Conceptual Considerations to Understanding the Consequences of Disasters for Rural Communities around the World

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Abstract

A common assumption is that any kind of disaster, from a fire to a typhoon, is short-lived. Another common assumption is that any kind of disaster, especially one affecting rural communities, brings people together, helping each other with clean-up and recovery. Indeed, there may be short-lived bursts of mutual support, the kind that shows up in media stories, but the sociological reality of a disaster is not so simple. The purpose of this article is to examine the impacts of disasters, both short and long-term on rural peoples and communities based on existing research and theory, especially scholarship from the fields of criminology and sociology of the community. Understanding the community-level through the lens of the extant research and criminological/sociological theory speak directly to key issues related to access to justice for rural populations.

Keywords: disasters, community, community resilience, community sustainability, access to justice, routine activity theory, civic community theory, critical criminological theory

Introduction

Almost all media depictions of disasters are shallow, sensationalistic and chock full of showmanship, and have been for a long time (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1972). A weather channel celebrity in yellow raingear leans faux-bravely into the howling winds of an incoming cyclone, a somber-minded meteorologist walks gingerly through the wooden waste of houses destroyed by a tornado telling viewers in a low-toned voice meant to provoke seriousness how devastated are the hapless, hopeless families unlucky to be in its path, and videos of the charred remains of sheds, gum trees and koalas becomes the visual attractions for newscasts about bushfires in Australia that now can be seen on every television and social media broadcast around the world. Popular in media depictions is video of disaster assistance equipment and personnel hurrying to the scene with sirens on full volume, or of a helicopter dropping water on raging flames, or of relief workers who are interviewed exclaiming for the cameras that it is the worst calamity they have ever seen. To further pique viewers' interest, the broadcast might post an ominous phrase like "viewer discretion is advised", which is actually a way to titillate interest and increase audience size.[1]

As usual, within a day or two, the media turns its attention to a weather-related tragedy elsewhere in the world, or perhaps the carnage of violence left over from a conflict between two hostile countries. Rarely, if ever at all does media attention remain focused on the recovery phase of a disaster, which may take months and even years.

This hackneyed and vapid news cycle masks over a real understanding of the economic, psychological, and sociological consequences of disasters. Criminology scholars too are rarely focused on research and theorizing about disasters, and its consequences for issues about crime and criminal justice, such as access to justice services (Frailing & Harper, 2017). This leaves open the question: How would a criminological assessment of disasters inform policy and practice? Since so many disasters are rural-located, are there important distinctions to be made between those which occur in rural places when compared to urban localities? Further, given the vast number and incredible diversity of rural places around the world, are there distinctive characteristics of these localities which influence the ways they recover? Disasters are increasingly linked to climate change, hence, the effects of climate on rural communities anywhere on the planet must be understood so that a better understanding of the criminological dimensions of disasters can be gained (Woroneicki et al., 2022),

Of particular note for a focus on disasters and their impacts on rural communities is the development of the United Nations 17 sustainability goals (United Nations, 2024). Although all

[1] One incredible example of sensationalism associated with disasters comes from a Georgian Congresswoman named Majorie Taylor Greene and her claim that wildfires are caused by "Jewish space lasers" (see Mark Rothschild, 2023). The comment created a counter-industry of online vendors selling pins and patches with the spoofish slogan "mazel tough".

17 are relevant, several of the goals are especially apropos for a consideration of disasters in relation to rural communities around in the world. These include: #11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities, which is making communities of all sizes "safe, resilient and sustainable"; #13 – Climate Action, which is taking actions to "combat climate change and its impacts"; and #16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, which entails providing "access to justice for all."

