

Disaster & Environment Spring 2023 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 have been closely intertwined since the work of Samuel H. Prince.

- i. Pick 3 distinct concepts that demonstrate the intersection of collective behavior and disasters. Do not pick a concept you discuss in detail in another answer in this exam.
- ii. Citing key works, explain in detail how the three concepts above contributed **over time** to our evolving understanding of disaster.
- iii. Be sure to give a **full representation** of work starting from the early or mid 20th century (depending on the concept) to recent work, and spanning across decades.

A concept might have been developed early on and evolved 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.

2. Scholars have argue that the need for improvisation is inherent to the very definition of what a disaster is. Drawing from and citing examples from the literature,
 - i. Outline and elaborate on the key findings related to disaster improvisation and adaptation, noting the contributions of **several different authors** from the reading list.
 - ii. Explain how improvisation can take place in role allocations, role behavior, and role relationships, citing examples.
 - iii. Describe in detail how you might integrate these findings to better understand a research topic you are interested in or have worked on.

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

1. Describe **three common disaster myths**. Specifically describe the ways scholars identify these myths in the field of disaster studies (in other words, present the ways the scholars argue that they are “debunked” versus accepted as myths). Are there circumstances when some of these myths still “happen”? Your response should include the specific reference to articles/books and case studies. Please also address the following points:
 - a. **Describe the ways in which the myths are connected to other broader social or cultural patterns.** Identify the ways broader social and cultural patterns must be critiqued in order to fully understand the phenomenon of the disaster myths you chose/describe.
 - b. Given the body of knowledge on disaster myths, make the case for which of the myths you chose (at least 1) that should be “revisited” due to rapid changes in social landscapes. For example, are there aspects of the pandemic **that present evidence that at least one myth may need to be revisited with new data and analysis to clarify if that phenomenon still can be categorized as a disaster myth?** Clearly state why you argue that this specific myth should be revisited, what data would be important to collect, and why. Note that it does NOT have to be pandemic-related, but you may choose this if it links with one of the myths you chose.
2. Describe three ways in which **international disaster scenarios** highlight how colonialism and/or conflict for maintaining power/elite systems exacerbate social and physical vulnerability of the disaster-impacted communities. Specifically include in your response:
 - a. Identify failures in **at least two case studies/disaster events in which organizations, leaders, or individuals exacerbated conditions in a disaster impacted community.** Describe if this was a policy, recovery plan, or other decision/action and explain why it was evident to be a failure.
 - b. Describe at least one theoretical approach that could have been used as a guiding principle for **each case study** as a way to make the disaster recovery more effective, sustainable (programmatically), and explain how using that theory as a guide for the failed plan/action could have changed the outcome for the disaster impacted community.

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

1. Sociologists are keenly interested in how conditions of environmental injustice interact with disasters. Summarize the major research findings that shed light on the relationship between environmental injustice and disasters. Additionally, be sure to address the following in your answer:
 - a. Provide an in-depth account of at least one prominent example of a disaster and how environmental injustice played a significant part in the vulnerability of the affected community and its resilience after the fact.
 - i. What are the key *structural conditions of inequity* that played a part before and after the disaster event and in what ways?
 - b. Highlighting both short- and long-term outcomes, summarize the recommendations from the scholarship in the reading list on how to address the structural issues that you identified previously to enhance disaster preparedness and mitigate environmental injustice.
2. Summarize the scholarship from the reading list on disaster risk communication. In your answer, be sure to address the following:
 - a. Provide at least two contrasting sociological views of risk communication in the context of disasters and their relative place in sociological reasoning (i.e., when they were introduced in the literature and how they were then situated with other, existing approaches). How does each frame risk communication, what are the chief differences, and why are those differences important?
 - b. Provide at least one example of risk communication *failure* in the context of disasters and how this influenced the development of at least one of the sociological approaches to risk communication that you provided.