

Communicating Potential Hazards to Homeless Populations

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ESMS 4900 – Bachelor of Emergency and Security

Management Studies Capstone Project

Justice Institute of British Columbia

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13 April 2019

Abstract

This project explores the communication relationship between Canadian emergency planners, homeless service providers and homeless populations. During the literary review, which had a significant amount of content from the United States, three themes emerged. First, emergency managers rely heavily on service providers to communicate with homeless communities. Secondly, service providers require training and assistance from emergency management professionals. Thirdly, there is some uncertainty as to who is responsible for communication with homeless populations in the event of an emergency.

Questionnaires were sent to both Canadian emergency managers and service providers across the country (N=30), nine were completed and returned. The data received were compared to the three themes from the literary review and it appears to be consistent. Canadian emergency planners rely heavily on service providers; some service providers need assistance in developing business continuity plans and training on what to do in the event of an emergency; and, there is some confusion as to who is actually responsible for communication with homeless communities in the event of a disaster.

Recommendations include further research in order to develop a Canadian document of best practices for emergency planners across Canada.

Keywords: homeless, emergency plans, service providers, emergency management, preparedness, business continuity plans.

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Communicating Potential Hazards to the Homeless

Arguably, among the most vulnerable in our communities are those who are chronically homeless, especially in times of an emergency when this may be more pronounced. Failure to develop effective plans to communicate potential hazards and to provide emergency aid to this vulnerable population could result in preventable casualties. For example, during the 2002-2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in Toronto, there were a number of communication shortfalls with regards to information getting to homeless populations and homeless service providers (Leung, Ho, Kiss, Gundlapalli, & Hwang, 2008). Specifically, the Toronto emergency management team initially failed to notify homeless communities or homeless service providers that there were specifically designated locations and services available for the homeless if they contracted SARS (Leung et al., 2008). The transient nature of their lifestyle, the inherent mistrust of authority, and the high incidence of mental illness and drug abuse within homeless populations present barriers to communication by authoritarian figures (police or government officials) in the event of an emergency (Edgington, 2009; Every & Thompson, 2014). However, this research does not cover provincial public health agencies responsibilities with regards to communicable diseases but rather will explore mechanisms in place, or lack thereof, for ensuring that homeless populations are appropriately included in planning and communication strategies.

Background

In Canadian local (municipal or regional) emergency plans, the emergency managers are responsible for communication to the public about potential threats and hazards. A preliminary review of various provincial legislative frameworks indicates that there is a lack of guidance as

to who is responsible for, or how, to communicate information to homeless populations in the event of an emergency.

In theory, the provincial emergency management legislative framework is all encompassing when it comes to the population. For example, the Ontario Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E 9, only mentions “the public” or “in the interests of public safety”.

The British Columbia Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation includes the “impact on people and property” but does not distinguish between groups or specific categories of people (Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation, B.C. Reg. 380/95 s. 2(1)(b)).

The Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.) Emergency Measures Act (1998) defines a disaster as something that affects the health, safety or welfare of the civil population (Emergency Measures Act, R.S.P.E.I. 1998, c. E-6.1, s. 1(b)). Under the definition of Emergency Measure Plan, the legislation states that the plan is to provide for the safety, health or welfare of the civil population (Emergency Measures Act, R.S.P.E.I. 1988, c. E-6.1, s. 1(e)). As there are no references to homeless populations in the Act, it is assumed that the plans made pursuant to the P.E.I. Emergency Measures Act (1998) will include provisions for homeless populations. Examination of Charlottetown, PEI, Emergency Measure Bylaw (1999) established pursuant to the P.E.I. Emergency Measures Act (1988), as an example only, defines disaster as an event “which endangers, the health, safety or welfare of the City’s population...” (City of Charlottetown, By-Law 1999, Emergency Measures, s. 2,3). Under section 4.1(c) of the By-Law it states that the mandate of the Charlottetown’s Emergency Measures Organization is “To prepare plans for the public’s safety and survival in the event of a disaster or emergency; ...” (City of Charlottetown,

By-Law, Emergency Measures by-law, s. 4.1(c)). The use of the words “public” and “city’s populations” would indicate that the City of Charlottetown is responsible for emergency planning, which includes addressing the needs of homeless populations.

Research Questions and Rationale

Significant research has been undertaken in the United States on communication with homeless communities in the event of a disaster or emergency to ensure that this segment of the population is reached. Very little research or information is available from Canadian studies or resources. Therefore, this research paper endeavours to address, from a Canadian perspective, the following questions: In what ways do emergency managers and homeless service providers communicate in order to ensure that information relating to potential hazards and threats are passed to homeless populations? What formal processes are currently in place to communicate information to homeless communities and how is that done?

The scope of this project examines only existing policies and procedures of emergency management organizations and homeless service providers to determine whether they communicate effectively to ensure that potential hazard information is disseminated to homeless populations. The representatives responding to the questionnaire are either employees of municipal emergency management teams or employees/volunteers at organizations that provide shelter care and/or outreach programs for homeless populations. Any response received from persons outside these defined groups was disqualified from the study.