The purpose of this article is to help redress some of the shortcomings of criminology for an understanding of crime and criminal justice issues confronting rural peoples and rural communities who are affected by disaster events. It describes conceptual frameworks by which research and policy about rural disasters can be developed. Without a framework, there is no issue about crime that can be understood by scholars, and by practitioners, policy-makers and ordinary citizens as well, much less the link of disasters to crime and criminal justice issues. Lilly et al. (2015) observe that:

> …ideas have consequences…the important point is that support for criminal justice policies eventually will collapse if the theory on which they are based on which they are based longer makes sense. (p. 5)

Burke (2014, p. 8) too opines that "We all make assumptions and generalizations about the world around us. We thus theorize." Burke's observations includes those directly involved in disaster recovery and policy and practices related to disasters. It is for this reason that the criminological community needs to step up its scholarly examination of disasters, and especially for rural criminologists when disaster events affect people living in smaller communities and remote places. How do we frame them? How do we understand them? To this end, the article will discuss five key concepts and three important theories for building frameworks for the rural criminology of disasters. The five key concepts are: what is a disaster, what is a community, what is resilience, what is sustainability, and what is access to justice. The criminological theories that can advance understanding of disasters in a rural context are: routine activity theory, civic community theory, and a critical criminological perspective.

Five Key Concepts

What is a Disaster?

This article is focused on how to think about and examine disasters and their effects on rural populations, especially in terms of various crime and criminal justice issues. To start out – what exactly is a disaster?

In one of the earliest attempts to define what is meant by a disaster, Quarantelli & Dynes (1977, p. 24), observed "At least four major references for the term have been noted: the physical agent, the physical consequences of the agent, the way in which the impact of the physical agent is evaluated, and the social disruption and social changes brought about by the physical agent

and its impact". The authors cite Barton (1969), indicating that during a disaster, there are "key problems of individual behaviors…such as the matter of role definition, role competence, and possible role conflict during such emergencies" (p. 26). The advantage of these observations is that it improves the view of disasters and the aftermath of disasters by taking the frame from a psychological level to a sociological level, examining the socio-cultural and economic contexts of the behaviors of victims, first responders, and relief agencies, among others. Quarentelli and Dynes (1979) recommend a "systems" approach to understanding disasters, and knowing something about the pre-impact period as the basis of post-impact planning. Again, to quote Quarentelli and Dynes (1977, p. 34) in reference to disasters:

> …such changes and shifts as do occur in structure and functions, in most cases, already manifest in the pre-disaster period. At most, they appear to accelerate existing trends and, in this sense, reflect the principle of continuity.

Generally, definitions of a disaster include acknowledgement of an event, or set of sequential events that are usually concentrated in a short period of time. Even so, many scholars point out that an epidemic, such as the onset and impacts of COVID-19 at the beginning of this decade, Mad Cow Disease in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, other environmental calamities such as the Chernobyl incident and its aftermath, climate change, and drought, can be quite extended in their occurrence (Kreps & Drabek, 1996). Yet, even short-lived events have long-term consequences. For example, the Christmas Day cyclone (Cyclone Tracy) of 1974, which was accompanied by 255 millimeters (10.04 inches) of rain and unusually high storm surges, destroyed or seriously damaged over 70% of buildings in the city of Darwin, which at the time had a population of nearly 50,000. Sixty-six people were killed and over 500 people injured. Further, the estimated economic impact was about $800 million (AUD) (National Museum Australia, 2024). As Quarantelli and Dynes (1979) observed about Cyclone Tracy:

> …the cyclone victims who remained in Darwin experienced the least disruptive social and psychological effects. On the other hand, those evacuees who still had not returned to Darwin at the time of the study suffered the most effects, with returned evacuees falling in between the other two categories. (p. 35)

Most contemporary definitions of disasters recognize the foundational work of Quarantelli and Dynes (1979), but have continued to examine the definitional nuances further. For example, Dombrowsky (1995) refers to a disaster as a collapse or breakdown of cultural protections. Perhaps either the phrase "societal protection" or "socio-cultural protection" would be better, but the point is that forest and bush fires, tornadoes, hurricanes or cyclones and the more temporally stretched-out critical events like COVID and climate change can overwhelm the social arrangements and economic resources that normally protect most of a society's population at large, or within specific regions and localities. For example, this can be seen in Raisio et al.'s (2022) discussion about how to proactively improve disaster response through the stronger

coordination of the private sector with various governmental agencies and non-profit sector organizations.

