

Gender disparities in flood risk perception and preparedness: a Serbian case study

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The catastrophic flood occurred in Serbia in 2014 was one of the most critical events registered in the Balkan area in the last decades. The procedures for evacuation have been tough to manage indicating a low level of perception and preparedness towards flood events. Also, the failure in the response phase showed a gender unbalance, where information did not reach men and women equally. Urgently, the Council for Gender Equality Government of the Republic of Serbia held an extraordinary meeting dedicated to the flood planning and emergency support in a gendered perspective. It concluded with the necessity of developing more gender-sensitive statistics, indicators of vulnerability, reconstruction and recovery to floods. For these reasons, we conducted an extensive interview to underlined the differences in risk perception and preparedness actions of both women and men regarding flood events in Serbia. 2500 face-to-face interviews have been conducted in 27 out of 150 municipalities being a good representative sample of the country with the use of a multi-stage random sample. The research findings indicated that is a gender disparity among men and women both in the perception than in the preparedness actions toward floods. Men seemed to be more confident in their abilities to cope with flooding, assessing a greater individual and household preparedness. This could be ascribable to their active involvement in the army where young men were educated to manage emergency situations. They displayed more trust in themselves rather than external agencies or organisation, and this could result in a general mistrust on institutions and planned evacuations. On the other hand, women displayed larger sensitivity and knowledge to these events, however, this did not translate into a capacity to react. It has been assumed that their work as child-carers and housekeepers made them unable to create a strong social network within the community being less informed and involved in the decision-making process. For this purpose, planners might consider how this can affect the way authorities can reach women with hazard information and emergency warnings. However, they should not be seen as sole victims, but valuable resources able to take leading roles in building disaster resilience. In this work they displayed higher organisation of basic supplies and emergency amenities, saving important documents and dealing with the financial matters of the household. This should be taken as an advantage in preparing the family for a possible hazard situation, enlarging their self-confidence and burdens of responsibilities.

Demographic and economic attributes, behaviours and beliefs reflect gender power relations in the flood hazard context in Serbia. Failing to recognise it, may lead to inefficient community-based risk management plans. Thus, there is a systematic need to investigate and acknowledge the role of gender dynamics without limiting gender as an isolated variable. This work will contribute raising further investigations on this topic especially in a country like Serbia where this topic was weakly investigated.