



Regular Article

Gender, disaster and climate change: Reflections on fifteen years of evidence to action[☆]Debra Parkinson^{a,*}, Susie Reid^b, Helen Riseborough^c, Frank Archer^a^a Monash University, Clayton, Victoria 3168, Australia^b Women's Health Goulburn North East, 86/90 Rowan Street, Wangaratta, Victoria 3677, Australia^c Women's Health In the North, 2/266 Raglan Street, Preston High Street, Victoria 3071, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing recognition that disasters are profoundly gendered, relatively little has been written about how research evidence is translated into sustained policy, practice and institutional change. This paper presents a practice-based evidence synthesis of fifteen years of gender, disaster and climate change research undertaken in Australia through the Gender and Disaster Pod (GAD Pod) and, subsequently, Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus). Originating in the aftermath of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, the paper examines how successive research projects informed policy development, training, national guidance and the establishment of a nationally funded organisation dedicated to gender-responsive disaster risk reduction.

With foundations in feminist scholarship and qualitative research informed by grounded theory, the program progressively expanded from women's experiences following Black Saturday to include men, people of diverse gender and sexual identities, emergency management organisations and long-term disaster recovery. This retrospective synthesis demonstrates that evidence alone is insufficient to achieve lasting change. It identifies sustained collaboration, knowledge translation, training and persistence in the face of institutional resistance as critical mechanisms for translating research into policy and practice. The paper contributes to scholarship on knowledge translation, gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation, offering a transferable framework for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers.

1. Introduction

For 15 years, contemplation of how gender is relevant to climate change and disasters was centre-stage for the authors. At the start of 2009, our work programs were about to change, as were our personal understandings of how disasters affect people differently – depending on gender.

The Victorian Black Saturday bushfires on 7 February 2009 were the worst in Australia in terms of loss of life since colonisation. 173 people died on the day of these terrifying fires. In the months and years after Black Saturday, many other people died from extreme heat, and from heart attacks, cancers and suicide stemming back to these fires. Mental health was implicated. Marriages broke down. Domestic violence increased, or began. Children waited until they could leave home, and in some cases, to leave Australia, so as never to relive the fear and the devastation of that day and what followed.

The early findings from research undertaken through Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) into women's experiences of Black Saturday formed the basis of doctoral research undertaken through the Faculty of Arts, School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University, providing a strong theoretical and methodological foundation for the iterative program of research, partnerships and knowledge translation that evolved over the fifteen years following Black Saturday.

Subsequent research and action on different aspects of gender and disaster were largely conducted under the auspices of the Gender and Disaster Pod (GAD Pod), a partnership between the 'legacy' organisations WHGNE, Women's Health in the North (WHIN) and Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI). This partnership contributed established expertise in women's health, gender equality, violence against women, community development and climate change, together with MUDRI's disaster research capability.

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Each new research project reiterated the overall finding of the original research with women, and then men: that the experience of catastrophic disaster is inescapably gendered. *Within emergency service organisations*, women and non-binary people are discriminated against and excluded [1,2]. At a *family and community level*, men are expected to 'protect and provide' for their families and communities, and are criticised for any perceived failures in this endeavour [3]. This is the flip side to expectations of women to sacrifice their autonomy and right to freedom from violence for the sake of 'their man' [4]. Non-binary people face prejudice and neglect at each stage of the disaster cycle [5]. Society-wide, the toll of a disaster experience is underestimated. The micro and macro causes and effects of climate change-related disasters destroy lives. Lives that are now delineated by 'before the fire/flood/cyclone' and 'after', just as COVID-19 is referenced by the greater population.

This paper presents a practice-based evidence synthesis of fifteen years of gender, disaster and climate change research undertaken primarily through the GAD Pod. Drawing on a longitudinal body of qualitative and participatory research conducted between 2009 and 2024, it examines how research findings were translated into policy, practice, training, institutional change and, ultimately, the establishment of a nationally funded organisation dedicated to gender-responsive disaster risk reduction. In doing so, it identifies the momentum, strategic partnerships, challenges and opportunities in an emergency management environment often characterised by competing priorities, changing institutional structures and resistance to gender-focused initiatives.

Beyond documenting the Australian experience, we reflect on lessons that may be relevant to researchers, practitioners and policymakers seeking to advance gender-responsive approaches to disaster and climate-related challenges in other national and regional contexts.

This research program was grounded in a feminist standpoint that recognised gender inequality as both a social justice issue and a determinant of disaster experience. Grounded in qualitative research using an inductive grounded theory methodology, the program progressively engaged with scholarship on masculinities, and gender and sexual diversity as new research questions emerged. The work did not assume that communities speak with a single voice. Rather, it recognised that disaster-affected communities comprise diverse experiences, competing interests and unequal power relations. The research sought to understand lived experience while also examining the broader social and institutional structures that, indeed, shape disaster experience.