This study provides insight into how information is communicated between emergency management organizations and service providers for homeless populations, and identifies potential gaps in either the communication process or the municipal communication plans in the

case of a potential hazard affecting the homeless. This study identifies additional areas where further examination is needed so that both emergency managers and homeless service providers can ensure a more effective system of communication between these services or agencies and homeless communities.

Literature Review

After conducting research on communication between emergency managers, homeless service providers and homeless populations, three themes have become apparent. First, the emergency management organizations rely heavily on homeless service providers to communicate accurate emergency information to homeless communities in the United States. Secondly, homeless community service organizations do not have the expertise to develop business continuity plans or provide training to staff to help homeless communities to become more resilient in the event of a disaster. Thirdly, there is some uncertainty around who is responsible for communication with homeless populations and other vulnerable communities? Unlike Canada, United States government agencies provide advice and guidance to emergency managers, for example Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Department of Housing and Urban Development; and, Veteran's Affairs. However, there appears to be no consistent approach across the United States in how this guidance is applied.

Homeless Service Providers

The most common theme in all the studies and journal reports reviewed is that emergency managers are strongly encouraged by the authors to contact homeless service providers to assist in the dissemination of accurate emergency information. While most of the studies involve various health departments in the United States, all of the conclusions are applicable to the

planning responsibilities of emergency managers. For example, Levin, Berliner & Merdjanoff (2014) focused on how emergency managers can leverage community service organizations (CSOs) to improve disaster planning with vulnerable populations.

Klaiman et al. (2010) studied how Philadelphia's Department of Public Health and Office of Emergency Management collaborated to implement an outreach program to ensure that communication between officials, community service providers and hard to reach vulnerable sections of the community was effective. This report clearly demonstrates dependence of emergency managers on homeless service providers to ensure that homeless populations, and other portions of the vulnerable community, are communicated with appropriately and efficiently (Klaiman et al., 2010, p. 248).

Sabrina Edgington (2009), advocates for service providers to contact local emergency planners so that they can jointly plan for emergencies, including identifying how best to communicate with homeless populations (Edgington, 2009, p. 1). Edgington also highlights communication with homeless service providers as a critical step in directing emergency information and guidance to homeless communities (Edgington, 2009, p. 7). However, there does not appear to be any legal requirement for homeless service providers to communicate the information to homeless communities.

Wexler and Smith (2015) agree that CSOs or homeless service providers are the best conduit for communication with the homeless in the event of an emergency because they are aware of how to reach these populations (Wexler & Smith, 2015, p. 197). However, again there appears to be no legal requirement for the CSOs to be responsible for communication with people experiencing homelessness in the event of an emergency.

Sundareswaran, Ghazzawi and O'Sullivan (2015) conducted a Canadian study that acknowledge emergency managers usually communicate with homeless service providers, but suggest that communication strategies and mechanisms need to be strengthened (Sundareswaran et al., 2015, p. 3).

Interestingly, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (n.d.) has produced a series of documents called “Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit”. This document encourages emergency planners across the United States to take into account the needs of homeless populations in the event of a disaster (United States Department of Housing and Urban Planning, n.d.). The handout advises emergency managers to seek out homeless service providers and incorporate them in the planning process because they will be valuable partners in communication with homeless populations in the time of emergency. (United States Department of Housing and Urban Planning, n.d.). In the tool kit there are no references to any legislation assigning responsibility for communication with people experiencing homelessness.

Assistance and Training

The second consistent theme discovered during the literary research is that homeless service providers do not usually have the time, finances or expertise to develop business continuity plans or to provide training to staff and clients to assist the communities to become more resilient in the event of a disaster. Meredith et al. (2009) identified a number of issues, including the training needs for those who are given responsibility to conduct communication with homeless populations (Meredith et al., 2009, p. 19). This is consistent with the findings of Edgington (2009), where it is identified that homeless service providers require training, as do their clients, on how to be more resilient during an emergency (Edgington, 2009, p. 5).

Edgington actively encourages homeless service providers to reach out to local emergency managers and to consider mutual aid agreements in which there is usually a training component included (Edgington, 2009, p. 31). This is supported by Wexler and Smith (2015) who recommend training, not only for the staff of homeless service providers, but also those experiencing homelessness, which would help them make better decisions and become more resilient in the event of an emergency (Wexler & Smith, 2015, p. 199).

Sundareswaran et al. (2015) identify the lack of preparedness by homeless service providers as a gap where emergency management professionals could provide assistance to these organizations (Sundareswaran et al., 2015 p. 3). Further, the study reports that there is a need for financial support for service providers to develop a business continuity plan in order to make their program and services more sustainable (Sundareswaran et al., 2015, p. 8).

