not always have what they need to then get those jobs (clothes, transportation, identifying documents, and other materials). Many of the resources regarding finding work are online which is only accessible to those who know how to navigate that space. They told me there are places like L.A. that have "drop-in centers," and that if there are any drop-in centers in the South Bay, they do not know where they are. Immigrants from other countries also have a hard time with finding a job because they are often treated like they are ignorant or stupid because they, along with so many others, do not know what is needed and find it difficult; immigrants also frequently do not want to ask for help outside of their familiar support networks. Multiple partners stated that this is where advocacy is required. You have to advocate for yourself, your friends, and family, and you need to find someone like, as they pointed out, the caseworkers at AGC, who can advocate for you. This has been an ongoing problem and has worsened as the world has become more technology based. Minorities and immigrants are affected most by this because they are not taught from a young age what resources they need, and minorities and immigrants are less likely to have built local professional connections through family and schooling.

When we began discussing the cost of living as a hazard, Maria said, "too high, too damn high, extremely high." The cost of living is a hazard for a similar reason to the lack of access to job information and resources; the current cost of living puts people in a position in which much smaller missteps or unavoidable life events could lead to homelessness. The problem is that everything (gas, food, etc.) is too expensive, particularly if you are trying to find

housing. We discussed how the cost of a rotisserie chicken from Safeway has doubled in price since the pandemic and the prepared food at Walmart just is not as good or worth the money. If you are staying in a shelter or an interim housing facility, you might not be able to cook your own food and be forced to buy prepared food. Despite all the cost increases in recent decades, pay increases have not kept up, therefore buying power has decreased. This is a significant contributing factor to disasters in the area because it increases homelessness and crime. When you cannot afford food, you also cannot afford rent and might take extreme measures to have your needs met. One person described it as a domino effect with low-paying jobs and rent increases that people cannot keep up with. The causes they see for the current cost of living are tech companies, the pandemic, displacement and immigration within the United States, and requirements for receiving aid. The solution cannot be leaving because many people are forced to stay for work, to take care of loved ones, or because it is too expensive to move. They have found their case managers at AGC to be the group trying the most to work on this issue by helping them find aid that they are qualified for. Going forward, they would like to see more transparency with government spending, rent control, and education subsidies. These proposed solutions in particular show that my partners are not asking for a complete overhaul of the system, but for there to be social structures that allow people to cope with these problems.

Limitations

Some of the limitations I experienced while working on this project were mistakes on my part, but some were just the nature of this type of research in this setting. The two mistakes that I made were not coordinating longer meetings and not having our worksheets reviewed

by someone who is not associated with the project. Other issues like people moving into permanent housing, motivation to participate, and general frustration with government agencies and nonprofits were out of my control.

The housing manager for the site, Nick, and I were both excited to get these meetings started quickly and have them all take place close enough together that people would be able to attend multiple meetings. The case managers and staff at AGC were incredibly helpful and accommodating by translating and helping us conduct these meetings at the housing site but, because of this tight schedule, we had to be finished by a specific time which prevented people from being able to explore the topics in a way that they might have. In some ways this was good because there were periods of getting off track, but it would have been helpful to have had more leeway in our scheduling.

The worksheets we used to help with our discussion on vulnerability were well organized and asked clear questions with some room for interpretation as far as I was concerned. I was wrong. The format of the worksheets themselves was a bit confusing to partners and needed to be explained to each small group that was working on them. The questions were a little too broad, leading people to initially respond that they did not have any relevant input, until some examples were provided.

Some limitations cannot be solved. We were working with people who were looking for permanent housing and staying at an interim housing site that was usually able to help people get their permanent housing in three to four months. One person had already moved into their new home by the fourth meeting, and another was preparing to, so they were only able to participate in the first three meetings. An additional basic limitation is the low motivation to

participate in this sort of research beyond their own moral drive. It came up in every meeting that, in the past, nothing had ever happened when they were asked to express their opinions and perspectives, and they did not expect this to be different, but they still wanted to be heard. Related to this, they expressed frustration with the fact that the person speaking with them and wanting to include their experiences and concerns was a graduate student rather than someone from the USGS or the county who might be able to do something more quickly with the information they provided. There is nothing I could do to alleviate these frustrations, but they should be considered when trying to work with similar groups in the future.

What Worked

Despite the difficulties, many things went well: Partners did not need to travel to the meetings (the first meeting was done as part of a weekly meeting for all of the residents); they were asked to participate when they were able rather than being required to attend all four meetings in order to participate; AGC was familiar with the causes of displacement and were willing to help with translating, and the vulnerability worksheets helped with managing our time. All of these were benefits of working with this particular organization, which can only be credited to Chyna, and Faas's methodology.