2. Methodological approach and evidence synthesis

This paper synthesises findings and experiences arising from a fifteen-year program of research, policy engagement and practice development undertaken through the GAD Pod which culminated in the 2021 establishment of a federally funded national body, Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus). The analysis draws on multiple qualitative research projects conducted between 2009 and 2024, including studies with women, men, people of diverse gender and sexual identities, emergency management personnel and long-term disaster survivors.

Each research project received approval from a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and employed qualitative methodologies informed by feminist and participatory research traditions. Informed by feminist scholarship and the inductive principles of grounded theory [6], the research program progressively engaged with literature on masculinities, and gender and sexual diversity as new research questions emerged from informants' accounts. Rather than beginning with pre-determined hypotheses or a fixed theoretical model, successive projects built iteratively on earlier findings, allowing empirical insights to shape both the evolving research agenda and the theoretical literature sought to help understand the data. Formal and informal Advisory Groups were established as required.

While individual projects varied in design, methods included in-depth interviews, focus groups, consultations and participatory approaches that prioritised the experiences and perspectives of disaster-

affected people. Specifically, informants were offered opportunities to review interview transcripts and comment on preliminary interpretations, strengthening the ethical integrity and reliability of the findings. Analysis was undertaken using an inductive qualitative approach informed by grounded theory principles, with interpretation developed through discussion among the research teams. Consistent with the longitudinal nature of the program, findings from successive projects, together with engagement and feedback from community members, practitioners, policy-makers and emergency management organisations, informed the development of subsequent research questions and knowledge translation activities. This iterative process shaped action to progress research report recommendations, including conferences, publications, training, and other initiatives designed to translate evidence into policy and practice. Critically, the legacy organisation leaders and researchers targeted engagement with government and emergency management leaders.

For this paper, we undertook a retrospective synthesis of the collective body of evidence generated across these projects. Rather than re-analysing primary data, we examined the pathways through which research findings were translated into practice. Particular attention was given to the mechanisms that facilitated movement from evidence generation to action, including partnerships, advisory structures, training initiatives, conferences, publications and policy engagement.

2.1. Research approach

It is notable that each of the research projects was granted ethics approval from a National Health and Medical Research Council registered HREC (specifically North East Health, and Monash University), offering independent scrutiny of the research design, participant welfare and consent processes prior to commencement of each project.

The relatively recent term, 'co-design', has been integral to our research from the outset, predating the term. A modified 'Grounded theory' approach [6] was taken in each research, echoing women's research and qualitative methods that centre informants. We relied on community leaders' commendations to engage with potential informants, and in this way, gained trust as researchers. It was important that the women, men and non-binary people interviewed had the opportunity to check their transcripts (allowing for withdrawal/alteration), and then to check how their words were interpreted in the final draft of the research report (again allowing for withdrawal/alteration). Consistent with an inductive qualitative approach, analysis sought to understand not only what informants described, but what those experiences meant in relation to gender, power, institutions and disaster recovery.

Advisory Bodies involved community members, people of influence and decision-makers, along with the CEOs/Directors of each of the three legacy organisations (WHGNE, WHIN and MUDRI). Formal evaluations were commissioned for the conferences and training, with a strong element of external authorship, to help shape future directions and links with the field [7,8].

Table 1, below, summarises the major research projects, initiatives and evidence-to-action outcomes that form the basis of this analysis. Together, these projects demonstrate how a sustained programme of qualitative research evolved into policy influence, training, resources, institutional reform and ultimately national implementation through GADAus.

3. Fifteen years of research and evidence generation

Consistent with grounded theory, the research was guided by broad research questions rather than predetermined hypotheses, allowing informants' accounts to shape the development of concepts, subsequent research questions and the evolving research program. The initial research was on women's and disaster workers' experiences of Black Saturday, including experience of men's violence. The very first public

Table 1

Evolution of the Gender and Disaster research program: major projects, initiatives and evidence-to-action outcomes, 2009–2025.