Tobin and Freeman (2004) agree with the assessment of Sundareswaran et al. (2015) and have identified that CSOs do not have the necessary skills to complete business continuity plans and have limited resources with which to complete this task (Tobin & Freeman, 2004, p. 4)

Klaiman et al. (2010) determined that one of the main pillars for the success of the City of Philadelphia's collaborative approach was a training component. The training was focused on both the vulnerable communities and the service providers to ensure that the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) etc. is developed to continue with services during or after an emergency (Klaiman et al., 2010, p. 249).

Who is Responsible?

Tobin and Freeman started their research by asking a question: Who is responsible for communicating with the homeless (Tobin & Freeman, 2004, p. 3)? This question was never

answered because the project changed direction once the service providers were able to explain the gap in emergency preparedness and business continuity existed (Tobin & Freeman, 2004, p. 3).

Edgington (2009) states that outreach teams are usually the first source of information accessed by homeless communities, vis-à-vis an emergency. The teams assume this role by virtue of the nature of their work and not because they are mandated by law. Edgington further concludes that most of the states in the United States are not equipped to help the vulnerable. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommends that service providers and government officials routinely assess whether they are in a position to assist the vulnerable populations in the event of an emergency (Edgington, 2009, p. 33). There appears to be no legal accountability for communication of critical information to those experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable communities in this research.

The Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (United States Department of Housing and Urban Planning, n.d.) provides guidelines and recommendations to emergency managers; there does not appear to be anything in the documentation citing legislation stipulating who is responsible for any vulnerable population in the United States.

Klaiman et al. (2010) describes the vulnerable populations outreach model that Philadelphia's Department of Public Health (PDPH) and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) have used to engage these communities in emergency planning, by utilizing all available stakeholders in the planning and communication processes. Yet at no point in the paper is there a reference to any legal requirement for any agency to communicate with homeless communities in the event of an emergency. Fortunately for homeless populations in Philadelphia, the City's

OEM has accepted that there is a need for communication and has followed the guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Klaiman et al., 2010, p. 247).

In Canada, the provinces are responsible for emergency management legislative framework and oversight of the municipal/regional emergency plans. A review of the provincial legislation reveals that homeless populations are not specifically addressed. Therefore, it can be assumed that homeless populations should be included in emergency plans. For example:

- The Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.) Emergency Measures Act defines a disaster as something that affects the health, safety or welfare of the civil population (Emergency Measures Act, R.S.P.E.I. 1998, c. E-6.1, s. 1(b)). Under the definition of Emergency Measure Plan the legislation states that the plan is to provide for the safety, health or welfare of the civil population (Emergency Measures Act, R.S.P.E.I. 1988, c. E-6.1, s. 1(e)).
- The Ontario Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E 9, only mentions “the public” or “in the interests of public safety”.
- The British Columbia Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation states the “impact on people and property” but does not distinguish between groups or categories of people (Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation, B.C. Reg. 380/95 s. 2(1)(b)).
- In the Province of Manitoba, the Emergency Management Act states that “emergency” means a present or imminent situation or condition that requires prompt action to prevent or limit (a) the loss of life, or (b) harm or damage to the

safety, health or welfare of people, ...” (The Emergency Measure Act, C.C.S.M. 1987, c. E80, s. 1).

This would indicate that under various Canadian provincial legislative frameworks, homeless populations are not exceptions and are to be considered in the event of an emergency. The following are reviews of municipal emergency plans to establish who is responsible for communication of hazards and threats to various communities in Canada:

- The City of Victoria’s (British Columbia) emergency plan stipulates that the Engagement Department is responsible to “ensure that the public within the affected area(s) receive complete, accurate, and consistent information about life safety procedures, public health advisories, relief and assistance programs and other vital information...” (City of Victoria, 2018, p. 63).
- The City of Windsor’s (Ontario) emergency response plan delegates the responsibility for communication with the public to the Emergency Information Officer (City of Windsor, 2010, p. 22). The role is further defined to include “ensuring that all information released to the media and public is timely, full and accurate” (City of Windsor. 2010. p. 34).
- The Emergency plan produced by the City of Toronto (Ontario) assigns the responsibility “for communicating critical information before an impending incident (if applicable), during and after a major disaster or public emergency” to the Strategic Communications section (City of Toronto, 2013, p. 31). However, the role is also assigned to members of the Emergency Operation Centre,

“Providing information to the public and news media”. (City of Toronto, 2013. p. 16).

These three are only examples of emergency plans produced by municipalities. It is clear from the wording that emergency managers who developed these plans are accepting responsibility, on behalf of the city, for communicating with the public. This should include homeless populations within their area of responsibility because there appears to be no other assignment of responsibility for communication with this segment of society in any legislation, regulation or by-law. Wexler and Smith conclude their research by stating that there is an ethical imperative for including homeless populations in emergency planning by emergency managers (Wexler & Smith, 2015, p. 199).

