

MIAMI INCLUSION ALLIANCE By: Sharon Langer Esq.

We are about to enter hurricane season and addressing domestic violence should be part of every community's recovery plan.

Researchers at the University of Missouri have identified a **framework** that can help victims of domestic violence before, during and after disaster events. (Disaster and Community Crisis Center (DCC) at MU) Their research has shown that when disasters like a hurricane, strike a community, they do not affect all community members equally, and victims of domestic violence are often particularly vulnerable. They have identified a framework that can help victims of domestic violence before, during and after disaster events.

"Disasters can cause significant emotional trauma or stress, injure or kill individuals, and threaten basic human needs such as access to food, water and housing," J. Brian Houston, associate professor of communication and director for the Disaster and Community Crisis Center (DCC) at MU. "We know from past research that disasters can increase the prevalence and severity of domestic violence; they have compounding effects on the recovery of women and families experiencing this violence."

"To promote women's safety and well-being, domestic violence services and resources should be integrated into disaster-related assistance and services. Emergency management often conceptualizes disasters in four phases—response, recovery, mitigation and preparedness. Our framework uses this perspective to identify objectives to use before, during and after a disaster to help victims of domestic violence." Jennifer First. (MU School of Social Work and Disaster Mental Health Program Manager with DCC)

The framework is in four parts, all integral to a successful system of care for victims/survivors.

### **Preparedness**

Domestic violence professionals should participate in activities **before** a disaster to better prepare individuals, families, organizations and communities to respond if a disaster occurs. One strategy could be to increase domestic violence awareness and training by working with local, state and federal emergency

management professionals who can train responders to assist victims of domestic violence.

## **Response**

Professionals responding to a disaster can promote empowerment for women and children by ensuring their basic needs are met and providing them with comfort and support. This can be done by working with providers **to transport** victims of violence to shelters and provide information on post-disaster resources and alternative domestic violence contacts.

## **Recovery**

After a disaster, communities can conduct activities to rebuild and recover. The researchers say this is a critical time for victims of violence. Professionals can help by **connecting** victims to long-term services and promoting social supports for women.

## **Mitigation**

Communities should identify risks and hazards to reduce or eliminate the impact of a disaster incident. The first strategy for this could be **developing connections** between domestic violence organizations and systems typically active in a disaster, such as disaster responders and law enforcement. As connections are formed, professionals can advocate for additional focus on mitigating domestic violence during disasters.

There is still much to work to be done on this important issue, I would love to hear your thoughts. [Sharon@justdigit.org](mailto:Sharon@justdigit.org)