Research / Initiative	Years	Focus	Key Findings / Contributions	Evidence-to-Action Outcomes
	2009–2011	Women's experiences after Black Saturday, including violence against women	First Australian research identifying links between disaster and violence against women; documented gendered disaster impacts and recovery experiences.	Led to the 2012 <i>Identifying the Hidden Disaster</i> conference; informed DHS reporting changes, police training, emergency management training and policy discussions.
Men and Black Saturday	2012–2013	Men's health, wellbeing and gendered expectations after disaster	Identified pressures associated with masculinity, risk, recovery and help-seeking after disaster.	Led to the <i>Just Ask: Men and Disaster</i> conference; contributed to the establishment of the Victorian Gender and Disaster Taskforce and expanded sector engagement with gender issues.
Gender and Disaster Taskforce	2014–2016	Cross-sector collaboration on gender and emergency management	Brought together emergency management, government, academia and community sectors.	Produced practical reforms and informed development of national gender and emergency management guidance.
Women in Fire and Emergency Leadership Roles	2015	Gender equity in emergency management leadership	Identified barriers to women's participation and leadership.	Informed sector discussion and policy responses to workforce diversity and inclusion. Commissioned and funded by the Victorian Government.
National Gender and Emergency Management (GEM) Guidelines	2015–ongoing	Gender-responsive emergency management	Collaborative guidance that synthesised Australian and international evidence on gender and disaster and was progressively expanded to include evacuation centres, pregnancy, infant feeding, and the needs of pregnant women, babies and caregivers in emergencies.	Overseen and funded by the Australia New Zealand Emergency Management Committee. Guidelines adopted through the AIDR Knowledge Hub and referenced nationally and internationally, including UNISDR PreventionWeb.
LGBTI Communities and Emergencies	2016–2018	Experiences and needs of LGBTI communities before, during and after emergencies	Identified exclusion, barriers and opportunities for more inclusive emergency management across diverse gender and sexual communities.	Commissioned and funded by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. Report launch, conference presentations, training and guidance for inclusive practice.
Long-Term Disaster Resilience	2017–2018	Protective factors and resilience among disaster-affected communities	Demonstrated long-term and gendered dimensions of resilience and recovery.	Produced community-level resources (e.g. postcards); highlighted in Federal Parliament; informed resilience policy and practice discussions.
Diversity in Disaster Conference	2018	Building inclusive disaster resilience	Brought together emergency managers, researchers and community organisations to share emerging evidence on gender, sexuality, diversity and disaster risk reduction.	National conference; informed policy and practice discussions; culminated in the Australian Journal of Emergency Management <i>Monograph on Diversity in Disaster</i> , extending dissemination of research findings and practice lessons. Formal launch of the GEM Guidelines.
Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Experiences of Emergency Management	2018–2019	Experiences of lesbian and bisexual women before, during and after emergencies	Addressed a gap in the earlier survey-based research by documenting detailed lived experiences of emergency management and the ways gender and sexuality intersect to shape disaster experiences.	Strengthened the evidence base for inclusive emergency management and gender- and sexuality-informed disaster risk reduction.
International contribution to WADEM Policy Statement on Gender in Disasters	2019–present	International leadership on gender and disaster through the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM).	Convened a half-day international workshop at the WADEM Congress (Brisbane, 2019), contributing to development and subsequent adoption of the WADEM Policy Statement on Gender in Disasters.	Invited contribution to the International Congress program; informed an internationally adopted policy statement and publication in <i>Prehospital and Disaster Medicine</i> .
Contributions to university education	2019–present	Integrating gender and disaster into tertiary education.	Contributed teaching to Monash University's Master of International Development and undergraduate Paramedicine programs, translating research into higher education.	Repeated annual invitations; strengthened the education of future practitioners and emergency management professionals.
COVID-19 and Violence Prevention Research	2020–2021	Family violence prevention, LGBTIQ+ communities and older people during the pandemic	Demonstrated gendered and social impacts of pandemic conditions.	Commissioned and funded by Respect Victoria; informed prevention workforce responses and training.
Gender Justice in Disaster: Inspiring Action Conference (Online) and Lead-in Sessions	2021	Advancing gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and recovery following the Black Summer bushfires (2019–20).	Brought together researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and community advocates to share evidence on gender, disasters, family violence, recovery and climate-related risks.	National online conference; strengthened cross-sector networks and maintained momentum for gender-responsive disaster reform during COVID-19 restrictions; led to the Australian Journal of Emergency Management Special Issue on Gender Justice in Disaster.
Contribution to Australia's Mid-term Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction	2021–2022	National reporting on Australia's progress in integrating gender into disaster risk reduction.	Fifteen years of Australian research and practice informed Australia's reporting on gender in disaster risk reduction, addressing an area where relatively little national evidence was available.	Contributed to Australia's official Mid-term Review of the Sendai Framework, ensuring Australian gender and disaster research informed international reporting on progress under the Framework.
Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus)	2021–present	National implementation of gender-informed disaster policy, training and resources	Translation of fifteen years of research into national-scale practice and capacity building.	

Note. This table emphasises the translation of research into policy, practice, training and institutional change. Publications associated with individual projects are cited throughout the manuscript and are therefore not listed separately here.

report from this research, 'Beating the Flames' [9] was interim and with the clear aim of simply sharing women's accounts of surviving or escaping the fires. It was well received, including from politicians. The introduction noted:

These women were active agents in their survival and the survival of partners, children, parents, friends, neighbours and strangers. (2011, p. 1).