The meetings were held in the "kitchen" of the interim housing site (it was not set up for cooking but there were small refrigerators with some prepared foods, as well as snacks, fruit, and canned foods for residents to take as they needed). This made it convenient for people to attend, prevented partners from needing to travel out of their way after work in order to participate, and in the case of a couple of partners, they were able to join in the meeting without prior knowledge of it when they came in to grab food. The benefit of convenience

cannot be overstated; had we tried to hold these meetings off-site or even in a different part of the building, I do not think we would have been as successful as we were.

Nick holds a weekly meeting at the site to keep residents updated on policy changes and concerns that are being addressed. He wanted the first meeting to be done at the end of their site meeting so that more residents would be gathered and could hear about the project. Since the plan that Faas created for the first meeting is mostly an explanation and a shorter discussion, we were able to directly inform the residents about the project and what we were asking for rather than trying to recruit specific people. (Previously, another interim housing site had allowed us to tell people about the project at one of these meetings but instead, being able to have a general discussion about pressing issues and who is working to mitigate the risk caused by them helped people get engaged and interested in sharing their perspectives more than just hearing about the project could have done).

At the first meeting, we asked the residents and all of our partners going forward to attend any meeting they were able to even if they were not able to attend all four. Tanya was not present at the first meeting but walked in toward the end of the second meeting and was able to include her perspective, which I would not have wanted to miss. Only three partners were able to make all four meetings but the way they all steered our conversations and built off of each other was valuable even though they missed some conversations.

AGC's leadership and staff at the main office, as well as at this particular site, all seemed to immediately understand the purpose of what we were doing and why it was important. Many of their programs help people who have been displaced for a variety of reasons, and many of their clients do not speak English. They were just as motivated as I was to get these

meetings started quickly and they were able to translation for myself and for the partners who primarily spoke Spanish so they would be able to include their perspectives and our conversations would not need to be limited by my language inabilities.

The vulnerability worksheets that we used to help organize our thoughts and consider vulnerabilities at different stages of disasters were not only a great orientation for how we would be discussing vulnerability but helped manage our time. Small groups discussing our questions, rather than the whole group, allowed us to gain the valuable breadth of perspectives that we wanted while limiting long group discussions to a few questions at the end. Case managers providing translation was incredibly helpful, but this was part of their workday so we could not let our meetings go too long.

Recommendations Going Forward

The fourth meeting we held helped me understand how successful the HayWired Scenario was in highlighting groups that may need additional help in the event of an earthquake, and how well these meetings are organized to elicit participation and discussion. That being said, there are a few changes that could be made.

HayWired

The HayWired Scenario lists non-English speakers as a group that will need more help, which is not being contested. One partner noted that non-English speakers could be a stand-in classification for immigrants, though it does not include everyone it ought to. By specifically looking at the experiences of immigrants from other countries and other parts of the U.S. and California, we can see how social networks and local knowledge gained by living in one location can change a person or group's ability to prepare for or respond to

disasters. A lot of information regarding resources is gained slowly over time, as it typically stops being advertised once the cost is deemed ineffective by whatever government agency, nonprofit, or company manages those resources.

Phase One

These conversations were fairly short (90 to 120 minutes each) but they were still too long. It is not only the time commitment that we are asking of people but also the tedium and emotional labor of going through some of these questions. The hazards meeting has a list of questions to be discussed about each hazard and, after the first three, it was less interesting for people to discuss how long they have been in danger and whether or not anyone was trying to alleviate the hazards they are concerned about. It might not always be an option but, when possible, it could help to break up the hazards discussion into two meetings and/or create worksheets that help people organize their thoughts in a way that is similar to how the vulnerability worksheets do. These potential worksheets would also need to be reviewed by someone not involved in the project (as I am currently doing with the vulnerability worksheets to, hopefully, require less explanation in the future).

Phase Two

A potential start for phase two could be a modification of the ideas behind work done by Jackson Benz. Jackson was trying to create a map of important places based on where people were going in their daily lives. Rather than map where people facing housing insecurity are going (it will change as often as their housing situation does), I suggest we try to map where partners would want resources like drug treatment, childcare, job search support, and shelters to be located. These maps could be very specific if people name specific streets and

neighborhoods, or more general if they want some of the resources to be available at libraries or churches, or even nonphysical if particular online spaces would be the most helpful. While this does not map where people are, it does map where they would like to be and where they might want to go to seek help. This next step in the project could help lay out a plan for addressing some of the concerns my partners expressed.

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