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## Women's Voices

This first issue of **Doing Gender & Disaster** focuses on good practices in New Zealand following the Earthquake Sequence in 2010 and 2011 in Canterbury, New Zealand. Women's Voices/Ngā Reo O Ngā Wahine was developed by the Christchurch Branch of the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) because media reports focused on earthquake victims and male rescue crews, army officers, police, fire-fighters, local and national politicians. NCWNZ used the efforts of many volunteer interviewers to create a digital archive of women's earthquake stories and a number of reports and presentations. Policy-related documents are currently being prepared.

The **Women's Voices project** documents how individuals, families/whānau, streets and neighbourhoods got on with life after the quakes when there was no power, no water, no sewerage, as well as damaged homes, closed shops and schools, impassable streets and disrupted communication systems. It records what it was like to live in a city damaged by repeated quakes and women's involvement in different forms of community activism.

A research strategy was developed including ethical protocols that maximised women's control over their stories. The Women's Voices Research Committee worked out specific questions, identified a wide range of women to be interviewed, and drafted a template for the earthquake stories.

NCWNZ researchers collaborated with the University of Canterbury as well as a range of community organisations in Christchurch, particularly the Ōtautahi Māori Women's Welfare League and PACIFICA. The project started with very little funding, but gradually accessed resources from the city council, from a local university, from a chain of petrol stations, and finally from a national community research fund.

### NCWNZ Women's Voices digital archive:

Women's earthquake stories and also information about the research process:

<https://quakestudies.canterbury.ac.nz/store/collection/228>



### Movers and Shakers: Women's Stories from the Christchurch Earthquakes – A report on the findings:

Women's experiences of each of the four major quakes, their post-quake lives and their hopes for the future.

<http://www.communityresearch.org.nz/research/movers-and-shakers-womens-stories-from-the-christchurch-earthquakes-final-version/>

### Key Messages

*After natural disasters everyone has a story to tell. Telling stories is part of the recovery process.*

*Media reports often focus on victims of natural disasters or heroic rescues by disaster response teams.*

*Women's everyday contributions to survival must also be recorded, recognised and incorporated into disaster planning.*

*What happens in homes, on the street, in churches, community halls or sites cleared of rubble matters most after disasters.*

*Women's organisations are well placed to record women's ingenuity, determination and support for their families, neighbourhoods and communities.*



## What We Did

At a meeting soon after the 22 February 2011 earthquake, members of the National Council of Women were concerned that women's voices and experiences were not being recognised nor recorded. A committee was set up to record the earthquake stories of a wide range of women living within the Canterbury region.

The research committee developed a research plan, raised funds, identified women to be interviewed, purchased recording equipment, trained volunteer interviewers and liaised with a range of organisations. Committee members recorded a number of interviews and processed research findings, as well as supervising volunteer interviewers, paid research assistants and students working on the project.

The research was conducted in two stages. Women were initially contacted through NCWNZ networks and the networks of related organisations. Early in 2013, 80 interviews were completed with women of different ages and in different family circumstances living all over the city. Christchurch City Council, the University of Canterbury and Z Energy made major contributions to the costs of this research.

A New Zealand Lottery Community Sector Research Grant made it possible to interview more women in the lower-income eastern suburbs of Christchurch that were most affected by the quakes. Ōtautahi Māori Women's Welfare League members interviewed Māori women and PACIFICA recorded the stories of Pasifika women. Refugees and more women on low incomes were interviewed. Another 40 interviews were recorded in 2013 and early 2014.

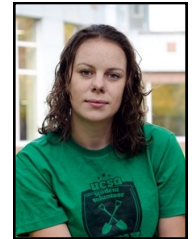
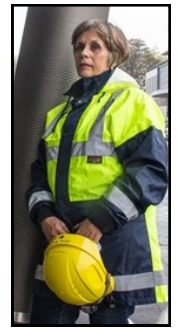
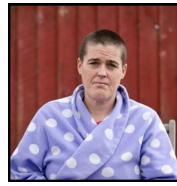
Stories from the second stage of the project were analysed and then integrated with information from the first set of interviews. Out of this came *Movers and Shakers* – a major report that is available online. With the permission of the women interviewed, summaries of their stories and interview recordings were uploaded into a publicly accessible digital archive.

## How We Did It

Questions were developed to use in each interview. They focused on women's lives before the quakes (family, work, neighbourhood, community involvement, and plans for the future); their earthquake experiences, what was happening in their lives at the time of the interview and their hopes for the future (including the future of their city). These opening questions were used to stimulate stories about the things that were important to the participants. Interviewers had often had similar experiences and told their own stories during training sessions.

### Ethics and Consent

A two stage consent process was developed. Women initially agreed to an audio and/or video recording of their story. They could then check a written summary of their interview and consent to its use in the research. They



could also consent to the interview summary and any recordings of their story being uploaded on the Women's Voices website. Some women also agreed to be photographed and for the photos to be used on the project website. Photography students at University of Canterbury took these photographs during internships in 2013 and 2014.