Research Design and Methodology

Mixed Method Design

A mixed method design was selected, not only because of the small sample size (n=9) but also that the existing research, predominately from the United States, can be compared and fully analysed with the information obtained from the questionnaires from the Canadian respondents. By blending the existing information with the responses from the questionnaires it was hoped that there would be some findings as to why and how emergency managers, service providers and homeless communities communicate in Canada. The difference in the answers between the service providers and the emergency management professionals could help to identify gaps or opportunities for both to assist in building the resilience of homeless populations in Canada.

Two questionnaires were developed consisting of ten questions each: one questionnaire for the emergency management professionals and the other for the service providers. Emergency

management organizations and homeless service providers across Canada agreed to participate (N=30) in the study, nine completed questionnaires were returned; five from emergency managers and four from homeless service providers. The questions are slightly different in wording. However, they are inherently linked as the intent was to identify any variances in response regarding what policy and processes are currently in place, depending on whether the respondent is a service provider or an emergency management official. It should be noted that the questionnaire was developed prior to the full literary review in order to ensure sufficient time to obtain Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) Ethics Board review and decision for the research to proceed and submission of this paper. JIBC Ethic Board confirmed that the questions submitted did not require Ethics Board approval as the questions required factual answers including information available in the public domain and not opinions from the participants; a copy of the letter is on file. The full questionnaires are attached in Appendix A and B. Appendix C contains the information given to the potential participants and a consent form for completion.

Questionnaire Data

The following is a review of the data collected from each question sequentially, with the exception of question 1 which did not contain any data and was intended to remind responders to sign the voluntary consent form, which was included in the study package.

Emergency Manager Data

Question 2	Yes	No
Does your organization have a specific communication plan to pass on information to the homeless in the event of an emergency (flooding, tsunami, extreme heat or cold)?	1 20%	4 80%

Question 3	City Staff	Homeless service providers	Combination of both
How does your organization communicate emergency information to the homeless?	1 20%	1 20%	3 60%

Question 4	1-5	6-10	11-20
In the past two years (2017 and 2018) how many times has your organization passed information about potential hazards (flood, heat, cold and tsunami) to the homeless?	2 40%	1 20%	2 40%

Question 5	Yes	No
Does your organization have a policy or program to assist the homeless service providers in developing a business continuity plan in the event of a disaster (tsunami, flood, earthquake or freezing rain)?	1 20%	4 80%

Question 6	Yes	No
In the event of the homeless service providers not being able to provide services after or during an emergency, has your organization developed contingency plans on how to house the homeless?	3 60%	2 40%

Question 7	Yes
Does your city provide funds to the homeless service providers for those organizations to operating?	5 100%

Question 8	Yes	No
In your provincial emergency management legislation, are there any references to who is responsible for emergency planning for the homeless?	1 20%	4 80%

Question 9	The Municipal or Regional Government	None of the above
Within your current provincial emergency management framework, who is responsible for communicating with the homeless if there is a pending disaster, for example a flood, extreme heat or cold?	4 80%	1 20%

Question 10	Unknown	Don't know	Knows exactly
What is the percentage of homeless people in your city? (number of homeless divided by the number of residents multiplied by 100 using Statistics Canada information if available)	2 40%	2 40%	1 20%

Homeless Service Provider Data

Question 2	Yes
Does your organization have a specific communication plan to pass on information to the homeless in the event of an emergency (Flooding, tsunami, extreme heat or cold)?	4 100%

Question 3	As they enter the shelter	Shelter, outreach and other means
How does your organization currently communicate emergency information to the homeless?	3 75%	1 25%

Question 4	City/Region	Multiple sources	Do not receive information
Who is/are the source(s) of the emergency information that needs to be disseminated to the homeless (Flooding, heat, cold etc.)?	2 50%	1 25%	1 25%

Question 5	6-10	20+	Don't know
In the past two years (2017 and 2018) how many times has your organization been asked by any emergency management organization (municipal, regional, provincial or federal) to disseminate information about excessive heat or cold, floods or other potential emergency situations?	1 25%	2 50%	1 25%

Question 6	Yes	No
Does your organization have a business continuity plan so that you can continue to provide services or resume services quickly in the event of a disaster (tsunami, flood, earthquake or freezing rain)?	3 75%	1 25%

Question 7	Yes	Don't know
Does the city have a plan to continue services to the homeless if your organization, for whatever reason, is unable to continue providing services?	2 50%	2 50%

Question 8	Service providers	City/Regional Government	City/Region and Province Gvt.	Don't know
Under the current provincial emergency management framework, who is responsible for communicating emergency information to the homeless?	1 25%	1 25%	1 25%	1 25%

Question 9	Yes	No
Has your organization received any training in what to do in the case of an emergency (flood, freezing rain, earthquake etc.) from the local emergency management team or other emergency organization (Police, Fire etc.) responsible for where your organization operates?	3 75%	1 25%

Question 10	Yes	No
Does your organization attend meetings with emergency managers to discuss issues that affect the homeless with regards to the city's emergency plans?	3 75%	1 25%

Questionnaire Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

It appears from the data that only 20% of emergency managers (n=1) have specific communications plans to inform homeless populations of pending emergencies, which is very different from homeless service providers where 100% responded (n=4) that they do have specific plans. In the event of an emergency, 20% of municipalities (n=1) do not use service providers to disseminate information to the homeless populations and 25% of service providers (n=1) do not receive emergency information about floods, extreme heat or cold. This is a

significant gap for emergency managers because there is a potential for a significant number of the homeless population to be missed in the communication process.