The point about defining exactly what is a disaster is that the frame through which these events occur affects how the consequences are assessed and the kinds of responses considered both appropriate and sufficient for recovery. Hence, a relevant criminological framework itself is necessary to consider issues related to crime, police and other services and eventually, considerations related to access to criminal justice services. One might naively think these issues are outside the purview of an emergency response to real-world disaster events. It is not, because policy and practice related to what the police and other first responders do is based on how disasters are framed, especially by politicians and government bureaucrats. Certainly, it is beyond the ways that the media normally view disasters, except for dramatic footage of looters or vigilante actions by possible victims to protect themselves and their property. Inevitably, therefore, a criminological frame of disasters must take a view about how it affects a society, or of groups within. Therefore, when the focus about disasters and access to justice is on rural populations, it is important for the frame to consider the sociological dimensions of a community and how any disaster can "accelerate existing trends" (Quarantelli and Dynes, 1979).

What is a Community?

There are plenty of academic definitions of community, but for the moment, consider a visual depiction. Picture, if you will, a big bowl of wet spaghetti noodles as a better definition of a community than any nerdy-headed professor will ever come up with. It does not matter if that community is a small town like Birdsville or a big city like Melbourne. Every community around the world is made up of dozens if not hundreds and even thousands of networks of people who are in frequent communication with each other because they have common interests and various spots where they can meet and interact face-to-face, such as at a coffee shop, a pub, or a park. Each strand of a wet noodle symbolizes a network of people who interact with each other. Their common interests may be political, economic, occupational, religious, ethnic, tribal, and numerous other shared relevancies, including the fact that they live near each other and therefore likely have a common role in each other's mutual welfare. The networks intertwine in ways that are much too complex to map, hence, the visualization of a community as a messy pile of wet spaghetti noodles.

People sharing geography also means sharing beliefs and practices related to the place where they live and in which they share a stake. These stakeholders protect and sustain something perceived to be valuable at these places, or to start something new that they believe improves the social or economic environment of their community. It is also true that many times, individual self-interest is inconsistent, perhaps in conflict, with community-level interests. Both commonalities and differences can play out more rapidly and perhaps more visibly in the context

of a disaster. A disaster can bring people together because it threatens everyone's welfare, or exaggerate already existing divisions within a place.

Now, for a more formal, sociological definition of a community. A community can be defined as possessing three characteristics which can be found in definitions both old (Warren, 1963) and young (Delanty, 2018). All three are commonsensical and obvious once one thinks about the place where one lives, but nonetheless worth spelling out here. The definition of a community includes the following: (1) geographic or physical proximity of people, that is, they live nearby to each other; (2) because of this proximity, they are more likely to interact with each other (spaghetti noodles) at a spot and to exhibit shared values and beliefs, plus behaviors which potentially impact their neighbors, either for good or not so good; and (3) a place identity, that is, there is a shared name for their neighborhood or town (Warren, 1963; Delanty, 2018). Hence, a community is a human group that is based on geographic contiguity, that is, when people are in physical proximity they interact and from these interactions emerge patterns of behavior and expectations about how to behave within those spaces, which also entails definitions of what is deviant and criminal (Burke, 2001).

When referring to any kind of human group, a function is defined as what that human group does (Merton, 1957). Merton (1957, p 22), citing Radcliffe-Brown (1935) specifies that:

> And in the social sphere where individual human beings, "the essential units", are connected by networks of social relations into an integrated whole, "the function of any recurrent activity, such as the punishment of a crime, or a funeral ceremony, is the part it plays in the social life as a whole and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of structural continuity.

