

A Social Ecological Response to Community Based Man-Made Trauma: Analysis of Laramie, Wyoming and Jasper, Texas

SURP Research Proposal

Statement of Purpose

The proposed research study serves as a continuation to a project on which I have been involved for several months, assessing community response to man-made trauma in Jasper, Texas and Laramie, Wyoming. I seek to examine the collective community response and the resulting traumatic effects of several crimes that resulted in disastrous consequences on the communities in which they occurred. The overarching goal of the project is to understand how the communities were impacted in the period since the crimes. This current proposal seeks to extend and broaden quantitative analysis to include economic, education, medical, and social capital measures, as well as qualitative analysis by visiting the community of Laramie, Wyoming. The study will utilize a holistic and social ecological approach in analyzing trauma by addressing the hypothesis that the communities themselves were victims in the two tragedies.

Proposal:

The effects of disaster and trauma on communities have become a popular topic of study. Currently, most studies focus on natural disasters, like hurricanes or floods. Most studies also consider the effects of such traumas on individuals within the larger community. For example, there are a number of studies that have examined post-traumatic stress disorder within a community after a disaster occurs (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999).

This study, however, will consider how two communities, Laramie, Wyoming and Jasper, Texas, were impacted by a man-made trauma -- in these cases, murder. A man-made trauma, with its source within the community, has the ability to involve and affect the community in a way natural disaster cannot. Varying degrees of man-made trauma introduce aspects of responsibility, guilt, justice, and punishment. These societal consequences of man-made trauma can become severe enough to cause more community-wide damage than the original incident (Wicke, 2004). Simply looking at the group of individuals within a town may miss the subtle effects that a man-made trauma can have on the community as a whole. This proposed project's goal is to examine the community as something more than a group of individuals and instead as a holistic whole. I expect that only by taking a broader view of the community, will an exploration of effects of the trauma not seen on individuals but embedded in the community fabric itself be possible (Trickett, 1995).

Each individual has his or her own response, but collectively their response becomes something beyond what can be seen when psychologically evaluating them. To look at the individuals, even if one could possibly look at every individual, would still not take into account the interactions between community members. The social networks that create and bound a community

together must be considered. For example, looking at changes in the education or medical community may be indicative of varying degrees of traumatic responsiveness, from feelings of togetherness to community stress and tension in response to the incident. Additionally, changes in the local economy could indicate a willingness to invest and a confidence, or lack thereof, in the community. These elements of social capital are only evident when the community is considered as an ecological whole, rather than a sum of individuals. This study seeks to identify the specific mechanisms to trauma by framing the community as a collective unit victimized by the trauma itself and analyzed holistically from a social ecological perspective.

Background

In Laramie, Wyoming, Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, was brutally tortured and killed on October 7, 1998. In Jasper, Texas, several white men dragged James Byrd, Jr., a black man, to his death at the end of a truck on June 7, 1998. Following each of these hate crimes, opposing activist groups and the media quickly overran the communities. In Laramie, anti-homosexual activists led by Reverend Fred Phelps protested against gay rights activists. In Jasper, Black Panther members demonstrated across from members of the Klu Klux Klan. These quiet, rural towns became the center of the nation's attention, and became known only for the hate crimes committed. The communities, horrified by the crimes committed against an individual in their town, became victims of disaster when flooded by outsiders.

Methods

To measure the effects of the disaster on each town, a quantitative and qualitative research methodology will be utilized. Quantitatively, I plan to use archival analysis to examine various longitudinal measures of community impact from 1995 to 2003, including economics, education, medical, and social capital. Qualitatively, I plan to make a trip to Laramie, Wyoming to conduct participant interviews and field observations. It is a necessity to assess the communities both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to establish a complete social ecological and holistic analysis of community response to trauma. In order to show that any trend or pattern appearing in the data is significant and independent to Laramie or Jasper, each town will be compared to a control town. Data from Jasper, Texas will be compared to data collected in Center, Texas. Data from Laramie, Wyoming will be compared to data collected in Kearney, Nebraska. The control towns are similar in population size, racial makeup, economic success, and other comparisons. The same quantitative measures will be taken and analyzed in these towns as well.

The primary method of data collection will extend across both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Each method will involve extensive archival data analysis involving community statistical information as well as participant interviews and field observations. For quantitative analysis, each community will be contacted using the telephone in order to request archived quantitative data

over a period of January 1995 through December 2003. Second, qualitative analysis will be conducted by visiting the community of Laramie, Wyoming in order to conduct participant interviews and field observations. A quantitative and qualitative research methodology is critical in such a project so as to develop a holistic approach to analyzing social ecological community response to man-made trauma.