Both service providers and emergency managers were asked who is responsible for communication with the homeless populations under their legislative framework. The responses were varied and indicated that 20% of emergency managers (n=1) and 75% of service providers (n=3) are unsure of their provincial legislative framework. This would indicate a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed to ensure that responsibility is accepted and that service providers know who they should contact and liaise with in the event of a real or pending emergency.

One hundred percent of cities who responded (n=5) stated that they provide financial assistance to the service providers. However, 25% of service providers (n=1) do not have a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) (n=1), also 40% of cities (n=2) do not have contingencies in place if the service providers are unable to carry on business in the event of an emergency. Eighty percent of emergency managers responded (n=4) that they do not have a policy or program in place to assist service providers with BCPs. If the cities do not have contingencies in place, additional funds for training service providers or assisting them in the development of BCPs could be an area of valuable support. Another option would be for municipalities to have a contingency plan to address the plight of homeless communities in the event of an emergency. Assisting service providers in development of a BCP may be a more practical option instead of developing full contingency plans to house homeless populations in the event that service providers are unable to continue operating.

Fifty percent of service providers (n=2) do not know whether the city has a contingency plan to continue service to homeless populations if the service providers are unable to operate.

This indicates a lack of communication between the service providers and the emergency planners, and reveals a vulnerability to consistent services.

Seventy five percent of service providers (n=3) assist their local emergency planners by attending meeting related to the homeless community, yet only 20% of emergency managers (n=1) know the number of homeless people in their communities. This is problematic for emergency managers who need some knowledge as to the numbers of people with specific and special needs that they may need to provide, and be legally responsible for, in the event of an emergency.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data is drawn from the quantitative data, where the answers from the emergency managers were compared to the service providers to see if inferences could be made because of either agreement or disagreement in how they answered similar questions from a different perspective. For example 25% of service providers (n=1) do not have a BCP, yet 80% of municipal emergency management organizations (n=4) do not have a plan or program to assist the service providers in developing a BCP. What can be inferred from this data? What situational realities can be extrapolated from the numbers? How do emergency managers perceive their responsibility towards the homeless?

This data set is small (n=9) however, if the responses are taken as a true representation of ground realities across Canada, it is evident that some of the following shortfalls need to be addressed.

One responding city emergency management member reported that only municipal staff members (police, fire and other municipal employees) are utilized to communicate with the

homeless populations in the city. In another example, one service provider does not receive any hazard or threat information from the municipal emergency team. This would suggest that either the city emergency planner has overlooked a valuable resource or that there is lack of established communication between the city and the service provider. This is a gap that both parties may wish to consider closing as a portion of homeless populations in that city do not receive emergency situation information in the event of a potential disaster.

The completion of a BCP was reported by 75% of the homeless service providers (n=3). However, only 60% of emergency management bodies (n=3) reported having contingencies in place to house homeless populations if the service providers are unable to continue providing services. Firstly, it is in the interest of every municipality to ensure that the homeless service providers continue operations in the event of an emergency and perhaps funding could be linked to the development of a BCP. Yet, it appears that emergency managers rely too heavily on and are overly confident in the service provider's ability to operate in time of a crisis. Arguably, the cost of providing advice and guidance to service providers to ensure adequate business continuity planning would be less than the cost of having to supply services to homeless populations in the event that the service provider ceased operations. This area could be considered a gap that both service providers and regulated emergency management providers can address to be mutually beneficial. Could it be that emergency managers consider only people who have become homeless as a result of the emergency and not those already homeless before the incident?

There appears to be a knowledge gap about who is responsible for communicating information to the homeless. While it is recognised by emergency managers that it is their

responsibility to communicate with the public, only 80% (n=4) have a plan to communicate the information to homeless service providers. Unless there are agreements in place, there appears to be no legal requirement for homeless service providers to pass on emergency information to homeless populations. One can infer that this is done probably because they feel a moral obligation and personal concern to ensure that they communicate with this vulnerable community. This indicates a tendency by emergency managers to download responsibility to service providers; twenty percent (n=1) reported that they only inform the service providers and take no further action to reach hard to communicate with vulnerable populations like homeless communities. The analysis of the data also indicates that only 50% of the service providers (n=2) know who is legally responsible for communication of hazard information. Further, 20% of emergency management (n=1) respondents reported that the region or municipality is not responsible for communication of hazard or threat information. This data indicates a gap in knowledge for both the service providers and emergency management professionals that should be addressed.