### Finding Women to Interview

Researchers wanted to record the stories of women of different ethnicities and ages living in different parts of the city. They were keen to involve Māori and Pasifika women, new immigrants and refugees as well as women in varied family circumstances, with mortgages and in rental accommodation. They wanted to hear the stories of women in different jobs, on benefits, running businesses and involved in different community organisations. Participants were selected from lists developed through contact with NCWNZ members, their social networks and a range of community organisations and groups active in responding to the challenges of the Canterbury quakes.

### Interviewer Training

Many volunteers had not done interviews before, but they were trained in workshops, and practised interviewing one another. They worked in small groups with members of the Women's Voices Research Committee to ensure that women were contacted, ethical procedures implemented and interviews recorded and summarised.

### Processing Research Material

Interview summaries, audio recordings, edited video recordings and photographs of women who told their stories were uploaded into a digital archive on UC CEISMIC – a website with information about the Canterbury quakes of 2010 and 2011. Themes in the stories have been discussed in a number of reports, papers and conference presentations.

## What We Learned

### What We Learned About Women in Disasters

Women do a lot of the logistical, relational and basic survival work to meet the needs for shelter, food and water, sleep and psychosocial support of family, workmates, neighbours, local communities and also strangers. This work is often invisible and taken-for-granted but it is the work that ensures that families, streets and neighbourhoods survive and collaborate after a disaster.

Women themselves do not think their efforts are anything out of the ordinary. They often have to fight officials for their rights and for official help. Tradespeople and those with specialised practical skills may not take them seriously, and sometimes male plumbers, engineers, builders and electricians do not listen when women try to explain the damage to their water pipes, sewerage system or electrical supply.

Connections/relationships already made and those newly made in a crisis are critical for survival in natural disasters. Women often have varied social networks because they are involved in many different community and work organisations and also know people through their children's schools and their sporting, cultural and other activities. Women are ingenious in adapting what they have available to provide for others.



#### Key Messages

*Personal stories can inform disaster planning and future strategies, including the stories that do not hit the headlines.*

*Women's grass roots organisational skills and community networks facilitate their research into the everyday experiences of post-disaster survival, adjustment and recovery.*

*From small beginnings bigger projects can grow. Collaboration, determination and applications to multiple funding sources are vital for community-based research and action.*

### What We Learned About Doing Research

Women share their stories openly with little reserve, especially if they can talk in their home environment to an interviewer who has shared aspects of their experience.

An approach to research is needed that allows for and demands flexibility and adaptability by researchers. This includes an ethical stance that guarantees the participants' ownership of their stories. Negotiating women's consent is important and can take time.

Successful training of voluntary interviewers and strategies that build networks of support among researchers produces useful research material.

Using community connections is vital for finding out who should be interviewed and why. Activating community networks and doing the research in ways that suit participants is time consuming, but results in access to information from a wide range of women. Working through an organisation like NCWNZ (which includes many different organisations) is helpful when contacting women to interview.

Strategic and persistent networking with stakeholders and updating them on the progress of the project contributes to success in securing funding. Many opportunities present themselves for publicising the research both while it is being done, and when the findings are available. There is a need to use a wide range of media e.g. face-to-face meetings, written reports, PowerPoint presentations, websites, local TV news broadcasts.

### What You Could Do

Women are very good planners and excellent at multi-tasking. Their planning skills are invaluable when setting up a project management plan and developing research strategies, so reach out to get as many as possible involved.

Establish a core research group from interested women within your community organisation and share responsibilities within the group. Jointly set the goals, aims and objectives; then identify the particular skills required for the project and co-opt others to assist.

Meet regularly to ensure that the tasks are performed on time and that problems are identified and solved. Group dynamics are enhanced through email and phone contact. Continuity in community-based research depends on the commitment of the core research group and their belief in the potential of the project.

Compile a list of relevant organisations associated with disaster response, recovery and future disaster management and other organisations that may support the project, including potential funders. Keep accurate records of your contact with these organisations.

### How To Do No Harm

Follow established ethical practices for research. It is very important that participants have control over the stories they tell, especially when they have experienced a disaster.

Ensure that voluntary researchers are trained and their manner respectful. Make the experience of learning how to do research enjoyable and create opportunities for team-building and mutual support among researchers.

### How To Be Transparent and Accountable

Ensure there are accountability and reporting processes within your organisation.

Provide the various sectors/organisations/funders supporting the project with report up-dates. This is especially important if you are seeking funding for the project.

Produce a newsletter if appropriate and use a variety of different ways to communicate about the project while it is in progress.

Present the research at community gatherings, workshops and conferences.

Develop a publicly accessible website on which your research findings and research processes are available.

### How To Reach Out and Engage

Networking and regular sector engagement is an important way to keep the project alive and transfer what is learnt through the research.

Identify a contact person within an organisation and keep regular contact with that person to ensure continuity, understanding and to build that relationship.

Develop the organisation's infrastructure to ensure the address lists and email contacts are regularly updated.

Invite the stakeholders (research participants, funders and potential funders, relevant organisations) to a social occasion to provide information about the project.

### References and Further Reading

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*Women's Voices Digital Archive (QuakeStudies UC CEISMIC)* <https://quakestudies.canterbury.ac.nz/store/collection/228>

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### About the Series

The Doing Gender & Disaster series focuses on methods, processes, practices and research aimed at gendered disaster risk reduction (GDRR); sharing knowledge is important but only action leads to change.



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