The main research report [10,11], with an expansive section on family violence after the Black Saturday bushfires, instead met disbelief and rejection from many who preferred the myth of men as 'heroes' and women and children as 'protected' and 'rescued'. Denial of the findings of increased family violence was regular and loud, coming from police, emergency sector professionals, psychologists, academics and those supporting the gendered status quo. The contested nature of these findings was evident during the research itself. For example, permission to interview police officers was made conditional on removing references to "violence" and "women" from the research proposal. Because these issues lay at the heart of the study, the condition was not accepted and police interviews did not proceed. Yet, by the time the report was completed, the Deputy Commissioner agreed to launch it publicly, acknowledging that after disasters men often struggle to cope and that women frequently bear the consequences. This shift reflected the capacity of rigorous research to challenge initial institutional resistance and contribute to changing understandings of gendered disaster impacts.

Throughout the early years of the research, intimidation and blame were aimed at the researchers, with accusations that our research findings were inflicting even more hurt on suffering communities and contributing to male suicides. The frequent demand was, 'But what about the men?'. This became the next research project, attracting interest and funding that was not provided for the women's research.

The research with men about their experiences of Black Saturday confirmed that gendered expectations of them were equally damaging [3]. Men were expected to 'protect' family and community on Black Saturday and were quizzed after, on where they were and what they were doing. The same expectations applied to men's evidence of 'providing' for the family after the fires. Recriminations played out for months, frequently erupting into public violence as well as within the home.

There was an unexpected benefit to studying the impact on men of gendered expectations in disasters, as it helped protect the work from being dismissed as niche. The contrast in reception was striking. Research documenting increased violence against women after Black Saturday was frequently challenged, whereas the research on men's experiences generated significant interest and support. Essentially, society appeared more willing to engage with gender when men were positioned at the centre of the analysis.

This significant interest was reflected in subsequent developments. Immediately after the public launch of the men's research, a three-year Statewide Gender and Disaster Taskforce was established, headed by the Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner and our GAD Pod legacy organisation (WHGNE) CEO, with members including the WHIN CEO and MUDRI's Director [12–14]. Similarly, the fact that our body of research considered men's experiences of disasters helped reduce criticism of our advocacy for women and non-binary people.

The women's and the men's research [3,4,15,16] were followed by 2016 research into 'Barriers to women in fire and emergency leadership roles' [2] and by two research projects with LGBTI people (term at the time of writing) [1,5], finding discrimination against them within emergency service organisations, and, within the community, neglect by emergency services of both their needs and strengths. This 2018 research, although commissioned by the Victorian Government, was close to never being released due to a campaign of adverse publicity in the nation's 'Australian' newspaper. It took a year of persistence, willingness to omit content, and agreement on a minor public release for

anything to be made public. A small, in-depth qualitative study of lesbian and bisexual women the same year found the ways this discrimination functioned at each stage of the emergency management cycle, and how this could be prevented [5].

The Long-Term Disaster Resilience research followed, incorporating the lived experience of survivors of disasters (including floods) from the past seven decades. It was federally funded and presented in 2018 to the Australian Parliament by a Member of Parliament who knew first-hand the damage to rural people wrought by climate change and disasters. The first of its kind in Australia, it asked men and women to reflect on their experience of disaster from more than 10 years earlier. It was astounding that memories retained their potency even 70 years later. Informants remembered the smell of smoke, the colour of flames, the confusion and fear of the day, the devastation of loss, and the hard road back. For many, there was no 'return to normal'. Again, gendered expectations added to the suffering of survivors.

In 2020, our research turned to investigate how family violence prevention fared in the early months of COVID-19. Again, it drew together the threads of disaster, climate change and gender, confirming the pandemic shut-downs in Victoria had the same effects as followed other disasters. These included: increased gender stereotyping and expectations; restriction of movement; men in authority; interrupted life course; increased unemployment, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence against women; decreased police reporting and decreased formal support seeking.

It is illuminating that increased family violence in COVID-19 was not challenged as it was in Black Saturday. People want to believe in our 'heroes' when disaster strikes, and want to support our 'good blokes' who suffered after Black Saturday. This confirms that there are different rules for disasters that involve society's desire for heroes and resilience and community cohesion. There are, indeed, sound reasons for women's reluctance to report violence in these circumstances. Who will believe them? On a positive note, the widely promoted body of research from the GAD Pod has done much to turn the 2009 disbelief into acceptance that increased domestic violence is linked to experiences of catastrophic disaster. The widely distributed 'Disaster is no excuse for domestic violence' postcard, and other resources and training have contributed to this progress in Australia.