Discussion

The new Canadian data from the questionnaires was compared with existing data, which was predominantly from the United States. If the limited data obtained from this new research is indicative of the rest of Canada, the three themes from the United States research appear to be consistent with that in Canada, and the findings and recommendations of the existing research likely would be applicable to the Canadian context. Both sets of research point to a systemic lack of inclusion in emergency plans vis-à-vis vulnerable populations – specifically people experiencing homelessness.

Service Providers

That the United States emergency planners rely heavily on the community service organizations or homeless service providers to communicate with homeless communities is well-documented. For example Levin et al. (2014) produced a paper that actively encouraged emergency planners to use community service providers when disaster planning and communication is needed with vulnerable populations, which includes homeless communities. Looking at the Canadian context, Sundareswaren et al. (2015, p. 3) concluded that, for the most part, there is communication between Canadian emergency management organizations and service providers. However, there is a need for that communication to be strengthened. This is consistent with the data collected in this research. Twenty five percent of service providers (n=1) reported that they do not receive any emergency communication with local emergency management organization and 20% of emergency manager (n=1) responses indicated that homeless population service providers are not in the communication plan in the event of an emergency. This could result in a large portion of a vulnerable community being neglected and subjected to enhanced risk of danger and injury.

Service Provider Assistance and Training

Assistance and training to service providers in the United States is recognized as a gap (Meredith et al., 2009; Edgington, 2009; Wexler and Smith, 2015) and recommendations for training both the organizations and their clients is encouraged. The Canadian data collected would support the same conclusions from the United States studies. Twenty five percent of Canadian service providers (n=1) who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they do not receive training from the local emergency organizations on what to do in an emergency. Further,

25% of service providers (n=1) do not have a BCP and 80% of emergency management organizations (n=4) do not offer to assist service providers to develop a BCP. The fact that 40% of emergency management (n=2) organizations do not have contingency plans to address the needs of homeless communities in the event of an emergency is disturbing. It would be beneficial to both service providers and emergency management for the community to ensure that an emergency would not result in cessation of operations. The additional resources needed to address this vulnerable population in the event of an emergency would likely be far greater than the cost of assisting service providers to continue operations by developing a BCP. However, it would appear that 80% of emergency planners (n=4) are not even aware of the scale of homeless populations in their community. How can you plan for an emergency when you do not know the number of homeless persons who may require services? These populations have different needs than those who have become homeless as a result of the emergency. The fact that 40% of emergency plans (n=2) do not have contingencies in place if the service providers are not able to continue functioning, raises questions about how emergency planning has prioritized the community response. Are emergency planners responsible for the whole community including those experiencing chronic homelessness or just those who have become homeless as a result of the emergency?

One hundred percent of emergency management (n=5) respondents reported that their city provides financial assistance to the homeless service providers. Tobin and Freeman (2004) reported that The Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Department of Social Services required a BCP before considering the continuation of funding to service providers. This requirement, coupled with the sharing of expert knowledge by city emergency planners, could be a good incentive and model for service providers to have a BCP, which would reduce the risk that the

city would face in addressing the needs of homeless communities in the event of a disaster. This model would also increase communication between emergency planners and service providers, as 25% of service providers (n=1) reported that they do not participate in meetings to discuss emergency planning and homeless populations. Enhanced communication and consultations would benefit emergency planners as service providers can provide expert knowledge on the needs of homeless populations, which will allow for a more accurate and detailed contingency plan in the event the service provider is unable to continue operations.

Responsibility for Communication

Tobin and Freeman asked a question at the start of their research: who is responsible? (Tobin & Freeman, 2004, p. 3). The question was never answered as the narrative shifted to other areas of focus. The United States Government Accountability Office report is quoted by Edgington (2009) as making recommendations for communication between service providers and emergency planners to ensure that vulnerable populations are included in emergency planning. Yet, in the United States no one is specifically assigned to be responsible for the homeless populations. This would, by default, suggest that local emergency planners are responsible. The United States government does provide guidance to emergency planners on how to engage service providers and to be inclusive during emergency planning. The documentation is produced by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Housing and Urban Development and, Centers for Disease Control.

In Canada, emergency management is a provincial responsibility. Each province has emergency preparedness legislation that mandates each municipality and region to have adequate emergency plans. These plans are required to ensure the safety of the population within the

geographic area of responsibility of the emergency planners for the cities and regions. A review of a number of plans shows that the planners use the comprehensive and limiting phrase “the public”. As there are no exclusions, one can infer that municipal emergency managers are accepting responsibility, on behalf of the city or region, for communicating emergency information and warnings to the public, whether they live in homes or tents or cardboard boxes.

From the data collected in the questionnaire, 20% of municipal emergency management teams (n=1) only inform the homeless service providers of the emergency information and not homeless populations themselves. Does this mean they have met their responsibility and their legal obligation under provincial legislative framework and, sometimes, municipal by-laws? Data from the questionnaires indicate that in some cases service providers are not informed of emergency information (25%, n=1) and in other cases (20%, n=1) emergency management planners are unaware of their obligations to communicate with members of their community without fixed residences.