The idea of "social life as a whole" is an old functionalist misstep that can be discarded without taking away from the value of Merton's (1957) assertion. Aside from any lack of consideration that the populations of all communities are stratified, that is, they exhibit differences based on social class, political power, race/ethnicity and other divisions, some of which are divisive, these decades-old definitions are still valid today for any kind of criminological study, including developing a framework for the impact (i.e., function) of disasters.

A community is a human group, and regardless of size, all communities have the same six functions (Warren, 1963). First, there is the economic function (people produce things and people consume things locally). Second, there is socialization, that is, community is one of many human groups (such as family, school, and church) by which people continuously learn and re-learn the culture of the society where they live. The third function is social participation. Within all communities are gathering places (i.e., spots), such as pubs, churches, sports clubs, restaurants and many more where people communicate with each other on a face-to-face basis. The fourth function is social control. People do think about how they might appear to their neighbors before they act. We also call it peer pressure. Plus, there are formal kinds of social

control, such as the police and courts. Fifth, there is the function of mutual support, which is when people from the same place help each other, from ordinary, everyday opportunities to helping each other in times of disaster. Finally, communities act like a filter or buffer (Liepins, 2000) between the bigger events happening around the world and how those events, if at all, affect the welfare of their own community (and of networks of people within), either for better or for worse. This latter function encompasses Mills' (1959, p. 8), concept of "public issues of social structure" and "personal troubles of milieu", that is, larger macro features of a society are ultimately reflected at the micro level in the everyday lives of people.

All six functions provide the context in which we can consider the rural criminology of disasters. The New Zealand sociologist, Ruth Liepins, focused her scholarship on community and rural development, defining any community as a "temporally and locationally specific terrain of power and discourse" (2000, p. 30). By terrains of power is meant power differentials between some people who are able to control decision-making locally and those who have limited or no influence on what happens in their community . Every community, large and small, has a set of local elites, and also has a set of marginalized members. In the US, there is a phrase with rural origins from the late 1800s, during the days of steam railroad locomotives – it is "the other side of the tracks." It refers to the social and physical separation and segregation of more privileged people (the middle and upper social classes) from less privileged people, that is, the working and lower classes. Discourse is how local people talk about their community. Do they talk of their community as the best place in the world to live, or the exact opposite, do they talk about their community as the place they want to leave as soon as they can make it possible?

Any kind of change, including disasters, modify those terrains of power and discourse. Often times those terrains are changed quite drastically, especially in the immediacy of a disaster, and some of those changes may remain for long periods of time rather than return to their previous condition. New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, for example. With a population of nearly 300,000 (not including the greater metropolitan area, only the central city), over half evacuated before the hurricane hit, some relocating as much as 250 miles (about 400 kilometres) away (similar to Darwin in response to Hurricane Tracy). Many of these individuals never came back (Stone et al., 2006). This was also true for other places along the Gulf Coast of the U.S., whether rural or urban. Today, most of these cities have recovered their population totals, but with a distinctive set of people, depending on real estate values, insurance costs etc., with some taking advantage of the changed economics found in the area.

Liepins (2000) breaks down the social structure/social organisation of a community into three essential elements that are actually processes for the ways they function when they interact with each other, that is, reciprocally. They are spaces/structures, practices/behaviors, and meanings. Spaces and structures provide the physical context for practices to occur, and the meanings people assign to these practices. In this case, think of the central role of a pub or church center as the places where people talk about issues, international, national, and local.

Practices enable the circulation of meanings, that is, the discourse or talk that occurs at specific places within a community, and again, like in a pub, restaurant, or church center. Meanings legitimate practices, and are embodied in spaces and structures, that is, they are symbols that evoke a local identity and for many, their loyalty to a place. How do people talk about that giant guitar in Tamworth or the big merino statue in Goulburn, two towns located in New South Wales? What do they symbolize and how do they function as a type of identity of place?