4. Links between disaster + climate change

In Australia, disasters are inextricably linked to climate change. Indeed, Australia has been called the world's 'climate canary' because this continent feels the damaging impacts first. Insurance annual reports in Australia read like trailers for apocalyptic films forewarning of end days. Early warnings about climate change emerged during the mid-twentieth century and were given international prominence at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm), where scientists warned that industrial emissions were altering the Earth's atmosphere and that action within 25–50 years would be necessary to avoid dangerous consequences. In 1990, the IPCC First Assessment Report (1990) noted that without urgent emissions cuts, it would not be possible to adapt to global warming. In the absence of action, the next two decades saw scientists necessarily shifting from prevention to limiting damage to the planet. The Fifth IPCC Assessment Report (2014) stated that some climate impacts – ice melt, rising sea levels, biodiversity loss – could not be reversed. A Special Report by the IPCC four years later (2018) was direct in its statement that the world had only 12 years to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees to avoid severe, irreversible impacts. With warnings largely ignored, and consequent ineffective action, the IPCC's AR6 Synthesis Report (2023) states that some losses are "already irreversible" and that "Continued [global] warming will cause cascading, compounding, and long-term impacts".

Many heard these warnings when climate experts and insurance companies alike described the more frequent and more extreme weather

events and disasters that inevitably accompany a **one degree** change in temperature. For decades, farmers and Indigenous people, climate conservationists and rebels, meteorologists and (retired) emergency managers saw for themselves the changes in temperatures, rainfall and disaster risk. Yet, on 4 November 2025, the UN Environment Programme [17] stated that ‘Lack of ambition and action means exceedance of 1.5 degree is approaching’.

While devastating to those who have followed the scientific evidence for decades, these warnings have often struggled to generate commensurate political action. In Australia, public debate has at times shifted towards reconsidering net-zero commitments, reflecting broader international trends in political resistance to climate action, including the United States’ withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

4.1. Implications of inaction: climate change and social risk

More than three decades after the Rio Earth Summit and ten years after the Paris Agreement, global emissions remain inconsistent with pathways required to limit warming to 1.5 °C. Despite growing scientific consensus and increasingly visible climate impacts, implementation of mitigation commitments continues to lag behind the scale and urgency of the challenge [18,19].

As climate change threats grow, Australia leaves our most vulnerable women, men, non-binary people and children in the front line of the assaults of climate change and associated disasters. Seeking affordable housing, we turn to marginally unsafe options. Risks are evident in local government land approvals for housing estates in flood plains; government re-releases of land bordering forests in bushfire footprints; and unaffordable or unobtainable insurance.

Fire seasons are longer and more intense. For example, the 2019–20 Australian Black Summer bushfires burned more than 24 million hectares, an area the size of the United Kingdom. Climate scientists have concluded that such fire-weather conditions are estimated to be 30% more likely due to climate change [20,21]), and bushfires are more dangerous and frequent (e.g. [22]). The CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology’s *State of the Climate* 2022 report confirms that increased elevated fire risk and extreme heat are intensifying as climate change progresses [23].

The rapid advance of climate change sees extreme weather events that were formerly one in 100 years, now every 10 years or sooner. For example, Lismore, in New South Wales, experienced two devastating floods in 2022, each higher than the previous “one-in-100-year” flood record, leading to the realisation that such intervals are no longer reliable [23,24]. A second example notes that Brisbane, capital city of Queensland, faced record-breaking flooding in 2011, and again in 2022. It is evidence that ‘rare’ disaster events are more common as climate change [25,26].

5. Gendered dimensions of disaster + climate change

It is inaccurate to assume an equal experience. Disasters are not the ‘great levellers’. Beyond wealth and class generally defining disaster experience, it is gendered expectations that cross every indicator of social differentiation. The key learning from the GAD Pod’s 15 years’ research in Australia is that gender defines disaster risk, experience and legacy.

Gendered expectations are as solid in households as they are in emergency management organisations. Each census report shows a snail’s pace shift in balancing unpaid work undertaken by women and men in households and in the community. Within the emergency management sector, each year yet another damning report points out discrimination against women (and sometimes against non-binary people) working in traditionally male ‘heroic’ roles, lauded by communities reliant on their services in disasters.

We will wait a long time for gender equality. In the disaster context, the minimal progress regarding gender equality achieved in the mid-

term review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is evidence that little has changed since gender was first investigated as critical to understanding disasters’ impacts [27,28]. ‘Two steps forward and one back’ seem to capture progress on gender equality over the past 50 years, yet even this compares favourably to the wholesale embrace of the 1950s gender schema by the US under Trump’s administration. Women’s rights to contraception and abortion are fundamental to any chance of gender equality. Consider the speed of retraction of these rights for women since the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in [26] [29].

Disasters are equally politicised. Political decisions – from local government and appeals tribunals to high courts and legislation – condemn **some** to suffer, while exonerating the powerful. Legislation that properly denotes land suitable for housing (devoid of political influence or outright corruption) could prevent the kind of bushfires and flooding inundation that destroy homes and lives.