The current research proposal acts as a continuation to the project “community response to man made trauma: Analysis of Laramie, Wyoming and Jasper, Texas”, for which I received UROP funding this past winter. Thus far, I have completed the quantitative measurements for crime across each community and have completed the qualitative analysis of Jasper, Texas. Additional time is required to gather specific quantitative measures such as economics, education, medical, and social capital measures. Additionally, while UROP provided funding for me to make a trip to Jasper, Texas over spring break, a trip to Laramie, Wyoming is needed to assess qualitatively that specific community’s response to the traumatic event. I hope to broaden both qualitative and quantitative depth to the project so as to better investigate from a socially ecological perspective the community-based mechanisms behind response to trauma.

Based on studies of natural disasters in communities, we predict that there will be a peak of community involvement and strength following the trauma, as the community pulls together in support. However this “honeymoon” phase is often short-lived and soon results in a general lack of community cohesion marked by high levels of distrust and discontent among members of the community. While this phase is slightly longer, the community is expected to stabilize to normal levels of functioning within a few years (Raphael, 1986). I predict that qualitative and quantitative results will illustrate a specific response to man-made community based trauma. Each community will experience turmoil in the months following the traumatic event; however, these strains will subsequently ease in the years that follow. Nevertheless, long-term embedded consequences of the trauma will remain and be especially prevalent quantitatively in terms of economic impact and qualitatively based in collective community attitudes and emotions. A complete socially ecological contextual framework founded upon quantitative and qualitative archival data analysis will work to form a picture of not only individual but community based victimization in response to man made trauma.

Responsibility

Numerous tasks will be required in order to ensure the research project is completed efficiently, correctly, and in a timely fashion. One of the primary and most difficult responsibilities to be completed is the archival quantitative analysis. This type of data retrieval will be completed over the phone and data will be sent via U.S. mail, fax, or email from each area of interest. It will be my responsibility to locate the appropriate contact, request and collect the data, and input the data for analysis. A second component of the project is the qualitative analysis.

Traveling to Laramie, Wyoming and conducting participant interviews with various community leaders and engaging in field observations will complete this portion of the project. Following quantitative and qualitative data collection, the data will be analyzed and appropriate conclusions will be drawn and compared to the research hypotheses. Meetings will be held throughout the summer on a bi-weekly basis with Dr. Roxane Cohen Silver and doctoral student Thomas Wicke so as to assist with overall project goals and aid in appropriate data analysis. It is my hope that my activities on this project will culminate in one or more conference presentations and journal submissions.

Timeline

-Week one:

1. Establish contacts in each community of Laramie, WY, Jasper, TX, Center, TX, and Kearney, NB along the various economic, medical, educational, and social capital measurements
2. Meet with Dr. Silver and Thomas Wicke to discuss project

-Week two:

1. Begin quantitative data collection with focus on collecting all data relating to economic measures in each community

-Week three:

1. Continue quantitative data collection by finishing needed economic data across each community
2. Begin collecting quantitative data relating to medical measures in each community
3. Meet with Dr. Silver and Thomas Wicke to discuss project
4. Begin to set up interviews for qualitative data analysis to be made in Laramie, Wyoming

-Week four:

1. Continue quantitative data collection by finishing needed medical measures across each community
2. Begin collecting quantitative data relating to educational measures in each community
3. Finalize interview schedules for qualitative data analysis in Laramie, WY

-Week five:

1. Continue quantitative data collection by finishing educational measures across each community
2. Begin collecting final quantitative data measurement relating to social capital across each community
3. Meet with Dr. Silver and Thomas Wicke to discuss project

-Week six:

1. Travel to Laramie, Wyoming to conduct participant interviews with community leaders and engage in field observations.
2. Collect and begin to analyze qualitative data from Laramie, WY
3. Finalize quantitative data collection and begin data analysis

-Week seven:

1. Finalize all data collection relating to both quantitative and qualitative measurements
2. Meet with Dr. Silver and Thomas Wicke to discuss preliminary data analysis
3. Begin preliminary project write-up of conclusions

-Week eight/nine:

1. Complete data analysis of both quantitative and qualitative measurements across each of the four communities
2. Meet with Dr. Silver and Thomas Wicke to discuss data analysis conclusions
3. Continue working on project write-up of conclusions

-Week ten:

1. Finalize analysis and conclusions based on quantitative and qualitative data
2. Meet with Dr. Silver and Thomas Wicke to discuss project conclusions
3. Complete project write-up of conclusions

References

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Wicke, T. (2004). *Community response to trauma: An ecological analysis of how community is affected by social disaster In Littleton, Colorado, Laramie, Wyoming and Jasper, Texas*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation proposal, University of California, Irvine, CA.