Spaces and structures help us understand points of vulnerability to crime, practices can include behaviors that are both law-abiding or not, and meanings include the reasoning people use to remain law-abiding or the rationalizations people employ to commit both property and violent crime, including during times of disasters. All can be changed by disasters, and crime can increase (or even decrease) at these critical times. These crimes can include increased incidents of burglary (sometimes in the form of looting), more sexual assault and domestic violence, new kinds of fraud or scams, a rise in alcohol and drug use (often as a form of PTSD), and also suicide. Some crimes may be due to outsiders, but often it is the folks who live there that are the real offenders, and maybe not for the first time (Cromwell et al., 1995; Freudenburg & Jones, 1991; Louis-Charles et al., 2022; Zahran et al., 2009).

When a disaster happens – earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, high winds, drought and so on -- it is likely to change the noodles in the spaghetti bowl, that is, the arrangement or networks of people. When that happens, the fourth function of social control changes, that is, diminished for some kinds of practices and strengthened for other practices. Even though mutual support and outside help from first responders and recovery specialists come speedily in the form of helpful actions for some citizens or even for everyone, the support received may be short-term and can quickly diminish (Ericson et al., 2024).

If you ask people who experienced a disaster event, they are likely to describe recovery in terms of re-establishing the space/structure, practices, and meanings of their place that were there before the disaster. Some of these symbols of recovery can be unexpectedly mundane. It might be, for example, the re-establishment of one’s garden, growing the same variety of zucchinis or tomatoes as one did before the disaster event. It may be the meaning assigned to the re-opening of a popular pub or a family-owned restaurant (or their shutting down for good).

In rural criminology, a relatively new technique that can be used to assess the impact of disasters is called “crime talk”. As defined by Pyltarz & Bowden (2019, p. 140):

> 'Crime-talk', which affects perceptions of community safety and general wellbeing, is a symptom of social conflict which can be observed in times of transformation and social change...Therefore, it can be easily connected to the wide range of anxieties and fears experienced by members of a community...Yet 'crime-talk' shouldn't be seen as a discourse about criminal activity: it concerns the drawing of social boundaries that constitute community. 'Crime- talk' defines what behaviours, groups or individuals

> should be seen as deviant and which of them are considered the most dangerous for the safety of a community. Thus 'crime- talk' becomes the evidence about how crime and deviance are constructed in a rural setting.

Hence, how rural people talk (Pyltarz & Bowden, 2019) about disaster events affecting their community illustrates the dynamic reciprocal inter-relationships of Liepins' (2000) three elements of a community, plus the six functions. Their sense of justice, including both access to the police and other criminal justice services and their satisfaction with these services, are forms of crime talk.

What is Community Resilience?

Both journalists and scientists who write about issues related to the environment and the relationship of the environment to culture and society frequently make use of the word resilience, or its derivatives, such as resiliency (Norris, 2008). At first glance, it could be assumed that resilience refers to lack of, or minimal change. This is incorrect. Resilience is a term used in both the natural and social sciences, and in various fields of engineering to mean how much change and the nature of that change is required to modify a system. Norris et al. (2008, p. 127), for example, refer to it as a "metaphor" that has "…roots in the sciences of physics and mathematics, the term originally was used to describe the capacity of a material or system to return to equilibrium after a displacement." In its essential form, resilience is a state of equilibrium with a measured degree or ability to resist and/or adapt to a disturbance (Ross & Berkes, 2014). It can also mean the amount of disturbance or influence that is required before a system (of any kind, natural or social) "flips" or transforms into a new state of equilibrium. Finally, it can also mean the plasticity of a system, that is, the system's ability to evolve or change in response to outside influences, while retaining its essential features.

When the reference point is more specific to humans, their communities, their societies, and their cultures, resilience can be seen as the relative capacity to adjust to change. For example, quoting from the Stockholm Resilience Centre (2007), Kulip et al. (2013, p. 759) defines community-level resilience as the capacity of a community "…to withstand and recover from stresses, such as environmental change or social, economic or political upheaval." In specific reference to disasters, Cutter (2016, p. 741) defines resilience as "…the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from or more successfully adapt to actual or potential adverse events."

The concept of resilience fits squarely with the idea that communities, especially rural places, exhibit varying capacities to deal with disasters during the recovery period. As well, community resilience is the context, to assume the view of Quarantelli and Dynes (1977), in which change may occur in the sense that what is already there in a community in terms of social relationships and what is already changing in a community either slows down or accelerates during disaster events. Ultimately, the strength of localized networks, also known as social and

cultural capital have a lot to do with the resiliency of a community, region or other locality to make these adjustments.

An example of measuring resilience comes from Sherrieb et al. (2010), who examined rural counties through a series of indices several years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast of southeastern United States. For example, social capital was measured by the number of sports and civic organizations per capita, voter participation in presidential elections, and membership in religious organizations. These indicators are surprisingly similar to a rural-based criminological theory called "Civic Community Theory" (Lee, 2004), which is discussed later in this article. These empirical indicators may be quite narrow and mundane, but with a well-developed theoretical frame, they take on much greater significance.

What is Community Sustainability?

A word that may seem synonymous with resiliency is sustainability. In fact, even though they may be complementary, they mean two different things. Resilience is the ability to resist and/or adjust to change, while sustainability is maintaining the status quo or changing at the same rate over a period of time.

Sustainability is usually thought of in environmental terms, such as preserving a species or the conditions of an ecology where certain species live. However, sustainability also has a significant human referent (Valentin & Spangenberg, 2000; Raco, 2012; Naji et al., 2024). In this case, sustainability refers to the ability of a human group, such as a community, to maintain and evolve or develop a preferred way of life and related aspects of culture, especially the non-material side – norms or expectations of behavior/practices, values or what is important, and beliefs or what people believe to be true or false. These are the "meanings" that Liepins (2000) talks about. Length or longevity, from the short-term to the long-term, and even multi-generational, is essential to a definition of sustainability. If multi-generational, then sustainability is intimately linked to the heritage and identity of a people impacted by a change or a critical event and likely becomes a prime source of concern and of multi-pronged attempts at recovery (Raisio et al., 2022).

Sustainability is a key issue when the focus is on indigenous societies and the people who frequently occupy more rural and remote communities that are less susceptible to influences from city environments. Sustainability is also related to issues of justice for rural peoples, a condition that is considered necessary for a healthy or viable community (Valentin & Spangenberg, 2000). Even though there are plenty of counter-examples of sustained cultures, such as the subculture of a drug trafficking gang, which would not be considered healthy, the link is nevertheless frequently invoked by those advocating both for and against proposals for planned development for sustainable communities as they attempt to frame their messages.

When change brought about by disasters creates greater inequality, or when change is a perceived cost imposed on only particular networks of people based on race/ethnicity, income, gender or other characteristics of the people who live there, the issue becomes one of "justice" because it is related to the distribution of costs and benefits. As the sociologist Robert Merton (1957) frames it, sustainability can be linked to inequality when the question – functional for whom? – is posed. In this case, the question is modified to "disastrous for whom"?

The United Nations (2024) defines sustainability as the ability to meet the economic, social and cultural needs of people in ways that do not exhaust resources for future generations. Obviously, disaster events require additional resources to allow rural communities to meet those needs. The United Nations (2007) describes many indicators of sustainability, however, specific indicators of access to justice services are absent, and without them, how disasters impact rural populations for issues specifically related to safety, security and criminal justice remain unspecified. This is an area that rural criminologists should examine and specify for future research and for the development of policy and practice for recovery assistance of rural peoples and rural communities.

What is Access to Justice Services?

Citing various literatures on access to justice, Camillleri (2019) defines the concept as the ability of people to seek and receive services related to the police, courts, legal resources and other government services. Hence, the concept is multi-dimensional – it is both the availability of justice services and the extent to which the services are provided. With respect to rural populations, the concept of a "desert" is used to frame the idea that services are often not available at all residents, or that access to services requires considerable investment in such things as the time required to request specific services and the cost of travel to access them (Pruitt & Showman, 2014). Obviously, disaster events not only damage access and availability, but call upon the great need for services related to recovery. As the dynamics of recovery play out, divisions within communities, such as more limited access by race/ethnic minorities, highlight that access to justice services is uneven.

What Theories Apply to a Rural Criminology of Disasters?

In the previous section of this article, the argument was made that framing a rural criminological analysis of disasters requires knowing what concepts to use and what they mean. To this end, five concepts critical to developing proper science frames to advance an understanding of disaster events and their possible impacts on rural peoples were discussed. In this section, three promising criminological theories are described in terms of their possible application to an analysis of the ways disasters affect access to justice services in a rural context. There may be other heuristically fit theories, but these are the three that seem to make sense in terms of assessing disaster impacts in a rural context.

Routine Activities Theory

Routine activity theory possesses important features with great potential for the analysis of criminological impacts from disaster events. The first is that it is a theory which presupposes that offenders are rational, at least to the degree that it is assumed they assess the situations in which opportunities to commit a crime without being detected, or at least, without being caught, that is, a lack of guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson & Boba, 1998). Disaster events can certainly reduce guardianship. Generally, motivations of potential offenders are not so important in routine activity theory, when compared to many other criminological theories, focusing more on characteristics of the target and the relative strength of guardianship, which determines opportunities. This may be a shortcoming for its application to the criminology of disasters, especially cases when crime increases dramatically post-disaster.

Obviously, disaster events can turn upside down, at least for a while, peoples' routine activities, hence, part of recovery is a full or near return to these routines at a later time. In this sense, in terms of Liepins (2000) three community elements, it is not only routines (i.e., practices) that matter, but meanings as well in terms of identity with a place that can include perceptions of security, especially if a disaster event destroyed or damaged spaces and structures, some of which have more symbolic importance than everyday utility.

One part of routine activities which very much involves law enforcement is guardianship, which is one type of social control, with social control being one of the six functions of a community. In that sense, access to justice services for rural victims of disasters is access to the kinds of assistance the police can provide to a community in emergencies, but also beyond to other kinds of services for both immediate and long-term recovery. That is because guardianship includes protecting the social life of a community and returning it to its prior status, or nearly so.

Although rural-located disaster events involve loss of life and property, it is also true that they provide opportunities for criminologists to document what happens to people who live in rural and remote places. What were the routine activities before the event, and what are they immediately after and many months and even years beyond? Are some routines more important than others for perceptions of safety and security, for a sense of well-being, and for actual victimisation as well. What were the roles of the police and other agencies in influencing these routines?

Civic Community Theory

Briefly mentioned under the discussion of resilience, civic community theory is one of the few criminological theories that was developed specifically for the empirical examination of crime and the characteristics of rural places. Developed by Matt Lee (2004) and associates (Doucet & Lee, 2014), civic community theory posits that traits associated with the social ecology of rural localities are correlated with rates of crime. These social ecological features fit

well with the concept of community by Liepins (2000). For example, Lee (2008) used such indicators as local ownership of businesses, membership in church groups, and voter participation to measure the strength or social cohesion of smaller places, with the presumption that these indicators would be statistically associated with less crime, which is, in fact, what Lee (2004; 2008) found when using official police statistics.

His theory is actually a variation on social disorganisation theory (Lilly et al., 2015), perhaps one of the most frequently cited theories, at least in American criminology. It is also similar in logic to social impact assessment literatures that would see disasters as a type of social disruption (Taylor et al., 2004; Vanclay, 2012). Indeed, disaster events do shake things up, to use a rather pedestrian colloquialism. However, as Quarentelli and Dynes (1977) observed, disaster events can be seen as rapid and even short-term change, hence, to view them as creating disorganisation or disruption is to lose sight of a larger picture about how rural communities change over a longer length of time.