In the absence of public interest integrity, and while gender equality remains unachievable, we can nevertheless strive to understand why women, men and non-binary people suffer differently in climate-change and related disasters. Our research since 2009 initially drew on the ground-breaking work of Enarson & Morrow [27], Fordham [28], and others (e.g. [30,31]), and over successive research projects, forged collaborations across the world (e.g. Canada, USA, NZ, Iran, Iceland, Sweden, England) to understand what is similar and can be shared across countries.

Collectively, these findings reinforce and extend several established theoretical traditions within disaster studies. Consistent with feminist disaster scholarship, they demonstrate that disaster impacts are shaped not only by hazard exposure but by pre-existing social relations and inequalities [27,28,32]. The findings also support vulnerability approaches that locate risk within social, economic and institutional structures rather than individual characteristics [33]. Equally, the research highlights intersectional approaches by showing how gender interacts with sexuality, care responsibilities, organisational cultures and other dimensions of identity to shape disaster experiences. Recent scholarship has further explored these dynamics through analyses of gender and sexual minorities [34], caregiving and support for infants and young children in disasters [35], and masculinities and disaster risk [36]. Taken together, the findings support calls within critical disaster studies for greater attention to the social production of inequity and vulnerability.

6. Research to action

The previous sections outline how the GAD Pod’s successive research between 2009 and 2021 identified and revisited the ways in which gender is relevant to climate change and disasters (including fires, floods and COVID-19). Shifting these research insights to action was achieved iteratively. Like an upward spiral, each subsequent set of findings led to a related set of actions.

Our *modus operandi* – informed and led by the legacy organisations – was to follow each research project with a conference to convey and build upon the new knowledge. Informants were invited to the launch of each research report, with several speaking at its launch and to the media. Some research informants continued their involvement for more than a decade after. Conferences were integral to drawing interest in the research findings, and having the informants present and speaking on their experience intensified the impact. A powerful incentive to delegates was involving influential international researchers (e.g. Elaine Enarson in 2012 and 2015 and Maureen Fordham in 2018) and involving relevant government ministers and emergency management leaders.

Quotations from police and fire commissioners and academics supporting the research findings and recommendations were pivotal to success. Each conference attracted 200 or more delegates. Further reach was achieved through presentations by the researchers at international conferences, building on the network of scholars interested in gender,

disaster and climate change. For each conference, an Advisory Body was formed, an issues paper was written to outline the existing state of play to delegates (and others), and an outcomes paper followed, along with conference proceedings including videos. Media coverage was sought to increase interest in each conference, and this led to wider networks, generative partnerships, and increased awareness of both the issues and the GAD Pod. A strong and ongoing collegiate relationship with the Australian Journal of Emergency Management (AJEM) allowed special editions following three conferences [37–39]. Beyond AJEM, national and international journal articles extended the reach.

6.1. Effective elements to achieve progress

Giving research informants a public platform to speak directly to conference delegates was integral to powerfully convey how women, men and non-binary people experienced their disaster and the aftermath. Using their potentially direct and eloquent words in quotations concurrently elevated and clarified the research report narratives. The informants' words shaped and spear-headed the insights of each research report, demanding (and receiving) funding to address the identified problems and implement many of the recommendations.

The words of the women, men and non-binary people used so liberally in the research reports resonated with people interested in disaster experience. Federal funding in 2015 allowed development and evaluation of four training modules, building on existing training offered (at cost) by WHGNE and WHIN trainers and informants of our research. National funding to GADAus in 2021 allowed consolidation, with previous trainers now employed in this new organisation to expand the number of trainers across Australia through a 'train-the-trainer' model. More than a thousand people received training in the first three years of funding to 2024. An ongoing task is ensuring that the quality of delivery remains high, and that all trainers are deeply immersed in, and faithful to, the research foundations—so they convey not only the findings, but the meaning and integrity of the work itself.

Democratisation and broad take-up of research insights was achieved through distilling hundreds of pages into postcards, snapshots, factsheet, disaster context sheets, FAQs, community service announcements on national radio, checklists, contributions to government-led inquiries, contributions to the National Foundation of Australian Women budget lobbying, short-form interviews (audio and hardcopy), podcasts, and presentations to sector, industry, academic and network meetings.

The value of distilling long research papers into accessible and succinct formats cannot be overstated, and these resources facilitated take-up of our research findings by agencies and professionals engaged in this work. A living document is the Organisational CV for the GAD Pod/GADAus.

