

Disaster & Environment Fall 2021 Comprehensive Exam

Section A: Pick one of the following two questions to answer:

1. The study of disaster sociology and the study of collective behavior has been closely intertwined since the work of Samuel H. Prince.
 - i. Pick 2-3 distinct concepts that demonstrate the intersection of collective behavior and disasters.
 - ii. Citing key works, explain how they've contributed over time to our evolving understanding of disaster.
 - iii. Be sure to give a full representation of work, starting from the mid 20th century to recent work and spanning across decades.

A concept might have been developed early on and evolve in use or sophistication over time. Alternatively, early research might not have evoked the term but rather led to its development decades later. Either approach is accepted. In your answer, the concepts chosen should be quite distinct from each other and have minimal overlap in the literature. Students who only pick two distinct concepts, you should provide more depth (detail and references for those). Those who pick three may have *slightly* less detail per concept, as they are expected to provide more breadth.

2. Drawing extensively on the literature, please answer the following question: **What is a disaster?** Your response should:
 - i. Demonstrate a strong mastery of the sociology literature on disasters while making your own argument.
 - ii. Reference literature, discussions, and dialogue on the topic that span the past 70 years.
 - iii. Conclude with a strong case and rationale for your answer to the question.

Section B: Pick one of the following two questions to answer:

1. Structural violence in communities intersects with the ways in which disasters unfold and the outcomes that disasters have on people.
 - i. Explain what structural violence means.
 - ii. Describe how it manifests **in two (of the four phases) of the hazard cycle**. Please be specific in describing how structural violence impacts (two of) preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery.
 - iii. Describe ways in which structural violence can change due to contextual factors and agents of socialization (please name the contextual factors and agents of socialization). Note that there may be readings that describe conditions of structural violence that do not specifically call it/name it as this phrase, but you can identify it as such as long as you state why and how it connects to the outcomes and impacts of disasters.
 - iv. Reference at least 2 different disaster events/case studies in your responses above (such as a specific hurricane or earthquake or other event).

2. Medical and health conditions are often at the center of disaster studies, especially in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
 - i. Explain from a standpoint of **risk for protective behavior** why there were **states and regions in the United States** that had variations in mask ordinances, vaccination uptake/roll-out, and long-term prevention measures (rate of re-opening public spaces, mask rules, ad campaigns, vaccine lotteries, and the like).
 - ii. Specifically, describe **2 theoretical models - such as the Protective Action Decision Model, the Pressure and Release Model, or other appropriate models of your choosing (they do not have to explicitly state the word “risk”)** - that you would use to explain these variations and patterns (slow recovery, higher death rates, lower vaccination rates, or other patterns you observe). You do not have to memorize or know exact rates of vaccines, death tolls, etc., but clearly link your descriptions of behavior with the literature on risk and health, and the ways in which your theories could be used to “explain” the story of COVID patterns in the United States. **The theoretical models you choose do NOT have to be medical/public health models and they do not have to be from recent literature.**
 - iii. Finally, dedicate at least one subsection of your response to how you would translate lessons learned from COVID through the lens of your theoretical models to improve response to the “next big outbreak” or pandemic.

Section C: Pick one of the following two questions to answer:

1. Sociological theories of risk (and subsequently risk perception) must consider the role of uncertainty in communicating and interpreting information about disaster vulnerability, environmental hazard exposure, and climate change consequences.

- i. Contrast at least two sociological theories of risk by discussing the way that risk perception is conceptualized across them and why the difference is theoretically and practically important relative to the notion of *uncertainty*.

- ii. Next, discuss key scholarly findings that examine the impact of social inequality, broadly defined, on variations in risk perception for at least one of these: climate change impacts, environmental hazard exposure (i.e., EJ), and/or disaster vulnerability. What have we learned about the way inequality shapes the perception of uncertainty and risk in the above areas?

2. Scholars have suggested that environmental (in)justice (EJ) communities are more vulnerable to climate change impacts and disasters.

- i. Citing key works, in what ways are EJ communities more vulnerable to climate change impacts and disasters? Be sure to describe types of environmental hazards impacting a community for context. What are the key *social* factors that produce this compounded vulnerability?

- ii. To this end, one “solution” for local governments is to mitigate climate and environmental hazard exposure through greening, making these communities less vulnerable to hazards by adding wetlands, sea walls, and other physical infrastructure. Some scholars argue that this approach is a “paradox” and even an “enemy of sustainability,” especially when they also involve revitalization through private development. What do they mean by this?