It would appear that Canada and the United States grapple with similar questions regarding the responsibility to communicate to the community as a whole in the event of disasters. One significant difference is that in the United States the federal government agencies that have an interest in homelessness actively encourage emergency managers to be inclusive and address the plight of this segment of society in an emergency. A search of the internet did not reveal any guidance or recommendations by the Canadian federal or provincial governments to assist emergency planners on how to address the issue of homeless populations in the event of an emergency, where do emergency preparedness planners get the guidance needed for these procedures? It appears that some emergency planners in Canada have recognized the need for

planning for homeless populations within their own community and have taken ownership. This is supported by 60% (n=3) of emergency managers, who responded in the questionnaire, reported that they use both city staff and homeless service providers to communicate emergency information to people experiencing homelessness in their community. Yet others appear to believe that informing the service provider fulfills their obligation to communicate with homeless populations in their community. Emergency managers who do not have a plan to communicate with either homeless populations or their service providers should consider their ethical obligation to protect homeless populations within their community, as suggested by Wexler and Smith (2015, p. 199).

Conclusions

Significant research in the United States has confirmed a lack of consistency by emergency planners across the country in how to manage and support how they address the issue of support to their homeless communities during an emergency. Some cities in the United States have taken steps proactively to deeply involve homeless service providers in their emergency plans. This study looked at how Canadian emergency planners communicated with homeless service providers and how information is passed to homeless communities in the event of an emergency. The information obtained from the literary review was compared with the current information received from Canadian emergency planners and service providers via this research study. Only one substantive Canadian study was found during the literary review and the conclusion by Sundareswaran et al. (2015) was the need to establish stronger communication between emergency planners and service providers for the chronic homeless population to increase the resilience of homeless populations in the event of a disaster. The results of the

questionnaire reveal that, similar to the United States, there are three consistent emergent themes. The first theme is that emergency planners rely very heavily on service providers to communicate and manage homeless communities in the event of a disaster. While the Canadian cities fund service providers, more can be done by the cities to mitigate the risk that service providers can't continue operations in a disaster. Secondly, service providers need training and assistance in developing business continuity plans. In return, they can help the city to prepare for the possibility that service providers need to close in the event of an emergency. Thirdly, emergency planners need to take responsibility for planning that is inclusive. Homeless populations are part of the community and communication with them, either directly or via the service providers, is required to ensure their safety in the event of an emergency.

This research has just scratched the surface with regards to emergency planning involving homeless communities in Canada. Gaps are evident by the lack of guidance by both the federal and provincial governments to municipal emergency planners. Much can be gleaned from the guidance given by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the United States document Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit (n.d.). Further, the model used by the City of Philadelphia as described by Klaiman et al., (2010) could also be used as a template and model for serious consideration by Canadian emergency planners and governing bodies to ensure that communication with vulnerable communities as a whole is achieved in the event of an emergency or disaster.

While this research focused on the communication relationship between emergency managers, homeless service providers and people experiencing homelessness, the questions

raised may be indicative of the relationship between emergency managers and other vulnerable populations. This is an area of interest that could be explored further.

Due to the potential for differences between the United States and Canadian contexts and operational requirements, Canadian emergency planners should not be dependent on US-based research. Further research into best practices in Canada could be conducted with a view to developing a guidance document for Canadian emergency planners on communication with homeless communities and other populations. This continued research could provide an opportunity for a preferred consistency and inclusive emergency planning and preparedness from coast to coast to coast.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire to Emergency Managers

Questions for Emergency Managers:

1. Have you read and completed the consent document? (If you have not then your answers will not be taken into consideration)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Does your organization have a specific communication plan to pass on information to the homeless in the event of an emergency (flooding, tsunami, extreme heat or cold)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How does your organization communicate emergency information to the homeless?
 - a. Using city personnel (staff, police, fire)
 - b. Contacting a homeless service provider
 - c. Combination of a and b
 - d. No information is passed to either the homeless directly or through service providers
 - e. Other
 - f. Don't know
4. In the past two years (2017 and 2018) how many times has your organization passed information about potential hazards (flood, heat, cold and tsunami) to the homeless?
 - a. Zero
 - b. One to five times
 - c. Six to ten times
 - d. Eleven to twenty times
 - e. More than twenty
 - f. Don't know
5. Does your organization have a policy or program to assist the homeless service providers in developing a business continuity plan in the event of a disaster (tsunami, flood, earthquake or freezing rain)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
6. In the event of the homeless service providers not being able to provide services after or during an emergency, has your organization developed contingency plans on how to house the homeless?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