Engagement of senior figures on Advisory Groups and in conference panels was central to achieving change. Indeed, progress in addressing gender, disaster and climate change relied on being adaptable enough to take up opportunities flexibly. Emergency management is characterised by shifting sands. It is an environment of rapid change sitting alongside century old bureaucracies. Fast staff turnover, new heads with different ideas, and changing challenges (internally and externally) demand agility. Scholarship on knowledge translation, mobilisation and research impact helped move research evidence beyond publication to influence institutional practice, governance arrangements and professional cultures [40–42].

A successful strategy was to inform governments' reviews of emergency planning handbooks through participation on Working Groups; and contributing to Monash University's Community-based resilience compendium, and to Royal Commissions/Inquiries into family violence or disasters; and to the government's mid-term review of the Sendai Framework. Influencing emergency management requires patience, persistence and opportunism. Essential 'mantras' to progressing from research to action were to 'stay in our lane' being clear of our expertise, and collaborating where others had built research and expertise we

needed to draw from. A set of eight literature reviews were produced in the early days of GADAus to bring our expertise to others with some adapted for publications e.g. on gender, disaster and disability [43].; gender, sexual minorities and disaster [34]; ATSI people, gender and disaster [44]; men, masculinity and disaster [36]; care-giving in disasters [35].

Digital platforms became an increasingly important mechanism for knowledge translation as the program evolved. Research findings and practical resources were disseminated through organisational websites, the GAD Pod and GADAus websites, an online Communiqué, the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub, PreventionWeb, webinars, online conferences, downloadable publications and training resources. Social media and digital communication platforms further extended the reach of research findings, enabling ongoing engagement with practitioners, policy-makers and researchers nationally and internationally.

6.2. Specific actions

The specific actions below are evidence of progress on gender, disaster and climate change, and are indicative of the stepping stones that led to sustainable funding.

In 2015, a successful submission to the federal government saw the 'All on Board' Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines project funded and developed. There were three main sections: Supporting community gender equity and diversity; Gender-sensitive communication and messaging; and Addressing domestic violence before, during, and following an emergency (Parkinson et al., 2018). In subsequent years, new sections were added, on *Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and those caring for infants and small children* (with Karleen Gribble); and *Addressing needs of women, men and people of diverse gender and sexual identities in evacuation and relief centres*. Approximately 500 emergency management personnel contributed to the original guidelines which were accepted by the Australian and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) who oversaw their development. Despite this, on two occasions since, the GEM Guidelines have had scathing criticism in both print and TV media.

A spin-off from the GEM Guidelines section on evacuation and relief centres is the GAD Pod's and GADAus' work in critiquing simulations. People seek refuge when their lives and homes are under threat, so these spaces must be safe not only from the physical disaster but also from discrimination, violence and other social risks. Drawing on extensive national research, the GAD Pod, and now GADAus, supports local governments and emergency services to apply a gendered lens in planning and managing centres, ensuring inclusivity and safety for all. This work includes attending simulation exercises, providing tailored feedback and checklists, and offering up to a year of follow-up advice to strengthen policy, practice and preparedness. This example of responsiveness to informants and agencies is replicated across all aspects of the work.

Alongside these discrete actions, progress depended on strong and enduring relationships with the academic sector—particularly through Monash University—and with an international network of scholars. Academic publications and participation in the peer review of emerging research were important in maintaining and extending knowledge of gender, disasters and climate change. These international relationships fostered genuine two-way learning, highlighting that there is often more similarity than difference in the gendered impacts of disasters and climate change across diverse national contexts. Collaboration occurred through both invitations to contribute internationally and opportunities to convene international scholars in Australia, including conference presentations (in person and online), contributions to the United Nations PreventionWeb platform, active participation in the International Gender and Disaster Network (GDN), and collaboration with leading researchers from six countries in an *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* article examining these commonalities [45]. A particular highlight was contributing to the development of the 2019 World

Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) [46] Policy Statement on Gender in Disasters, following collaborative work associated with the WADEM World Congress in Brisbane.

6.3. Awards

It was critical to our success in achieving Federal funding that the GAD Pod had a long history of successive awards – from International, National, State and University bodies. The growing influence of the research program was reflected in formal recognition from both the emergency management and academic sectors. Between 2013 and 2019, the GAD Pod received seven awards, followed by the 2024 *Emerging Not-for-Profit Organisation* award for Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus). The first major recognition was the invitation to deliver the 6th Professor Frederick ‘Skip’ Burkle Jr. Keynote Lecture in 2013.

Following Claire Zara's death in 2015, the Annual Claire Zara Memorial Oration was established in her honour, recognising her significant contribution to gender and disaster scholarship and practice. Incorporated into Victoria's principal emergency management conference, the Oration provides an enduring forum for advancing discussion of gender in disasters. Like many initiatives arising from this research program, however, its continuation was not assured in its early years. Through sustained advocacy and the calibre of invited speakers, it became an established and valued part of the conference program.

