



RAGING WATERS

Coming Together as a Family Following the 2013 Alberta Floods

Dr. Caroline McDonald-Harker

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Assistant Professor, Mount Royal University
cmcdonaldharker@mtroyal.ca

Dr. Timothy J. Haney

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Associate Professor, Mount Royal University
thaney@mtroyal.ca

This research began as a response to the 2013 High River flood, a large part of the costliest disaster in Canadian History, with estimated damages exceeding \$5 billion dollars. By focusing on the family unit, this research aims to better understand the impact the flood had on work, intimate partner relationships, parent-child relationships, family-school relationships, and the recovery needs of families following the disaster.

We look to bridge the gap between family and community partners, between our research and between pragmatic and representative changes to policies surrounding disaster recovery, mitigation, and building future resiliency to similar disasters. Our research has lead us to finding consistent themes in the following areas:



employment



intimate relationships



parent-child relationships



family-school relationships



recovery needs



environment

Methodology

SAMPLE

Face-to-face interviews	105
Focus groups interviews	8
Unique codes	165
Thematic sections	6

Our research study utilized a qualitative research approach, which consisted of 105 face-to-face in-depth interviews with parents of the families who live in High River and have been impacted by the 2013 flood. Additionally, we conducted eight focus group interviews with non-profit community organizations, which will be the focus of this report.

After coding the focus groups, the codes were collected across all focus groups and grouped within their themes. Codes were then assessed in terms of number of entries, total word count, and the number of focus groups the code occurs. The most frequent codes from each theme will be summarized below, as they represent the preliminary findings from the focus groups

Findings



EMPLOYMENT

The most prevalent theme regarding paid and unpaid work was that women tended to lose their jobs at a higher rate than men. Women's jobs tended to be more vulnerable as women were more likely to work in High River, work from home, or have part time employment. Women losing their jobs was:

mentioned
22
times

amounting to
917
words

across
7/8
focus groups



GAINING RESPONSIBILITY

Adolescents and young families (gaining more responsibility) by going through the flood was a major theme regarding parent-child relationships. In some cases by having more freedom, while in other cases, more responsibility was bestowed upon them by parents needing their help in taking care of younger children. Gaining more responsibility was:

mentioned
31
times

amounting to
3280
words

across
6/8
focus groups



INTIMATE PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

A loss of privacy between couples was the most discussed theme pertaining to intimate partner relationships. Intimacy was lost due to having share accommodations with family or friends, or in a short or long term shelter, such as Saddlebrook. Loss of privacy was:

mentioned
24
times

amounting to
2187
words

across
7/8
focus groups



ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Families needing to access mental health services was the most prevalent theme regarding family needs and care. Families accessed mental health services and wanted such services to be comprehensive and long term. Mental health service access was:

mentioned
21
times

amounting to
1441
words

across
7/8
focus groups



PARENT'S EXPRESSING GUILT

Parent's expressing guilt was the most prevalent theme regarding parent-child relationships. Parent's expressed guilt by being hard on themselves for not being able to protect their children or their sentimental belongings, while others felt guilt for not being as badly hit by the flood as other families were. Guilt was:

mentioned
39
times

amounting to
2402
words

across
7/8
focus groups



FLOOD MITIGATION

Finally, desire for flood mitigation was the more prevalent theme discussed in the environment section. Participants felt it was important to be better prepared for future floods and to take measures now to ensure more preparedness in the future. Flood mitigation was:

mentioned
17
times

amounting to
1794
words

across
6/8
focus groups

Implications

Given our preliminary findings, the 2013 High River flood affected the family unit as it relates to paid and unpaid work, intimate partner relationships, and parent-child relationships. As informed by participants, families want to be better prepared for future disasters and to have the necessary services in place to ease the recovery process.

Where from here?

We are currently conducting data analysis on the 105 in-depth interviews conducted in 2014, following preliminary reports on demographic and correlative information, and have begun to release preliminary reports concerning the focus groups. These reports are being used by

our community partners to better serve the community of High River. Additionally, we are beginning a new project in conjunction with other researchers, to expand on the purview of this study, with the primary focus of building more resilient communities across Southern Alberta. ■

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Original Research

To view or reference original research, please refer to: www.highriverfamilystudy.ca

McDonald-Harker, C & Haney, T. (2014) "The Effects and Implications of Environmental Disasters on the Family: Communicating, Coping, and Caring Among Families Impacted by the 2013 High River, Alberta Floods"