It could be argued that there is no such thing as social disorganzation (or disruption), only forms of social organization that change (i.e., re-organize) either gradually or rapidly, depending upon what is happening to a rural community at any particular moment (Donnermeyer, 2015). In this sense, issues related to access to justice services can be viewed differently. It is not the disaster event per se that denies or diminishes access, but other more long-term factors related to the distribution of safety and other services provided by provincial/state/regional and national governments. Hence, the terms disorganisation and disruption become unproductive traps of logic that do not advance scholarship or policy and practice about disasters, especially in terms of issues associated with access to justice services. However, a disaster event is useful for showcasing examples of denied and delayed access because it is during these events that certain features of a community, both its cohesion and its divisions, can be more keenly observed.

Critical Criminology Theory

One of the key features of a critical criminological perspective in relationship to an analysis of disaster events is the sixth function of a community, that is, as a filter between the experiences of individuals and the greater societies in which communities are located. This is basically the perspective of the sociologist, C. W. Mills (1959, p. 8), who spoke of "public issues of social structure" and "personal troubles of milieu". To quote Mills (1959, p. 8):

> *Troubles* occur…within the range of his [*sic.*] immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware…*Issues* have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual…

Although there are many variations of critical criminology, the key element in each is the connection between what happens to individuals where they live, and the society-at-large.

Communities often exhibit in microcosm the same social class, race/ethnic and other divisions that make up the very social organisation of the larger society (Donnermeyer, 2012). Hence, the advantage of using a critical perspective to the criminological study of disaster events is that it provides a way to understand various pre-conditions associated with inequality and discrimination, and how these are either set aside during and immediately after disaster events, or amplified to an even greater extent (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). For example, Wylie (1999), refers to a disaster as if it is two, not one, event, that is, "his" and "her" disasters that are a reflection of pre-socio-cultural differences in gendered expectations. By extension, this same way of thinking can be extended to other kinds of divisions often found within rural communities.

Conclusion

The need for proper frames to interpret reality is the reason that this article attempted to both define key concepts and theories and how they can help guide a criminological analysis of disasters in rural settings. Whether unconsciously or on purpose, humans frame the way they look upon themselves, their families and neighbors, their day-to-day experiences, their communities, and as well, extraordinary moments, including disasters. Otherwise, human experience is a jumbled, untidy and meaningless milieux (Mills, 1959).

Frames are socially defined, including those used by criminological scholars to analyze and discuss the impact of disaster events relative to access to justice services and other crime-related issues. Identifying what is a disaster may appear to be clear-cut, but in fact, there are various definitions, with recognition that some are quite sudden and short-term and others are long-term. Communities likewise may appear to be an obvious human group, easily recognized by the name on a sign by the side of a public highway, but often the key internal characteristics of a community are ignored from a science point of view. Likewise, how the resilience of a community and its sustainability are defined, make a difference for the analysis of disaster impacts and of various recovery policies and practices. Finally, what is meant by access to justice services is a frame itself, and the frame can vary from one scholar to another, and from one disaster relief agency and criminal justice organization to another.

As well, theories are frames through which to examine the impacts of disasters on rural communities. Routine activity theory is a theory that fits well with definitions of community resilience and community sustainability, providing a way to adjust indicators from previous disaster research to impacts in general, including impacts that speak to access to justice services. Critical criminological perspectives are useful for keeping a focus on the uneven distribution of both disaster impacts and recovery resources. Finally, great caution was made in this article to the use of disorganisation and disruption paradigms, favoring instead a civic community perspective because it fits better with both the concepts of resilience and sustainability.

Every year, in fact, every week, a disaster somewhere in the world deleteriously affects the rural communities located there. There is now a great need for criminologists whose interests go beyond city populations to focus upon disaster events as opportunities to see how crime is related to the characteristics of rural places. More importantly, how can rural criminologists help improve response and recovery policies when disasters occur through the insights gained by their scholarship.

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