Nationally, the GAD Pod was honoured with three Resilient Australia Awards between 2014 and 2019—one for Victoria and two for nationally recognised initiatives. The significance of this work was also acknowledged through two awards from Monash University. Our Australian-based research in gender and disaster has been recognised both nationally and internationally. In 2017, we received the Mary Fran Myers Award, presented by the Natural Hazards Center in Boulder, Colorado and the Gender and Disaster Network (based at the University College of London). In addition, Monash University honoured the work with two institutional awards, further acknowledging its impact and contribution.

The key benefit of awards is that they build legitimacy and trust for readers, and are a short cut for potential funders to feel safe in their investment.

6.4. Art

Art has been integral to creating an appealing and consistent visual identity that links this work to a recognisable and cohesive body of research. Beyond its communicative value, art has also been integrated into conferences as both a medium for engagement and a means of healing. The inclusion of an art therapy room, for instance, has provided informants with space to reflect, express and process their experiences, reinforcing the emotional and relational dimensions of the research. The artists central to this, Ona Henderson and Syd Tunn, themselves deeply involved in disaster resilience at a community level, have been involved since the beginning.

Building on this approach, a First Nations art project enabled meaningful engagement with diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, fostering connection through shared creativity and cultural expression. First Nations communities in each state designed an art piece to capture their response to the notion of gender and disaster. Three community representatives co-presented the project at a major Australian disaster conference in 2024, exemplifying the strength of partnership and mutual respect. The power of the project lay in allowing informants the freedom to create art that told a story of their response to disaster.

7. Lessons for other contexts

The Australian experience offers lessons that may be relevant in other high-income countries with established emergency management

systems, including New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. Common enabling conditions include legislative commitments to equality, comparatively strong civil society organisations, opportunities for policy engagement and the existence of institutional mechanisms through which research can inform practice.

As discussed by Fordham (United Kingdom), Peek (United States), Greaves and Poole (Canada), Sohrabizadeh (Iran) and Danielsson (Sweden), the specific pathways differ across jurisdictions, but sustained leadership, institutional commitment and attention to gender remain common ingredients of progress [45].

At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of context. Strategies that prove effective in one setting cannot simply be transferred unchanged to another. Legal frameworks, political systems, cultural norms and prevailing attitudes towards gender and sexuality shape both the opportunities and constraints for gender-responsive disaster risk reduction. For example, in some contexts, efforts may focus on increasing women's leadership and representation within emergency management institutions, whereas in others, progress may depend on strengthening women's participation through existing community-based structures [45]. Rather than prescribing a single model, the Australian experience suggests the importance of identifying locally relevant pathways through which evidence can be translated into action.

8. Conclusion

This paper has documented how fifteen years of gender, disaster and climate change research evolved into a broader process of policy influence, institutional change, professional development and national implementation. The findings demonstrate that evidence alone is insufficient to achieve gender-responsive disaster risk reduction. Progress depended on sustained partnerships, trusted relationships, strategic engagement with decision-makers, translation of research into accessible resources, and persistence in the face of institutional resistance.

The GAD Pod drew strength from many contributors over fifteen years—from disaster survivors who generously shared their experiences and informed successive research projects, to co-researchers, trainers and collaborators who helped translate evidence into practice. Progress also relied on the vision, commitment and courage of the GAD Pod's legacy organisations, together with influential decision-makers across politics, the women's sector, emergency management and academia. Underpinning the program throughout was persistence and determination. The progress achieved thus far provides a strong foundation from which to advance this work, guided by evidence, collaboration and the lived experience of those most affected.

Gender as a concept is in flux, and for the past 20 years (at least) has moved in and out of fashion and controversy, halting progress at times and threatening gains. The genius of patriarchy is its ability to pit subjugated groups against each other, rather than against the structures that reproduce inequality.

The only generative response is to be alert and open to opportunities, and to act where there is momentum. There will be shifts in what is valued depending on political imperatives, election timing and pressure points. The constant is the ever-changing landscape – both physical as a result of climate change, and social as trends come and go.

To achieve progress on gender, disaster and climate change, the essential words of advice are: Be alert to where momentum is and partner only with those who understand and value the work, both what's been achieved, and what is possible with action and daring. A timid approach is doomed to fail. Understand what changes and what remains constant, and defend what is evidence-based, despite trends. Above all, be persistent and prepared to fiercely defend your work in gender, disaster and climate change. Always ensure assertions are evidence-based. Be true to the research findings and informants, and be prepared for resistance!

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the revision of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an editorial assistant. AI-generated suggestions were not adopted uncritically but were considered through extensive discussion, evaluation, revision and rewriting to ensure they accurately reflected the research, its methodology and the authors' intended meaning. The authors made all final editorial decisions and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Debra Parkinson: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Susie Reid:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Helen Riseborough:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Frank Archer:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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