7. Does your city provide funds to the homeless service providers for those organizations to operating?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
8. In your provincial emergency management legislation, are there any references to who is responsible for emergency planning for the homeless?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
9. Within your current provincial emergency management framework, who is responsible for communicating with the homeless if there is a pending disaster, for example a flood, extreme heat or cold?
 - a. The Municipal or Regional Government
 - b. The Provincial Government
 - c. The Federal Government
 - d. Homeless service providers
 - e. Other
 - f. None of the above
10. What is the percentage of homeless people in your city? (number of homeless divided by the number of residents multiplied by 100 using Statistics Canada information if available)
 - a. Enter the value: %
 - b. Unknown
 - c. Don't know

Appendix B – Questionnaire to Homeless Service Providers

Questions to the Homeless Service Providers:

1. Have you read and completed the consent document? (If you have not then your answers will not be taken into consideration)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Does your organization have a specific communication plan to pass on information to the homeless in the event of an emergency (Flooding, tsunami, extreme heat or cold)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How does your organization currently communicate emergency information to the homeless?
 - a. As they enter the shelter
 - b. Volunteers on the street
 - c. Combination of a and b
 - d. We do not
 - e. Other
4. Who is/are the source(s) of the emergency information that needs to be disseminated to the homeless (Flooding, heat, cold etc.)?
 - a. The City/Regional Government
 - b. The Provincial Government
 - c. The Federal Government
 - d. Other homeless service providers
 - e. More than one level of government
 - f. We do not receive emergency information
5. In the past two years (2017 and 2018) how many times has your organization been asked by any emergency management organization (municipal, regional, provincial or federal) to disseminate information about excessive heat or cold, floods or other potential emergency situations?
 - a. Zero
 - b. One to five times
 - c. Six to ten times
 - d. Eleven to twenty times
 - e. More than twenty
 - f. Don't know
6. Does your organization have a business continuity plan so that you can continue to provide services or resume services quickly in the event of a disaster (tsunami, flood, earthquake or freezing rain)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
7. Does the city have a plan to continue services to the homeless if your organization, for whatever reason, is unable to continue providing services?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
8. Under the current provincial emergency management framework, who is responsible for communicating emergency information to the homeless?
- a. Homeless service providers
 - b. Municipal/regional government
 - c. Provincial Government
 - d. Federal Government
 - e. Other
 - f. Don't know
9. Has your organization received any training in what to do in the case of an emergency (flood, freezing rain, earthquake etc.) from the local emergency management team or other emergency organization (Police, Fire etc.) responsible for where your organization operates?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
10. Does your organization attend meetings with emergency managers to discuss issues that affect the homeless with regards to the city's emergency plans?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

Appendix C – Participant information and Consent Form

Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

Date: 10 February 2019

Research Study: *Communicating Potential Hazards to the Homeless*

My name is Mark Haynes and I am exploring how information about potential hazards are communicated to the homeless. The project is being conducted through the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) and is part of the requirements in the BESMS¹ degree.

Your participation involves answering 10 questions, in the attached document. The questions focus around your organization's policies and procedures and interaction with other agencies. Answering the questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes.

Any and all questions will be optional to answer. All identifying information will be kept strictly confidential and only aggregated or anonymized data will be reported. In other words, any participation may be included in research reports and publications and will not be attributed to you.

Any and all information collected for this research will be kept strictly confidential. All research documents will be kept in a secure location. Only the project's researcher and instructor will have access to the information. No identifiable information will be included in any final paper.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can decline to participate in any section of the study or withdraw at anytime without any negative consequences.

We do not foresee any risks from participating in this study. Benefits from participating in this study include the opportunity to participate in research that will inform and extend best practices in communicating hazards and risks to the homeless.

If you have questions, please contact the Lead Researcher Mark Haynes, by email at JIBC.Capstone.Project@mail.com; additionally, you may contact the research instructor for this project Beth Larcombe, by telephone at 604.737.7727 or by email at blarcombe@jibc.ca

If you have other concerns, you can also contact Darren Blackburn, Program Director - Program Development & Credential Programs: Emergency Management Division at JIBC at Tel: 604.528.5702 dblackburn@jibc.ca

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

¹ Baccalaureate Emergency and Security Management Studies

Informed Consent: The Study Communicating Potential Hazards to the Homeless

Having received information about the research study entitled “*Communicating Potential Hazards to the Homeless*” I consent to participating in this research study.

I understand that I will participate in a survey. I understand that I will complete a word document and email it back to JIBC.Capstone.Project@mail.com

I understand that data collected will remain confidential with regard to my identity. I understand that publications, manuscripts, and other media arising from this research may incorporate direct quotes, but that no quotes will be accompanied by identifying information. I understand that all data will be kept securely. No information or records that disclose my identity will be removed or released without my consent unless required by law. I understand that at the conclusion of this study the questionnaire will be destroyed.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation, including all contributions to the study, at any time with no repercussions. I understand that I may choose not to answer any survey questions.

I understand that I may receive online access to, or a hard copy of the resulting research report(s) by request.

Date:

Signed:

Name (Please Print):

Email:

Phone:
