

Disaster & Environment Spring 2022 Comprehensive Exam

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

1A. On your reading list was a 2007 article by Kathleen Tierney (From the Margins to the Mainstream? Disaster Research at the Crossroads) in which she argued:

“The sociology of disasters has developed in ways that have weakened its ties with mainstream sociology. It has remained remarkably resistant to changes in the broader sociological landscape, and its strong applied focus has been a barrier to theoretical innovation. This situation is changing, as indicated by critiques of traditional ways of conceptualizing and explaining disasters; greater acceptance of constructivist formulations; willingness to acknowledge that disasters are accompanied by both social solidarity and social conflict; and recognition of the significance of the interaction of disasters and risk with gender, class, and other axes of inequality. However, the field is unlikely to overcome its marginal status without significant efforts to link the sociology of disasters with the related fields of risk and environmental sociology and, more broadly, to focus on core sociological concerns, such as social inequality, diversity, and social change.”

Use your knowledge of the literature to:

- i. Illustrate Tierney’s argument in the scholarship;
- ii. Discuss examples of **recent** scholarship efforts to overcome that marginal status she mentions, commenting on if you think those efforts have been successful.
- iii. Close with a clear and detailed argument of what you feel is the path forward for the field.

2A. There is emerging debate in the disaster field regarding the ethics of disaster research - particularly quick response research, which is an approach well-grounded in the sociology of disaster and collective behavior tradition.

- i.. Drawing on examples in the literature, discuss what distinguishes quick response disaster research from other kinds of research that disaster social scientists undertake.
- ii. Citing extensively the assertions in the literature and considering key issues of vulnerability and resilience, articulate arguments for and against the increased ethical monitoring and guidelines in disaster research.
- iii. End with a strong case for the position you hold, including a detailed discussion of the rationale for your assessment of the issue in relation to the arguments you presented from the literature.

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

1B. The dominant emergency management rhetoric of disaster preparedness emphasizes personal levels of responsibility for preparedness. Please explain the limitations of this approach to preparedness.

- i. Use at least **two theoretical models** to explain how preparedness can be explained or predicted.
- ii. Identify **two disaster case studies** or examples that illustrate the ways in which preparedness unfolds at varying levels (individual, household, community, govt/organization).
- iii. Describe the relationship between **privilege and preparedness** according to the readings/literature

2B. What are the ways in which **gender roles and norms** impact hazard exposure, recovery, and resilience?

- i. Identify examples from the readings to explain how gendered occupations exacerbate specific forms of hazard exposure. Please use 2-3 specific disaster case study examples.
- ii. What is the role of **family structure** in gender and disasters? Identify core concepts related to gender and family structure such as key feminist theories, a functionalist perspective approach, or other sociological theories to explain and describe how disasters are experienced differently based on gender (for example, by men than by women or other forms of gender expression and identity).
- iii. Describe the role of **agency** in disasters for women and girls, and the ways in which agency can be facilitated or prohibited by agents of socialization and other social forces.

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

1C. *Risk* is a core tenant in environmental sociology and the sociology of disasters. Recently, scholars have examined how sustainability and resilience are instrumental factors in reducing risk of harm from disasters.

- i. Provide at least two *sociological* theories of risk and illustrate how they frame the principles of sustainability and resilience.
- ii. Given your answer, so far, highlight the subsequent ways that risk can be addressed (e.g., mitigated) through resilience and sustainability, either in a “disasters” context or some other threat (e.g., climate change).
- iii. Provide examples that make clear how risk is tied to social vulnerabilities and their relationship to resilience and sustainability to help make your case.

2C. Research typically defines an environmental justice (EJ) community as one whose residents are exposed to a variety of environmental and technological hazards at disproportionately higher rates, relative to other communities.

- i. Citing key works from the reading list, illustrate and discuss at least two specific examples of communities and their hazards, and the impact of the hazards on community members’ health (broadly defined) as they relate to disaster and overall vulnerability.
- ii. Be sure to note the historical, social, and contextual factors that produced the vulnerability and outcomes you previously described.